

# Mapping the field of religious environmental politics

Kidwell, Jeremy

DOI:

[10.1093/ia/iiz255](https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz255)

License:

Other (please specify with Rights Statement)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Kidwell, J 2020, 'Mapping the field of religious environmental politics', *International Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 2, pp. 343–363. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz255>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

## **Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in *International Affairs* following peer review. The version of record Jeremy Kidwell, Mapping the field of religious environmental politics, *International Affairs*, Volume 96, Issue 2, March 2020, Pages 343–363, is available online at: <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/96/2/343/5775739> & <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz255>

## **General rights**

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

## **Take down policy**

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

# Mapping the Field of Religious Environmental Politics

## Introduction

Until fairly recently, consideration of religion has been marginal or even nonexistent in the scholarly discourse about environmental politics. Renewed attention to the intersection of these fields has been encouraged by several overlapping developments: Within environmental science, discussion of “environmental values” has opened up towards a larger consideration of the role of religious institutions and personal belief in forming spiritual environmental values.<sup>1</sup> In a related way within the more specific policy discourse surrounding climate change mitigation and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, policymakers have devoted renewed attention to the place of ethics and religious institutions.<sup>2</sup> The prominent role of religious groups in the buildup to the Paris climate summit, through events like the people’s climate march and people’s pilgrimage, have coalesced towards a sense of a burgeoning social movement emerging from the religious grassroots.<sup>3</sup> Alongside other prior historic declarations by religious leaders, the recent encyclical by Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí* signaled a new level of integration between Catholic concerns for social and environmental justice. Yet, much of the continued engagement by large environmental NGOs has continued to bypass intermediate social networks and organisations or have focussed minimalistically on religious grassroots groups as an avenue towards information dissemination and not as legitimate collaborative partners. As we seek to re-vision international environmental politics, this seems an opportune moment to provide a map which might guide more holistic forms of policy co-creation, outreach and engagement. It is also important to note that the audience for these kinds of interventions will necessarily be hybrid, reaching across both practical policy and scholarly contexts. In this paper, which is based on data gathered during five years of fieldwork, primarily with British Christian REMOs (religious environmental movement organisations), I probe the complexities of political engagement with religious environmentalism which arise from the many different organisational iterations these groups may take. This inquiry takes me into questions of polycentricity, scalar structuration, multiple social identities, and eco-theo-citizenship. On the basis of such investigation I suggest that effective high-level engagement with REMO groups will be greatly enhanced by a nuanced understanding of the many different shapes that these groups can take, the various scales at which these groups organise, and the unique inflection that political action and group identity can take in a religious context. My aim, therefore, is to present as comprehensive a categorization of REMO groups as is possible and then to provide two brief vignettes which begin to unpack the specific dynamics at work within these categories, highlighting the way that inter-group dynamics function across these categories, particularly across scale. It is my hope that this exploration of these different coalescences

---

<sup>1</sup> Nigel Cooper et al., ‘Aesthetic and Spiritual Values of Ecosystems: Recognising the Ontological and Axiological Plurality of Cultural Ecosystem “Services”’, *Ecosystem Services* 21, no. B (October 2016): 218–29, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoser.2016.07.014>

<sup>2</sup> Mike Hulme, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0914/2009004684-b.html>

<sup>3</sup> See further discussion regarding the increase in religious grassroots mobilization in Anonymised, Re-enchanting Political Theology, *Religions*, forthcoming, 2020.

and dynamics of religious environmentalism can serve as a resource for governments and NGOs seeking to enact effective pro-environmental behaviour change in the specific context of religion and religious organisations.<sup>4</sup>

## Theorising the field of environmental politics at scale

Environmental politics can coalesce in a variety of different ways. There are a growing number of individuals interested and mobilised around environmental issues.<sup>5</sup> Whilst many of these individuals lack formal affiliation, a significant number of persons are affiliated with local environmental groups (e.e. Transition Towns, Co-operatives, Permaculture projects, etc.) with Regional, National and International environmental charities (e.g. Friends of the Earth, Green Peace, WWF, etc.) and choose to participate in more ephemeral social movements. Yet even as the number and influence of communities seem to grow, social and political science have struggled to engage with the concept of “community” and intermediate forms of political organisation.<sup>6</sup> As I will go on to suggest, there is a need for more sophisticated categorizations of environmental mobilization, which can challenge a public policy environment which is shaped around binary understandings of individual / society. Particularly with regards to religious environmentalism, it is further necessary to unpack the significance of these categories in order to develop a better understanding of the ways that they function at scale and impact social networks. There have been several significant theoretical responses to the under-theorisation of scale and the role of intermediate politics in our analyses of individual behaviours. In one classic example, across the 1970s and 1980s Anthony Giddens formulated his theory of structuration, arguing in particular for a “duality of structure” in which study of structures and agents were not bifurcated and examined in isolation, but rather the two were taken to be interrelated and interdependent. As subsequent scholarship explored, Giddens’s theorisation carried implications for hermeneutics, practices, phenomenology, etc.<sup>7</sup> As Rob Stones suggests,

Social structures are not reified entities denuded of human beings and their irreducible qualities, just as the views and experiences that prompt the thoughts and actions of social agents are not those of beings who are islands unto themselves, secreted away from social currents. The phenomenology and hermeneutics of practices play an indispensable role in structuration’s conception of social structures, just as social structures play an equal role in the understanding of the phenomenology, hermeneutics and practices of agents.<sup>8</sup>

In a similar way, and around the same time, scholars such as Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law were developing Actor-Network theory to emphasise the presence of “heterogeneous” networks - bridging the study of human social networks and “natural” (non-human or ecological) networks and seeking to move beyond essentialised examinations of

---

<sup>4</sup> Anonymised et al., ‘\_\_\_\_\_’

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Gustafson, A., Bergquist, P., Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E. (2019). A growing majority of Americans think global warming is happening and are worried. Yale University and George Mason University. New Haven, CT: Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Fraser, *The Problem of Communitarian Politics: Unity and Conflict* (Oxford University Press, 1999). David Studdert, *Conceptualising Community: Beyond State and Individual* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2006)

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 25. Discussed in depth in Rob Stones, *Structuration Theory* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2005)

<sup>8</sup> Stones, 4

events towards more holistic observation of network interaction.<sup>9</sup> Though both approaches have had their critics, one abiding consequence of these theoretical innovations has been a new and more complex attention to the role of structures and networks in shaping political agency and action.

More recent work theorizing political groups and movements across scale within international affairs has not generally focused on the confluence of religion and environmentalism. However, resonant research can be found in analysis of marginal/minority groups, particularly in development studies and security studies.<sup>10</sup> Relevant attention to multiscalar / transnational nature of environmentalism can also be found in environmental governance literature. A key contribution here comes from Elinor Ostrom, who in 2010 observed that the climate governance landscape was shifting in new directions which might be described as 'polycentric'.<sup>11</sup> As Bulkeley et al. suggest, "today, climate change governance encompasses a much more diffused and overlapping system of instruments, sources of authority and practices."<sup>12</sup> The situation is made more acute by the way that these new agents of environmental governance are coming onto the scene at the same time that traditional multi-lateral instruments seem to be in significant decline. As Pattberg and Wildberg observe, "From 2000 onwards, however, far less MEAs have been adopted and a general 'stagnation' in international law has been observed."<sup>13</sup> On one hand, as these authors observe, "agency and authority of actors 'beyond the state' has become a prime occupation for global environmental governance scholarship," yet the texture of "civil society" input often remains undefined within this literature.<sup>14</sup> Following the broader interdisciplinary turn in environmental governance literature, a number of scholars have made attempts to illuminate this complex field using social network analysis.<sup>15</sup> These studies have confirmed that the agentic field is not so much fragmented and incoherent as it is characterized by complex, yet

---

<sup>9</sup> Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987)

<sup>10</sup> For an example of this emphasis in international development studies, see especially research on transnational actors, e.g. the *Handbook of Community Movements and Local Organizations in the 21st Century* (Springer, 2018). Michael Peter Smith provides a helpful summary in, "Translocality: A Critical Reflection" in *Translocal Geographies*, edited by Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta (Ashgate, 2011), pp. 181-198. There has been a great deal of attention to the entanglement of religion in translocal/transnational configurations. See, for example, Peter G. Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (Routledge, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> See Elinor Ostrom, 'Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems', *American Economic Review* 100, no. 3 (2010): 641–72. For explicit translation of this approach to environmental governance, see also, *Governing Climate Change: Polycentricity in Action?* edited by Andrew Jordan, Dave Huitema, Harro van Asselt, Johanna Forster (Cambridge University Press, 2018). For a different take, albeit alert to the significance of religion, see Gabriel Ignatow, *Transnational Identity Politics and the Environment* (Lexington Books, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Harriet Bulkeley, Liliana B. Andonova, Michele M. Betsill, Daniel Compagnon, Thomas Hale, Matthew J. Hoffmann, Peter Newell, Matthew Paterson, Stacy D. VanDeveer, Charles Roger, *Transnational Climate Change Governance* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 62

<sup>13</sup> Philipp Pattberg and Oscar Widerberg, "Theorising Global Environmental Governance: Key Findings and Future Questions" in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 43:2, pp. 685. For more in-depth diagnosis, see Donald K. Anton, "'Treaty Congestion' in Contemporary International Environmental Law", Unpublished, downloaded from: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1988579>.

<sup>14</sup> Pattberg and Widerberg, p. 693.

<sup>15</sup> Rakhyun E. Kim, "The emergent network structure of the multilateral environmental agreement system" in *Global Environmental Change* 23 (2013), pp. 980–991.

perceptible, polycentric agencies. One of the key features of these advances in research is to conceptualise political agency as distributed variably across a multidimensional field (as emphasised by Actor-Network theorists), rather than across a scalar continuum.

I will argue in this article that conceptions of religious environmentalism need to be updated to account for similar distribution across a complex and polycentric field of agents. A prerequisite for this kind of reconceptualisation is to establish the different forms of organisation which appear across that field, particularly inasmuch as they scale from small and local to large and international. With this in mind, after a description of my methodology, I will provide a more granular categorisation of religious environmental movement organisations in the next section. The final analysis section which follows will draw on three brief vignettes in order to indicate how agency can work out in ways that are complex and somewhat unexpected.

It is important to note that while there are good theoretical reasons for this reconceptualisation, my purposes are also practical. Religious environmentalism has experienced a sudden and recent growth both in terms of participation and in terms of the development of formal organisations and local networks. To give one example, one of my research subjects, the Eco-Church network in England and Wales has grown from just over 200 members in 2015 to over 1700 members by 2018.<sup>16</sup> Growth across this three-year period has quickly made it the most numerous community-level environmental organisation in the UK. This kind of rapid growth is not uniformly distributed globally, with many national religious eco-networks remaining quite small, but it nonetheless points to a shift in the potential horizon of such activity. Alongside this increasing prominence of REMOs, the dynamics of religious organisations across scale are also arguably even more complex and intertwined than commensurate secular organisations. Better understanding these dynamics will aid policymakers and third sector groups and increase policy and consultation efficacy. Limited funding leads environmental agencies and NGOs to target their outreach in specific ways. A given organisation will likely be confronted by a choice between engaging with elites (e.g. religious leaders), intermediaries (NGOs with connections to specific places of worship) or the general public. Which of these is most appropriate? How might an organisation make an informed decision regarding their approach? As I will argue, the answer is not always obvious or straight-forward, and there is a need for further research which can test out a range of case-studies in specific national policy contexts. The aim of this article is to serve as prolegomena for subsequent research into REMOs and religious environmentalism. In what follows, I attempt to flesh out and abstract for the sake of further analysis the range of possible configurations that religious environmental politics might take. I begin this inquiry with a more pragmatic assessment of the current political field of religious environmentalism in order to flesh out the range of structures and entanglements at work more broadly.

---

<sup>16</sup> Compare this, for example, with Friends of the Earth, which has 129 local groups in England and Wales (<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/local-groups/our-local-groups>, consulted 5 Sep 2019). The Transition Network reports 27 hubs and 992 initiatives in total worldwide (<https://transitionnetwork.org/transition-near-me/>, consulted 5 Sep 2019).

## Methodology and Approach

The set of categories that underpins my analysis is the result of an evaluation of primary data from a variety of sources gathered over a period of four years (2014–2017). These research engagements, which were primarily with Christian religious environmental groups in the UK included 32 semi-structured qualitative interviews, discourse analysis of websites and organisational publications, organisational mapping, social network analysis, and participant-observation work.<sup>17</sup> An important innovation in the methodology behind this research was sampling work across scale, e.g. interviews were conducted with national and international leaders and at the grassroots. My initial qualitative engagement involved representatives from 17 different religious environmental organisations and 10 different non-religious environmental NGOs in the UK and USA.<sup>18</sup> Subsequent analysis for this study was a tiered process, building on my findings at a national level to identify relevant international comparisons. The initial dataset was augmented and internationalised using a snowball approach which began with major international meta-network websites and twitter accounts.<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that many of these networks overlap or have mutual representation and this list does not include unaffiliated persons and churches which were also consulted. My purpose was not to publish a comprehensive worldwide list of discrete REMOs, but rather to work with a large range of networks at an international level to confirm or deny identify unique organisational categories and genres. I acknowledge that later international data is not comparable at every level, but of the purposes of this analysis and categorisation, it is sufficient. By setting a baseline for comparison, I hope that subsequent research might challenge and expand on the set of categories presented here.

To date, there have been no attempts to comprehensively categorise the agents involved in specifically religious forms of environmentalism. Magdalena Kuchler has recently published findings from a similar kind of study, albeit one not focussed on religious groups. This study, which seeks to explicate the specific content of civil society participation within environmental governance using a multi-stakeholder framework, maps out the “types of actors that are, in practice, involved in each stage of stakeholder interaction.”<sup>20</sup> Echoing my

---

<sup>17</sup> This research was co-funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council, Economic and Social Research Council, Grant/Award Numbers: AH/K005456/1 and AH/P005063/1.

<sup>18</sup> Organisations which were selected for qualitative interviews spanned the full range of scale and included: Eco-Congregation Scotland, the Catholic Church in Scotland, Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, Quakers in Scotland, Christian Aid Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church, United Reformed Church Scotland, National Justice and Peace Network, Church of Scotland, Free Church of Scotland, Baptist Union of Scotland, Church of England, Eco-Church England and Wales, Alliance of Religion and Conservation, Environmental Issues Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, A Rocha, Earth Ministry (WA, USA).

<sup>19</sup> Additional analysis and modelling began with all self-identified member groups listed on websites of the European Christian Environmental Network (<http://www.ecen.org/>), Green Faith international (<https://greenfaith.org>), Eco-Congregation (<http://ecocongregation.org/>), the World Council of Churches (<https://www.oikoumene.org/>), Caritas Internationalis (<https://www.caritas.org>), Season of Creation (<https://seasonofcreation.org/events>), and the Roman Catholic Church (<http://w2.vatican.va/>). Subsequent analysis of social networks using Twitter was used to identify further groups but is as yet unpublished. Code and raw data can be found here: [https://github.com/kidwellj/sustainable\\_networks\\_paper](https://github.com/kidwellj/sustainable_networks_paper).

<sup>20</sup> Magdalena Kuchler, “Stakeholding as sorting of actors into categories: implications for civil society participation in the CDM,” *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 2 (2017): 191–208.

concern, this study begins with an emphasis on participation, but observes that simplistic maximisation of participation is not enough. One is concerned here with the quality of “input legitimacy” and by extension, a properly inflected account of the different forms of agency and the best context for their inclusion. I share Kuhler’s concern that effective environmental governance requires a comprehensive sense of the ways that these various heterogeneous inputs may be rendered most legitimate, and by extension, effective. As I have already suggested above, this requires some attention to the scalar configuration of groups within given set of regime complexes or architectures. However, there is a second layer behind this which needs similar attention, which requires more ethnographic sensitivity. Kuhler criticises the notion of stakeholding inasmuch as it “entails sorting actors and recasting them into categories that, in turn, can enable or constrain their ability to influence decision-making” (205). I have also attempted in this study to represent a categorisation that is multidimensional and textured, taking into full account the challenges and nature of participation/non-participation within each category.

## **Part 1: Individual Affiliation (I<sup>1</sup> and I<sup>2</sup>)**

In figure 1 below, I have attempted to visualise the broad range of scales and configurations in which religious environmentalism might be deployed. I will refer to to this figure throughout the next two sections, in which I unpack these dimensions systematically.

*[Figure 1, see attached file]*

Let us begin with smallest and most individual or local forms of environmental polity, which I have visualised at the bottom of the figure. One of the first key points of distinction, shown by I<sup>1</sup> and I<sup>2</sup> lies in the nature of religious affiliation. Since the turn of the millennium scholarship in religious studies has increasingly emphasised the complex nature of religious affiliation. To give one well known example, in the most recent UK census, finalised in 2011, 59.3% of residents of England and Wales identified themselves as Christian. Yet general social surveys which ask persons to indicate whether they are part of a worshipping community show a significant gap, with church attendance surveys showing around 10% of the population attend worship on a regular basis.<sup>21</sup> Even for those persons attending a specific church, self-reported affiliation is complex, with one study conducted in Scotland suggesting that persons who attend a church which belongs to a specific denomination may actually report their affiliation as belonging to another denomination.<sup>22</sup> This complexity regarding formal affiliation is not limited to Christianity either. Of significant relevance for the study of environmental action is the study of new religions such as Neo-Paganism which have seen significant growth in some parts of Europe. The 2010 registration with the UK Charity Commission of the “Druid Network” was contested by many within the UK community of druids and this contestation revealed the ambiguity of formal organisational participation for persons participating in new religious movements.<sup>23</sup> One final complication at the level of individual affiliation is the potential for multiple affiliations, that is, that individuals may

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Peter Brierley, Religious Trends 7 (<http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/church-attendance-in-britain-1980-2015/>), accessed 02 May 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Steve Aisthorpe, ‘A Survey of Christians in the Highlands & Islands Who Are Not Part of a Church Congregation’, *Rural Theology* 12, no. 2 (2014): 83–95

<sup>23</sup> Suzanne Owen and Teemu Taira, ‘The Category of “Religion” in Public Classification: Charity Registration of the Druid Network in England and Wales’’, in *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty*, ed. T. Fitzgerald, T. Stack, and N. Goldenberg (Leiden: Brill, 2015)

identify themselves as belonging to multiple groups, e.g. Catholic and Pentecostal, New Age and Christian, etc. Many high-level studies and censuses which seek to identify religious affiliation fail to design instruments which can test for hybridity and scholars have noted that multiple and cross-cutting identities are a particular problem for the nonprofit sector.<sup>24</sup> The key point is that self-reported affiliation may be multiple, ambiguous, and aspirational and should thus be treated with care in large-scale instruments and in designing public policy engagement.

Developing a robust understanding which takes into account the full range of this complexity, especially in the context of religion, may require a number of different research methodologies. On one hand, there are religiously located environmentalists, where affiliation is firmly in the foreground. This can be seen in studies such as Sarah McFarland Taylor's study of Catholic Green Sisters in the USA, or in Lucas F. Johnston's study of Religious Environmental Movements which focusses on interviews with elite actors.<sup>25</sup> However, we can also find *implicit* religion in the context of apparently secular environmentalist organisations. Bron Taylor's work on Earth First! uncovered religious underpinnings to the ethics of activists in the USA and in a different, but related way, Gretel Van Wieren argues that ecological restoration work can often be guided by "a Spirituality of Environmental Action".<sup>26</sup> Community is constituted and consolidated in a range of quite different ways by the various research subjects covered in these studies, but in acknowledging these concerns about the complexity of affiliation, we may still hold onto three key affirmations: (1) there are a significant number of environmentally active persons who choose to affiliate themselves in some formal way with a religion; (2) this affiliation (increasingly) provides a specific location for some aspects of their environmentalism; and (3) there are specific forms of environmental citizenship and activism which predominantly take place within the space of these formal communities and affiliations.

For the sake of simplicity, I have identified two basic categories at the local and individual levels: I<sup>1</sup> represents those persons or local groups who affiliate with a specific faith and I<sup>2</sup> represents those persons or local groups who would define themselves (and their environmentalism) as religions or spiritual but do not have a formal affiliation. For religious environmental groups which coalesce at the local level, particularly in the case of I<sup>1</sup> but possibly also with I<sup>2</sup>, I have found that there is also a micro-scalar differentiation which should be noted. Another way to put this is that with religious environmentalism, an eco-group will quite often be situated within a larger polity (e.g. church, cathedral, mosque, etc.).<sup>27</sup> In my analysis of qualitative interviews and organisational mapping, I have found

---

<sup>24</sup> Bob Doherty, Helen Haugh, and Fergus Lyon, 'Social Enterprises as Hybrid Organizations: A Review and Research Agenda', *International Journal of Management Reviews* 16 (2014): 417–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12028>. Dennis R. Young, 'Organizational Identity in Nonprofit Organizations: Strategic and Structural Implications', *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 12, no. 2 (2001): 139–57

<sup>25</sup> Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), <https://doi.org/0674034953>. Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment* (Sheffield; Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2013)

<sup>26</sup> Bron Taylor, 'The Religion and Politics of Earth First!', *The Ecologist* 21, no. 6 (1991): 258–66, [http://www.brontaylor.com/environmental\\_articles/pdf/Taylor--ReligionPoliticsEarthFirst.pdf](http://www.brontaylor.com/environmental_articles/pdf/Taylor--ReligionPoliticsEarthFirst.pdf). Gretel Van Wieren, *Restored to Earth: Christianity, Environmental Ethics, and Ecological Restoration* (Georgetown University Press, 2013)

<sup>27</sup> On microsociality, see Jane Wills, '(Re)Locating Community in Relationships: Questions for Public Policy', *The Sociological Review* 64, no. 4 (2016): 639–56, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12431>. and Studdert, *Conceptualising Community*

there to be four fundamental categories which can be used to describe the different composition of local groups. It is important to note that all four of these categories may appear on the outside to be the same, which I will describe generically as an “eco group”. This appearance masks a range of possible scenarios:

[Table 1]

Further research is required to test out the differences in group composition and identity across these categories. Overall, I would suggest that attempts by NGOs to support religious eco-groups, or governments seeking to engage on the level of public policy, should seek first to understand the composite or hybrid nature of the group, and then seek to identify a mode of support which is appropriate to the group category. For example, “lone voices,” which are groups with just a single very active member in them, may need help finding ways to connect with others within their organisation or community. Other groups may be more effective at outreach within their organization, but still composed of a single individual or couple. These “local heroes” may need to be encouraged to bring others into their group. Type 3, “small but active” groups, are the closest to the stereotypical understanding of a “green group” within a faith community, where one has a small but stable core of individuals contributing to the work of a given group. It is important to appreciate, again, for the purposes of effective practical engagement that, type 4, “large eco-groups” may appear to be more well-resourced than they actually are, as the full range of many members of the group are only occasionally involved, while a smaller committed core are more integral to group work. In some cases, these large groups may already be at an optimal size and better suited to mentoring other smaller groups or consolidating their successes, so the nature of engagement here from outside may best draw on these groups as exemplar, or “beacon” schemes for other commensurate networks. My key overall point here is that individual groups have different compositions and it may be necessary to formulate campaigning and outreach strategies which can be iterated to map onto the very different needs of these four types of local group across the bottom level of scale.

## **Part 2: National (A-F) and International**

I turn next with this descriptive work to the regional and intermediate (sub-national) coalescing of eco-active religious individuals and groups. It is here that polycentrism becomes particularly relevant as one finds that there are a range of different and possibly overlapping forms of network which are expressed at different levels of scale. The illustration in figure 1, above, includes a range of small boxes which are meant to signify individual eco-groups (I<sup>1</sup>). These groups may belong to different religions or denominations (signified by different colours), and the affiliation of an individual place of worship with their wider denomination can be strong or weak (signified by the random shading of various boxes from dark to light). Individual eco-groups may also participate in several different overlapping national-level networks, as indicated by the different boxes drawn around subsets. Two types of national-level meta-grouping, E and F do not have formal participation of individual member groups, but may nevertheless engage with religious eco-groups for campaigns or mobilisations.

Examples of different national groups:

[Table 2]

Listed in the table above are a random subset of individual groupings drawn from the USA and UK. These are merely to provide a concrete illustration of each category as there are

dozens of other examples of each category that might be listed and nothing specifically exemplary about these examples.

The most visible form of national-level grouping is the classic REMO (**Category A**, on Figure 1), often situated within a particular religious tradition, but also often working in an ecumenical way (across different denominations or religious traditions). In many cases, groups may affiliate unofficially with a majority religion (as in the UK and USA, many Ecumenical REMOs are provided offices which are co-located within Christian organisations). However, it is important to note that there are also often networks relating to other religions, such as the UK-based EcoIslam. In all cases, membership can be variable, with some networks consisting of less than ten affiliated communities and others exceeding a thousand. It is important to stress that these groups are often entangled with **Category B**, which represents networks which are explicitly affiliated with a specific religious denomination. Here I refer to groups which are constituted within specific religious sub-groups, so examples within Christianity might include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, etc. In some cases groups are formally constituted within a Christian, or other religious denomination. *Gronnkirke* is organised by the Church of Norway (a Lutheran denomination of Protestant Christianity in Norway). In contrast, Eco-Congregation Scotland describes itself as ecumenical, that is, composed of several different denominations including the Church of Scotland (a Presbyterian denomination of Protestant Christianity, hereinafter “CofS”), the Roman Catholic church, the Scottish Episcopal church, the Methodist church and many others. Going one step further, in terms of ecumenical self-identification, is Interfaith Power and Light in the USA which has member groups which span a range of different religions. In other instances, as in England and Wales, there may be unaffiliated organisations running networks. In this case, Eco-Church is run by an ecumenical Christian charity, A Rocha without any official denominational links, and run with relative independence from any denominational organization (in contrast to Eco-Congregation Scotland which has staff members seconded from specific denominational groups). These relationships are complex, and I provide some analysis of the tensions and complexities of denominational and organisational affiliation further below. In the case of public policy engagement, these distinctions are important because affiliations can imply a much smaller base of member groups than one might expect. For example, public policy engagement with *Gronnkirke* will not reach every single church within that particular denomination, and given the dynamics outlined above, individual groups will not likely represent the entire place of worship.

There are also Regional Networks which serve as overlapping sub-groupings (Marked as “**Category C**” on Figure 1). To take one example, Eco-Congregation Scotland, has a series of 20 networks, ranging from the Ayrshire network in the South to the Orkney network in the far North. In my research in the UK, I have found that networks arise for several different reasons, and their founding relates to affiliation across the intermediate scale. Some arise in a bottom-up and more or less spontaneous way, representing a religiously-particular coalescence arising from local networks around a particular urban conurbation or rural bioregion. In other cases, “local networks” are the result of Ecumenical REMOs attempting in a top-down way to support the development of regional expressions in less active regions.<sup>28</sup> Regional networks are often small, with uneven representation across 5-15 individual groups and can themselves serve as an individual community of highly-committed persons. In this case, public policy engagement on the regional level may naturally involve

---

<sup>28</sup> This initial analysis arose from interviews conducted with members of Eco-Congregation Scotland, 29 August 2014 and 9 June 2015.

religious communities where there is a strong regional network in place, by contrast if this is not present, regional engagements may require special effort to ensure that policy engagement includes religion.

There are also denominationally constituted efforts which are constituted as campaigns rather than membership networks (marked as “**Category D**” on Figure 1). The largest church in England, the Church of England, like the Church of Norway, has its own environmentally oriented membership organisation, called “Shrinking the Footprint”. In effect, almost every diocese in the Church of England is part of the efforts of “Shrinking the Footprint.”<sup>29</sup> However campaigns disseminated through this network will not necessarily reach a wider group than outreach directed to the Church of England subset of the Eco-Church network. In some cases, leadership overlaps between these two, and in other cases, different individuals are key contacts in specific regions. Finally, there are also a range of relevant NGOs with specific religious and denominational affiliations (“**Category E**” on Figure 1). In the UK, this includes examples such as the denominationally-affiliated Catholic Agency For Overseas Development (CAFOD) which manages the “Live Simply” scheme, an Eco-Congregation network for Catholic parishes in England and Wales; and (turning to “**Category F**” on Figure 1) the large non-denominational charity Christian Aid, which has engaged in sustained campaigning to church groups on “Climate Justice” since 2015.<sup>30</sup> Many of the charities in Category F are not exclusively environmental in their orientation. To give another example, the National Justice and Peace Network (<https://www.justice-and-peace.org.uk/>) is a grassroots network of Catholic churches and individuals in England and Wales which explicitly, but not exclusively, campaigns on environmental issues.

Many of the organisations highlighted above also cut across National boundaries in the form of International organisations. This can tend to work out in two ways: (1) International denominational hierarchies, which are the international aggregation of various national denominational groupings which represent member churches at intergovernmental agencies such as the United Nations.<sup>31</sup> So for example, the worldwide Anglican Communion brings together Anglican and episcopal denominations in 165 countries and has an explicit objective to “care for environmental issues at the United Nations and to raise awareness of those issues within the Anglican Communion.”<sup>32</sup> This is worked out in specific bodies such as the Anglican Communion Environmental Network<sup>33</sup> and *ad hoc* groups such as the “Anglican Bishops for Climate Justice”.<sup>34</sup> There are similar international networks such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council, or the World Assemblies of God Fellowship, each with millions of members and thousands to hundreds of thousands of churches involved.

---

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.london.anglican.org/mission/shrinking-the-footprint>, accessed 02 May 2019.

<sup>30</sup> <https://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/How-to-Campaign/Livesimply-award>;  
<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/campaigns/climate-change-campaign>, accessed 02 May 2019.

<sup>31</sup> For more on UNDP engagement by religious groups, see Natabara Rollosson, ‘The United Nations Development Programme (Undp) Working with Faith Representatives to Address Climate Change: The Two Wings of Ethos and Ethics’, *CrossCurrents* 60, no. 3 (2010): 419–31

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/at-the-un/environment.aspx>, accessed 02 May 2019.

<sup>33</sup> <https://acen.anglicancommunion.org/>, accessed 02 May 2019.

<sup>34</sup> <https://acen.anglicancommunion.org/resources/anglican-bishops-for-climate-justice.aspx>, accessed 02 May 2019.

Most of these groups have both official and unofficial environmental sub-committees which produce internal policy papers and outreach strategies.

Alongside and overlapping with these international denominational networks are international ecumenical organisations. The most prominent of these is the World Council of Churches, a gathering of what are primarily protestant and Orthodox Christian churches. The WCC is particularly important because it has been the site of sustained and significant site of high-level work on religion and ecology since at least the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> There are other ecumenical groups working at an international level, such as the UK-based Alliance of Religion and Conservation (“ARC”, <http://www.arcworld.org/>) and also a range of religiously affiliated international development NGOs which campaign on environmental issues, such as Caritas Internationalis.<sup>36</sup> Engagement with groups at an international level may seem encompassing, particularly given the size of some denominations worldwide. However, each has its own boundaries, and as with national policy engagement with religious groups, successful international engagement will require multilateral engagement and attention to possible overlaps and gaps across networks.

## Analysis

Religious environmentalism is becoming increasingly visible and by extension consolidating as a political force and social movement. However, as the movement expands, actors have become increasingly heterogeneous and interconnections across groups have become more complex. The various trans-national actors and institutions which represent religious environmentalism do not represent a coherent global commons. Further, even where there are an apparent set of shared (religious) values one should not assume that connectivity across groups and networks implies an stable epistemic community with a coherent focus on political ecology at a national level.<sup>37</sup> As I have highlighted in the categorisation above, there are a range of often interactive or overlapping modes of religious environmentalism operating at multiple levels, from the level of individuals and local community up to national and trans-national scales.<sup>38</sup> This increase in both visibility and diversity parallels a broader shift in contemporary political structures. As a number of environmental governance specialists have observed, the new reality of environmental politics is far more polycentric and consists of complex aggregate architectures. The effects of this new context for governance have been well noted, for example, in the form of increases in interruptions to “established scales of sociopolitical regulation.”<sup>39</sup> No longer can a binary focus on rational individuals or national

---

<sup>35</sup> For some history of the WCC involvement in environmentalism, see Robert Booth Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). and Guillermmo Kerber, “International advocacy for climate justice” in Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay, eds., ‘How the World’s Religions Are Responding to Climate Change : Social Scientific Investigations’ (Veldman, Robin Globus,, Szasz, Andrew,, Haluza-DeLay, Randolph, Routledge, 2014), 278–94.

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.caritas.org/2016/05/caritas-work-laudato-si/>, accessed 02 May 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Michele M. Betsill and Harriet Bulkeley, ‘Transnational Networks and Global Environmental Governance: The Cities for Climate Protection Program’, *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2004): 471–93. Peter M. Haas, *Saving the Mediterranean: The Politics of International Environmental Cooperation* (Columbia University Press, 1990)

<sup>38</sup> I and my coauthors unpack the tension between local and national organizational levels in *Anonymised*, xxx.

<sup>39</sup> Neil Brenner, ‘The Limits to Scale? Methodological Reflections on Scalar Structuration’, *Progress in Human Geography* 15, no. 4 (2001): 594

governments (or “societies”) serve as the *de facto* contexts for environmental politics. At the same time that multi-national corporations circumvent national or regional political structures, oppositional social movements, sometimes seemingly spontaneously, have taken up symmetrical tactics, working to bypass national governments and forge alliances at a trans-national scale.<sup>40</sup> So on one hand, we find an interruption to traditional power structures and unpredictable engagements with political intermediaries such as national or regionally constituted forms of authority. In this new multi-scalar reality, one is confronted by the complexities of public policy deployment.

These suggestions regarding the complexity of structuration and the consolidation of political agency across scales have already been made more broadly by political ecologists.<sup>41</sup> Yet, characterisations of religious environmentalism (“RE”) have often attempted to minimise these complexities, perhaps in part to emphasise the viability of RE as a viable avenue for environmental policy engagement. As RE begins to mature and new public policy engagements begin to multiply, I want to affirm that these networks are complex and entangled, and that engagement cannot assume simple mechanisms for dissemination or concentration of agency which flow down evenly from the top to the bottom of group hierarchies. A natural question which arises in response to this analysis of religious environmental actors across scale is at which level one should target for engagement. As I have suggested above, governments and other major non-religious actors have traditionally tended to bypass explicitly religious organisations and local groups with behaviour change campaigns that target individual persons and households. Ultimately, I want to argue for a reorientation which pursues a multi-scalar public policy engagement with RE. Doing this successfully, however, requires an understanding not just of the configuration of the network but some of the complexities of relations across levels. In what follows, I demonstrate some of the complexities using two vignettes which expand outwards into broader analysis: (1) Roman Catholic hierarchy and (2) Eco-Congregation Scotland distribution across denominations.

## **Engaging local or global: top-down or bottom-up?**

The most visible forms of environmental work produced by organisations at the national and international level lies in policy statements, whitepapers, and behaviour change campaigns. Demonstrating the abiding interest of researchers in these documents, the Forum on Religion and Ecology, hosted by Yale University has collected an extensive list of these public statements ranging across world religions and one can see the diversity of organisations represented across their authorship.<sup>42</sup> Alongside sociological examination of religiously affiliated individuals, these kinds of official statements have likely received the most public attention as a representation of religious sentiment on environmentalism and several studies have assessed the way that these documents mobilise values and worldview.<sup>43</sup> However, as

---

<sup>40</sup> Lynn Staeheli, 1994

<sup>41</sup> For one example, see the essays in Sheila Jasanoff, Marybeth Long Martello, and Peter M. Haas, eds., *Earthly Politics: Local and Global in Environmental Governance* (MIT Press, 2004)

<sup>42</sup> <http://fore.yale.edu/climate-change/statements-from-world-religions/>, accessed 02 May 2019.

<sup>43</sup> For a general survey see Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay, ‘Climate Change and Religion - a Review of Existing Research’, *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 6, no. 3 (2012): 255–75. Two recent book-length studies which have focused on leaders include Lucas Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability : Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment* (Equinox, 2013) and

Veldman et al note, “denominational statements and education programs have had difficulty penetrating to the grassroots.”<sup>44</sup>

A good example for opening up this examination of the connection between top-level and grassroots action is the recent Catholic encyclical *Laudato Sí* by Pope Francis.<sup>45</sup> Among respondents in my research, *Laudato Sí* was described as inspiring and supporting environmental action among Christians both inside and outside specifically Roman Catholic communities.<sup>46</sup> This is not accidental. As Christie et al observe, the Pope makes use of a deliberately “cosmopolitan appeal”, addressing the Encyclical to “all people of good will”.<sup>47</sup> Yet there are indications that reception of this high-level statement has been mixed. Some sociological surveys have indicated that among a broader sample of Catholics (beyond those who are active in RE) the perspective of the majority (at least in the USA) on climate change remain unchanged and it seems likely that in spite of its high-profile launch and wide dissemination, many Catholics have not even heard of the encyclical.<sup>48</sup> One can often come across the assumption that Catholic practice is a passive reflection of hierarchically dispensed doctrine. Yet as Watling argues, “despite attempts by the church hierarchy to promote “uniform” doctrine, Catholicism is and may have always been diverse—a variety of conjunctions between doctrine and practice, theology and organizational details, clergy and laity, in different contexts” (p. 574). This process of negotiation is rarely reflected in representations of religious environmentalism and this is reflected in the common practice of engaging with elite actors when seeking to engage with religious communities on environmental matters. This was confirmed in my interview data. As one of my respondents, a Catholic priest in Scotland suggested, “the Catholic church is the largest franchise in the world. It does not have a command control structure. It looks like that from the outside, but it doesn’t work like that... Parishes do what they want.”<sup>49</sup> Authority is a complicated phenomenon, particularly in contemporary Catholic communities.

Another way to look at the range of reactions by eco-active persons and groups to organisational culture within their own denominations is to accept that belonging is a more complex synthetic process. Along these lines, Sarah McFarland-Taylor argues in her extended study of American Catholic “Green Sisters” that the “sisters’ complex combinations

---

Stephen Ellingson, *To Care for Creation: The Emergence of the Religious Environmental Movement* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> Veldman, Szasz, and Haluza-DeLay, ‘How the World’s Religions Are Responding to Climate Change’, 7. A longer analysis of the preference for and pitfalls of research which focusses on high-level statements can be found in Randolph Haluza-DeLay, “Religion and Climate Change: Varieties in Viewpoints and Practices” *WIREs Climate Change* 2014, 5:261–279. doi: 10.1002/wcc.268.

<sup>45</sup> An encyclical is the highest level of official doctrinal statement for Roman Catholics. *Laudati Sí* was officially published on 18 June 2015.

<sup>46</sup> This observation comes from an interview conducted with a Presbyterian respondent, 9 July 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Ian Christie, Richard M. Gunton, and Adam P. Hejnowicz, ‘Sustainability and the Common Good: Catholic Social Teaching and “Integral Ecology” as Contributions to a Framework of Social Values for Sustainability Transitions’, *Sustainability Science* x (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-019-00691-y>. See also C Iheka, ‘Pope Francis’ Integral Ecology and Environmentalism for the Poor’, *Environmental Ethics* 39 (2018): 243–59

<sup>48</sup> Pew Research Center (2015) Catholics divided over global warming. Pew Center, Washington. <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/06/Catholics-climate-change-06-16-full.pdf>. Accessed 02 May 2019

<sup>49</sup> Interview conducted on 09 Jun 2015.

of traditionalist and progressive political and lifestyle approaches make categorizing the movement along conventional notions of 'left' and 'right' a challenge."<sup>50</sup> She argues that the sisters take a more dynamic approach to their tradition, seeking to "retrieve, conserve, and then re-inhabit (in greener ways) aspects of Catholic religious life" and that this work, "to reconcile simultaneous commitments to honor both tradition and change" provides a window into "the creative process of religious meaning-making in action."<sup>51</sup>

Other previous studies have tended to describe denominational identity as more bounded and ideologically constraining. Based on his work interviewing leaders of REMOs in the USA Stephen Ellingson frames RE organisations as being embedded within the denomination or religion which they identify as their parent organisation. He suggests that "the emergence of the religious environmental movement can best be explained by understanding how activists' embeddedness in particular organizational, cultural, and eco-political contexts shapes their choices."<sup>52</sup> In his view, the primary concern for individual REMO organisations relates to their effectiveness at the work of identity protection - convincing those parent organisations of their ongoing legitimacy and fidelity. He frames this "formidable task" in terms of their ability to "navigate the constraints and opportunities posed by their embeddedness."<sup>53</sup> In his view, this makes coalition work more difficult and promotes an emphasis on niche-activism. While Ellingson's analysis is correct with respect to some REMO groups, I want to argue that generalising this view is misleading, particularly outside the American context where his research was conducted.

On the other hand, a strong version of this kind of resistance might lead one to conclude that individual groups are anarchistic and self-interested, and this would also, I think, be mistaken. I want to affirm an alternative model, one which is resonant with Taylor's view noted above. One of the unique features of RE is that affiliation is often focussed in the context of a small community. One might be tempted to assume that individual local groups were largely motivated by parochial, and by extension, exclusively local concerns. In analysis of data collected in fieldwork with Eco-Congregations, our research team sought to test out this question of local identity. What we ultimately argued in our final analysis is that Christian belief and Christian community stand in both resonance and tension with wider environmental identities. We called this eco-theo-citizenship, in order to highlight hybridity at the heart of RE.<sup>54</sup> We observed that members of an eco-group usually have some local attachment, whether to the building fabric of a church or to their wider worshipping community. However, most of our respondents also provided indications that their identity straddled a trans-national confederation of Christian believers. A key aspect of religious identity for our respondents was often at the level of denomination, but none of our respondents indicated that their environmentalism was oriented in a denominationally specific way. Religious environmentalists are far from homogenous, but rather have forms of belonging and orientation which are often hybrid. The take-away here is that effective engagement with local-level RE can and should anticipate that there will be both local and global dimensions and that people involved in RE may be implicitly trained to conceptualise

---

<sup>50</sup> McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 14

<sup>51</sup> McFarland Taylor, 15

<sup>52</sup> Stephen Ellingson, *To Care for Creation*, p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen Ellingson, *To Care for Creation*, p. 156.

<sup>54</sup> Anonymised et al., '\_\_\_\_\_'

their eco-action as traversing scale. It is also important to acknowledge recent work in sustainability studies which highlights the way that activity being done in apparent isolation at the level of individual communities can contribute to wider sustainability transitions in significant ways. As Koehrsen suggests, the socially bounded nature of individual faith communities can enable a process of niche-formation, and these micropolitical spaces can provide fertile ground for policy experimentation. This in turn can be upscaled through lateral dissemination, often in an ad hoc way across regional networks (Figure 1, Category C).<sup>55</sup>

## Denominations, ecumenicism and diversity

Inasmuch as I have noted just above how the relationship between international Catholic denominational hierarchy and local RE can be complex, the same holds true for denominations more broadly. In fact, at the national level, the dynamics of affiliation can seem to be simple, but upon closer look are unexpectedly complex. Denominational participation in RE (Figure 1, categories B and D) can vary quite widely. Similarly, those REMO groups that are often deliberately framed as “ecumenical,” (Figure 1, category A) can have implicit or perceived affiliations that can have particular implications for the participation by individuals in their campaigns and networks. We can see this worked out in another case study based on my research in Scotland. As of 2016, though it is notionally ecumenical, the Eco-Congregation Scotland (“ECS”) network was nonetheless largely composed of Church of Scotland (“CofS”) churches, at around 74% of overall network membership. This predominance can be explained in part by the fact that it is the largest denomination among Scottish Christian churches, representing 40.20% of overall church buildings in Scotland.<sup>56</sup> It is also the largest polity by participation, with the 2011 Scottish census indicating that 32.4% of persons describe themselves as CofS. If one filters out responses on the 2011 Scottish Census to exclude persons who reported either “no religion” or adherence to a religious tradition not represented among the eco-congregation sites, then this rises to 59% of the remaining persons who indicated an affiliation with the CofS.<sup>57</sup> Though this is a relatively high proportion, 59% still does not necessarily meet the 74% threshold of CofS participation in this network that I found in GIS analysis. Further emphasising this disparity is the low participation by Roman Catholic parishes, the second largest Christian group in Scotland. While Roman Catholic churches make up just over 10% of the church buildings in Scotland and 15.9% of the Scottish population describe themselves as Catholic, less than 5% of churches registered as eco-congregations in 2016 were RC.

One possible reason for this uneven participation is structural: ECS is part-funded by the CofS and also draws logistical support from two presbyterian denominations in the form of work in kind provided by the CofS Climate Change Officer and the United Reformed Church environmental chaplain (the URC and CofS have in recent decades formed a close organisational affiliation). ECS also has its offices located in the national headquarters for the Church of Scotland. One finds a similar affiliation with the ecumenical network Interfaith Power and Light in the USA, which was founded by an Episcopal minister and has a very

---

<sup>55</sup> Jens Koehrsen, ‘Religious Agency in Sustainability Transitions: Between Experimentation, Upscaling, and Regime Support’, *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 2017, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2017.09.003>

<sup>56</sup> For more details of church buildings in Scotland, see my unpublished paper “Mapping Environmental Action,” *Anonymised*.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release2a/rel2asbfigure12.pdf>. Accessed 03 May 2019.

high number of affiliated Episcopal church groups.<sup>58</sup> The key take-away here is that while both of these networks (which represent Category A in Figure 1 above) are generally ecumenical, with member groups drawn from across the spectrum of Christian denominations, their actual representation may be uneven.

However, these groups are not quite denominational organisations disguised as ecumenical REMOs either. There are, after all, three clear over-represented denominations in ECS, though this is not noticeable until viewed as proportions of overall places of worship. While their numbers are small, representation by the 41 Scottish Episcopal churches in the ECS network stands at 11.9% of ECS overall and the 11 United Reformed churches represents 3.2% of the ECS network. These smaller numbers also stand out as over-representations when seen against their overall proportion of Christian places of worship in Scotland which stands at 7.4% for the Scottish Episcopal church and 1.2% for the United Reformed Church. So in reality, ECS is not simply over-representative of Presbyterian CofS churches, but is actually over-representative for several protestant denominations which are all noteworthy for having similar organisational cultures and an ethos of ecumenicism. While the many different Christian denominations can seem homogenous on the level of values given their shared Christian theological identity, it is important to emphasise that denominations have unique and sometimes quite sharply contrasting organisational cultures. In particular, different denominational organisations have particular, and often conflicting, attitudes towards hierarchy and the best structures to facilitate decision-making. So on one hand, as Patricia K. Townsend argues, Presbyterian (and by extension, CofS) culture tends to focus on good governance by committee, while other Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic church have a contrasting organisational structure which is explicitly oriented around hierarchy.<sup>59</sup> A third contrast can be found in the many other Christian groups which eschew both denominational committees and hierarchy for theological reasons, among them many evangelical and congregationalist groups. So what one finds in actual fact is that ECS represents (at least at the time of this analysis in 2016) a strong coalition of organizationally similar protestant denominations with weak participation by two groups with contrasting organisational cultures.

My co-researcher Alice Hague, who conducted in-depth ethnographic work with three specific Eco-Congregations in Scotland, also highlights the way that “organisational structures are important in explaining environmental engagement” both as a “potential resource for political activism” and in other cases as a hindrance to engagement.<sup>60</sup> My point here is in some resonance with Ellingson’s argument noted above, but I want to also augment this analysis in order to suggest that these structures do not necessarily ensure a consistently “presbyterian” or “Roman Catholic” form of environmentalism, but that denominational culture will necessarily form part of the context for the formation of environmental practices and identity formation which may be either for or against traditional forms of hierarchy and organisational management within those organisations. It is also important to emphasise that

---

<sup>58</sup> For more detail on the history of IFPL, see Justyna Nicinska, ‘Religious Environmental Groups and Global Climate Change Politics in the United States and the United Kingdom: What Motivates Activism?’ (PhD thesis, Rutgers University; Rutgers University, 2013), 77ff

<sup>59</sup> Patricia K. Townsend, “‘How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb?’ Confronting global climate change in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.” in Veldman, Szasz, and Haluza-DeLay, ‘How the World’s Religions Are Responding to Climate Change’, 193–208.

<sup>60</sup> Alice Hague, ‘Faithful Advocates: Faith Communities and Environmental Activism in Scotland’ (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2017), 200

being oppositionally oriented towards organisational culture does not necessarily mean that a group or person is *less* religious in their environmental practice. Quite to the contrary, responses and networks can often bifurcate or fragment into, on one hand, a conservative bloc that seeks to work within and bootstrap institutional culture and, on the other hand, a radical bloc that seeks to transcend or transform institutional culture.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

There are presently few scholarly analyses in environmental governance literature which are specific to religion. The consequences of this lacunae will become more acute if the presence of religious actors in global environmental politics continues to grow. The categorisation and ensuing analysis I have offered here emphasizes the scalar complexity inherent to the field of religious environmental politics. Effective and coherent public policy and third sector engagement with these groups will be well served by agencies which can navigate these complexities, pushing beyond stereotypes and superficial mapping of religious identity onto political structures. As we move into an increasingly post-secular international environmental policy context, assumptions regarding the simplicity of religious organisations or the simplicity of value construction by religious persons will need to give way to more nuanced models and analyses. In developing this survey, I have provided a preliminary model which foregrounds the organisational complexity of the emerging international religious environmentalism. To be most effective, policy engagement will need to work in a tactical and multi-lateral way engaging grass-roots RE alongside more traditionally affiliated RE organisations and take into account the hybridity that exists across this spectrum.

## Bibliography

Agliardo, Michael. 'Public Catholicism and Religious Pluralism in America: The Adaptation of a Religious Culture to the Circumstance of Diversity, and Its Implications'. PhD thesis, University of California, San Diego, 2008.

Aisthorpe, Steve. 'A Survey of Christians in the Highlands & Islands Who Are Not Part of a Church Congregation'. *Rural Theology* 12, no. 2 (2014): 83–95.

Betsill, Michele M., and Harriet Bulkeley. 'Transnational Networks and Global Environmental Governance: The Cities for Climate Protection Program'. *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2004): 471–93.

Brenner, Neil. 'The Limits to Scale? Methodological Reflections on Scalar Structuration'. *Progress in Human Geography* 15, no. 4 (2001): 525–48.

---

<sup>61</sup> For examples of conservative/radical bifurcations within American Roman Catholicism, see case studies by Michael Agliardo, 'Public Catholicism and Religious Pluralism in America: The Adaptation of a Religious Culture to the Circumstance of Diversity, and Its Implications' (PhD thesis, University of California, San Diego, 2008). and McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*. Laurel Kearns presents a synthesis in Laurel Kearns, 'Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States', *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 1 (March 1996): 55–70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712004>. and Laurel Kearns, 'The Role of Religions in Activism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, ed. John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlosberg (Oxford University Press, 2011), 414–28.

Bulkeley, Harriet, Liliana B. Andonova, Michele M. Betsill, Daniel Compagnon, Thomas Hale, Matthew J. Hoffmann, Peter Newell, Matthew Paterson, Stacy D. VanDeveer and Charles Roger, eds. *Transnational Climate Change Governance*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Christie, Ian, Richard M. Gunton, and Adam P. Hejnowicz. 'Sustainability and the Common Good: Catholic Social Teaching and "Integral Ecology" as Contributions to a Framework of Social Values for Sustainability Transitions'. *Sustainability Science* x (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-019-00691-y>.

Cnaan, Ram A. and Carl Milofsky, eds., *Handbook of Community Movements and Local Organizations in the 21st Century*. Springer. 2018.

Cooper, Nigel, Emily Brady, Helen Steen, and Rosalind Bryce. 'Aesthetic and Spiritual Values of Ecosystems: Recognising the Ontological and Axiological Plurality of Cultural Ecosystem "Services"'. *Ecosystem Services* 21, no. B (October 2016): 218–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoser.2016.07.014>.

Doherty, Bob, Helen Haugh, and Fergus Lyon. 'Social Enterprises as Hybrid Organizations: A Review and Research Agenda'. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 16 (2014): 417–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12028>.

Ellingson, Stephen, *To Care for Creation: The Emergence of the Religious Environmental Movement*. University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Fowler, Robert Booth. *The Greening of Protestant Thought*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Fraser, Elizabeth. *The Problem of Communitarian Politics: Unity and Conflict*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Haas, Peter M. *Saving the Mediterranean: The Politics of International Environmental Cooperation*. Columbia University Press, 1990.

Hague, Alice. 'Faithful Advocates: Faith Communities and Environmental Activism in Scotland'. PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2017.

Haluza-DeLay, Randolph. 'Religion and Climate Change: Varieties in Viewpoints and Practices' *WIREs Climate Change* 5 (2014): 261–279. doi: 10.1002/wcc.268.

Hulme, Mike. *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009. <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0914/2009004684-b.html>.

Ignatow, Gabriel. *Transnational Identity Politics and the Environment*. Lexington Books, 2007.

Iheka, C. 'Pope Francis' Integral Ecology and Environmentalism for the Poor'. *Environmental Ethics* 39 (2018): 243–59.

Jasanoff, Sheila, Marybeth Long Martello, and Peter M. Haas, eds. *Earthly Politics: Local and Global in Environmental Governance*. MIT Press, 2004.

Johnston, Lucas F. *Religion and Sustainability : Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment*. Sheffield; Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2013.

Jordan, Andrew, Dave Huitema, Harro van Asselt and Johanna Forster, eds. *Governing Climate Change: Polycentricity in Action?* Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Kearns, Laurel. 'Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States'. *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 1 (March 1996): 55–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712004>.

———. 'The Role of Religions in Activism'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, edited by John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlosberg, 414–28. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Anonymised et al. '\_\_\_\_\_'

Kim, Rakhyun E. "The emergent network structure of the multilateral environmental agreement system" in *Global Environmental Change* 23 (2013), pp. 980–991.

Kuchler, Magdalena. "Stakeholding as sorting of actors into categories: implications for civil society participation in the CDM," *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 2 (2017): 191-208.

Koehrsen, Jens. 'Religious Agency in Sustainability Transitions: Between Experimentation, Upscaling, and Regime Support'. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 2017. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2017.09.003>.

Latour, Bruno. *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987.

Mandaville, Peter G. *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma*. Routledge, 2003.

McFarland Taylor, Sarah. *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007. <https://doi.org/0674034953>.

Nicinska, Justyna. 'Religious Environmental Groups and Global Climate Change Politics in the United States and the United Kingdom: What Motivates Activism?' PhD thesis, Rutgers University; Rutgers University, 2013.

Ostrom, Elinor. 'Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems', *American Economic Review* 100, no. 3 (2010): 641–72.

Owen, Suzanne, and Teemu Taira. 'The Category of "Religion" in Public Classification: Charity Registration of the Druid Network in England and Wales". In *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty*, edited by T. Fitzgerald, T. Stack, and N. Goldenberg. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Pattberg, Philipp and Oscar Widerberg, "Theorising Global Environmental Governance: Key Findings and Future Questions" in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 43:2, pp. 685.

Rollosson, Natabara. 'The United Nations Development Programme (Undp) Working with Faith Representatives to Address Climate Change: The Two Wings of Ethos and Ethics'. *CrossCurrents* 60, no. 3 (2010): 419–31.

Smith, Michael Peter. 'Translocality: A Critical Reflection' in *Translocal Geographies*, edited by Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta. Ashgate: 2011, pp. 181-198.

Staeheli, Lynn. 'Empowering political struggle: spaces and scales of resistance' in *Political Geography* 13, no. 5 (1994): 387-391.

Stones, Rob. *Structuration Theory*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.

Studdert, David. *Conceptualising Community: Beyond State and Individual*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

Taylor, Bron. 'The Religion and Politics of Earth First!' *The Ecologist* 21, no. 6 (1991): 258-66. [http://www.brontaylor.com/environmental\\_articles/pdf/Taylor--ReligionPoliticsEarthFirst.pdf](http://www.brontaylor.com/environmental_articles/pdf/Taylor--ReligionPoliticsEarthFirst.pdf).

Taylor, Peter J., and Frederick H. Buttel. 'How Do We Know We Have Global Environmental Problems? Science and the Globalization of Environmental Discourse'. *Geoforum* 23, no. 3 (1992): 405-16. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185\(92\)90051-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185(92)90051-5).

Van Wieren, Gretel. *Restored to Earth: Christianity, Environmental Ethics, and Ecological Restoration*. Georgetown University Press, 2013.

Veldman, Robin Globus, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay. 'Climate Change and Religion - a Review of Existing Research'. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 6, no. 3 (2012): 255-75.

———, eds. 'How the World's Religions Are Responding to Climate Change : Social Scientific Investigations'. Veldman, Robin Globus,, Szasz, Andrew,, Haluza-DeLay, Randolph, Routledge, 2014.

Wills, Jane. '(Re)Locating Community in Relationships: Questions for Public Policy'. *The Sociological Review* 64, no. 4 (2016): 639-56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12431>.

Young, Dennis R. 'Organizational Identity in Nonprofit Organizations: Strategic and Structural Implications'. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 12, no. 2 (2001): 139-57.

Table 1:

Category	Description
1. Lone Voices	“Eco-Group” is composed a single individual who works on environmental issues, in the midst of either indifference or hostility in the wider organisation where the group is situated.
2. Local heroes	“Eco-Group” is also a single individual but their work is conducted with sanction and/or indirect support by wider organisation/community.
3. Small but active	a small and generally self-contained group of 3-12 persons; wider organisation/community may be aware of the group but feels no significant sense of connection or solidarity with the eco-group.
4. Large with differential involvements	many people involved with varying levels of participation; wider faith community/organisation is not involved in active and sustained way; but self-reports may suggest that this is the case

Table 2:

Name	website	category
Eco-Congregation Scotland	<a href="http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org">http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org</a>	Ecumenical (A)
Gronnkirke	<a href="https://kirken.no/gronnkirke">https://kirken.no/gronnkirke</a>	Denominational Network (B)
“Shrinking the Footprint” (UK)	<a href="https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change/about-our-environment-programme">https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change/about-our-environment-programme</a>	Denominational Campaign (D)
“Live Simply” UK (Catholic Agency For Overseas Development)	<a href="https://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/How-to-Campaign/Livesimply-award">https://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/How-to-Campaign/Livesimply-award</a>	Religiously affiliated NGO (E)
Christian Aid	<a href="https://www.christianaid.org.uk/campaigns/climate-change-campaign">https://www.christianaid.org.uk/campaigns/climate-change-campaign</a>	Unaffiliated religious NGO (F)
Anglican Communion Environmental Network	<a href="https://acen.anglicancommunion.org">https://acen.anglicancommunion.org</a>	International denominational hierarchy, environmental sub-committee
Alliance of Religion and Conservation	<a href="http://www.arcworld.org">http://www.arcworld.org</a>	International ecumenical group