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Inspiration and insight to change
minds and policy

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June 2019

University of Manchester



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Influencing students' everyday behaviour through university infrastructure and services



Dr Rachel Howell, University of Edinburgh

Rationale for this project

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- Habit disruption theory and ‘moments of transition’ (Psychology)
 - Moving from home to university is a very important period of transition
 - Habits are formed which may persist for years after graduation
- Social practice theory (Sociology)
 - Everyday practices such as cooking are routinized and habitual
 - Practices can become more/less sustainable due to changes to the elements of practices (materials, meaning, skills)

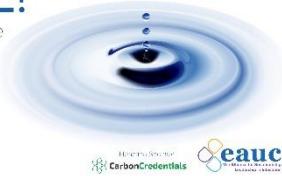
Thus potential to promote long-term sustainable practices through university infrastructure (materials), norms (which influence meaning) and skills that students have the opportunity to learn

Research questions

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- What influence do material and social structures, such as university infrastructure (e.g. accommodation), services (e.g. provision of campus allotments), and social norms have on the development and performance of students' everyday practices?
- Which students take advantage of university sustainability initiatives relating to infrastructure and services, and what effect do these have on their habitual behaviours/performance of everyday practices?

Data collection

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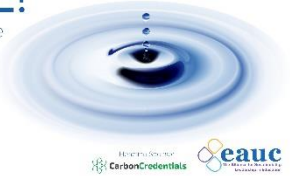
- Online survey of UG students at universities across the UK
- In-depth interviews with students involved in case studies
- Case studies:
 - Food co-ops/veg bag schemes: Hearty Squirrel (Edinburgh University; 10 interviewees) and Aberdeen VegBag/The Corner (Aberdeen University; 10 interviewees)
 - Edible Campus growing schemes: Lancaster University (8 interviewees) and St Andrews University (9 interviewees)

Aberdeen VegBag + The Corner

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Edinburgh Hearty Squirrel

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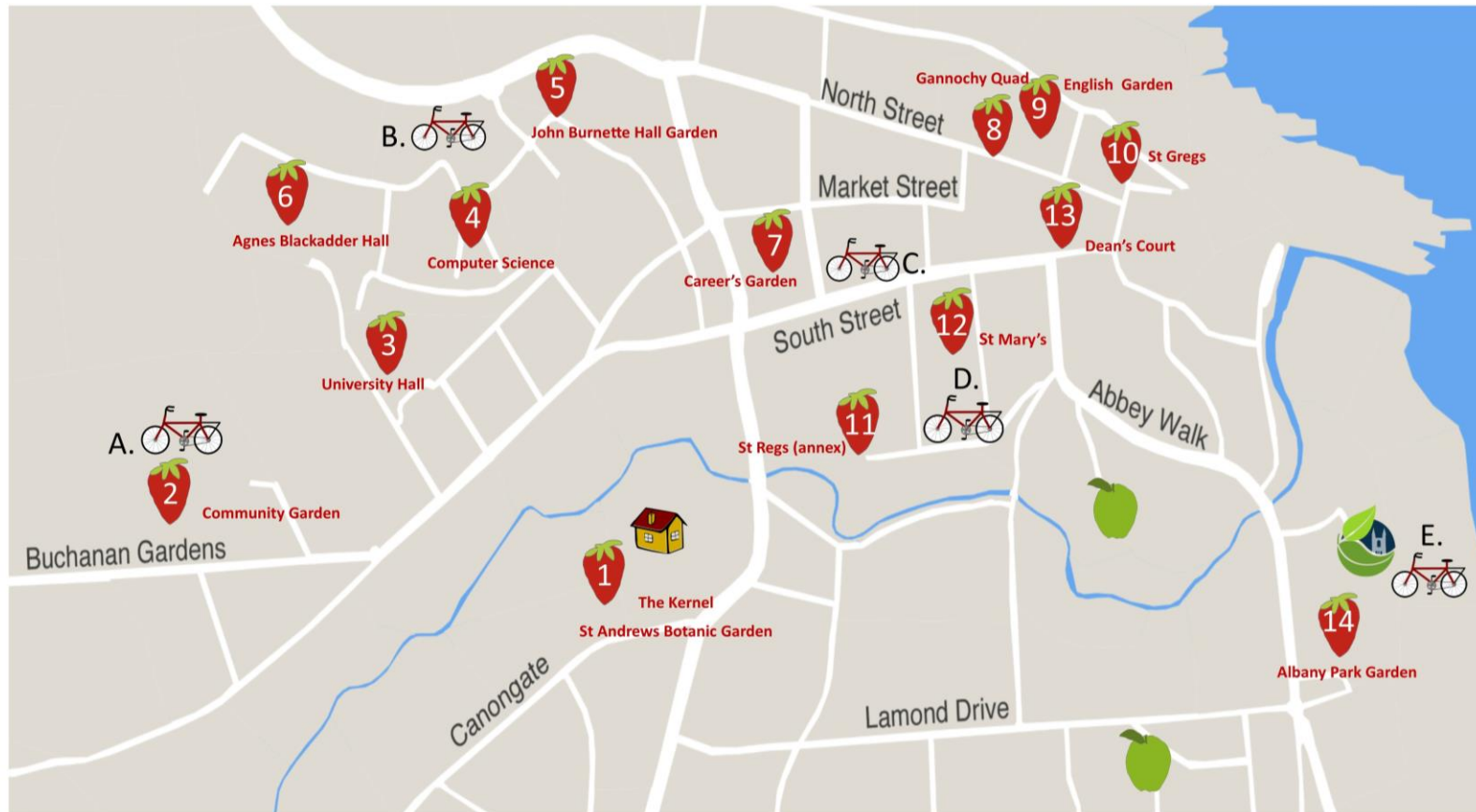
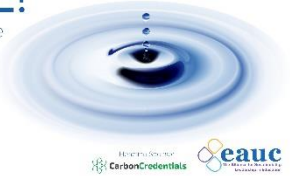


St Andrews Edible Campus

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University Hall Garden

Lancaster Edible Campus

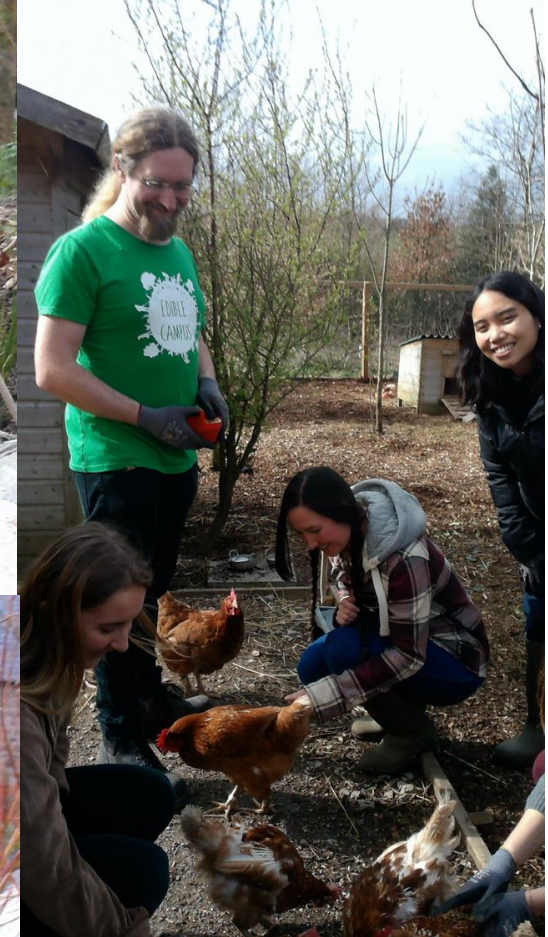
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Heavenly Bodies
Carbon Credentials
eauc



Interviews

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- What attracted participants to get involved?
- What benefits did involvement provide?
- Grocery shopping: what do they buy, where, why?
- Cooking: what do they cook, when, why?
- Eating: do they share meals? Do they get takeaways or go out to eat?
- Has being involved in the food co-op/Edible Campus scheme changed anything about any of these practices?

Initial findings (very much work in progress)

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- Many interviewees were ‘the usual green suspects’
- **Veg Bag/Food Co-op:** Aberdeen scheme linked to Shared Planet society and veggie/vegan society – promoting ‘spillover’ more than stand-alone Hearty Squirrel?
- **Edible Campus:** Small veg plots close to halls may encourage more involvement/more diverse range of students than separate large plot

Main changes to student practices

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- Students learning to cook with a greater variety of vegetables
- Some increased awareness of seasonality of food
- Some increased efforts to avoid plastic packaging and food waste (greater awareness of effort needed to grow food)

But interesting to see what participants focus on and what they ignore: veganism but not fair-trade; plastic but not personal flights

One recommendation

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- Universities could make these schemes more prominent when advertising campus services – not just on sustainability/society webpages

Thank you for listening! Questions?

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