Food Values

How does the way we value food link into the social health of our communities? How much can our own personal choices affect the way the food system works? How can a values-led approach connect different actors within the food industry?

Values are a basic and irreducible feature of our everyday lives that shape what we do and how we feel. So is food. In this paper we discuss how values motivate different attitudes and behaviour, and why we need to take values into account if we want to transform the food choices we make in Wales. We break this down into three areas: individual choice, community health and societal structures, exploring the significance of values for each and outlining the areas where we would recommend more research.

This paper is particularly aimed at educationalists, community workers and academics working on food within Wales, but is for anyone with an interest in understanding food from the perspective of values.

The Common Cause approach

Common Cause is an **analysis** that highlights the importance of values in social change; an **approach** that applies this understanding to achieving a more sustainable world; and a **network** using this approach in their work.

Our approach may be summarised by 5 principles, which are drawn from a large body of psychological research:

1. **We all share values**. These values are common across the world, whatever our age, gender or cultures, but we differ in *how much* we think each value is important.[1]

2. **Values matter**: they shape who we are - how we vote; how much money we spend, and on what; whether we're prejudiced; our careers, and how much we care about the environment.[2]

3. **Values can be engaged** by language and experience. Engaging a value can make it seem temporarily more important, shaping how we respond to the situations we're in.[3]

4. **Society shapes values** through the continual reinforcement of particular messages, for instance in schools, institutions and policy.[4] Values are not set in stone; they are more like muscles, growing stronger the more we engage them.

5. **Values connect issues:** everything from food to poverty, inequality and climate change.[5]

The map below (Figure 1) shows the broad range of values that most people hold, wherever they live and whatever language they speak. The map spatially represents how similar or different the values are, so values that are close together on the map (e.g. Equality and Broadmindedness) are likely to be held strongly at the same time, while values that are far apart (e.g. Equality and Power) are not. We can organise this map into ten groupings of values (see Figure 2). Extensive research on this subject reveals a particular set of value groups that are connected with more concern and action on social and environmental causes. These groups are: Benevolence, Universalism and Self-direction (collectively called 'Intrinsic Values'), and they can be characterised as motivating compassion towards each other, nature and, indeed, ourselves.

Benevolence, Universalism and Self-direction values are linked to a whole host of other attitudes and behaviours, which indirectly affect the choices we make around food. These values, for example, make us more likely to support human rights issues[6], cooperate rather than compete with others[7], and show less racial and gender prejudice[8]. They also make us more concerned about the impact our actions have on the environment[9], for us now, and for future generations, and they motivate us to do more to donate and volunteer for charities and campaigns.[10](See our recent report, Common Cause for Nature,[11] for more on how these values motivate us to appreciate and protect nature.)

So, when it comes to food, our values will also tend to influence our choices - not just at the checkout, but also in supporting the initiatives and groups working towards the bigger issues we care about.

The good news is that Benevolence, Universalism and Self-direction are consistently rated the most important values for people.[12] Unfortunately, there is often a gap between what we care about and what we are able to express. If we are to live in a society that really lives by these values, it is not enough for us to think they are quite important in the abstract. We need to consciously link them up to our work, making them relevant to the causes we care about and removing the barriers that prevent people from expressing them in action.

Figure 1: The structure of values found in 82 countries, with over 65,000 people
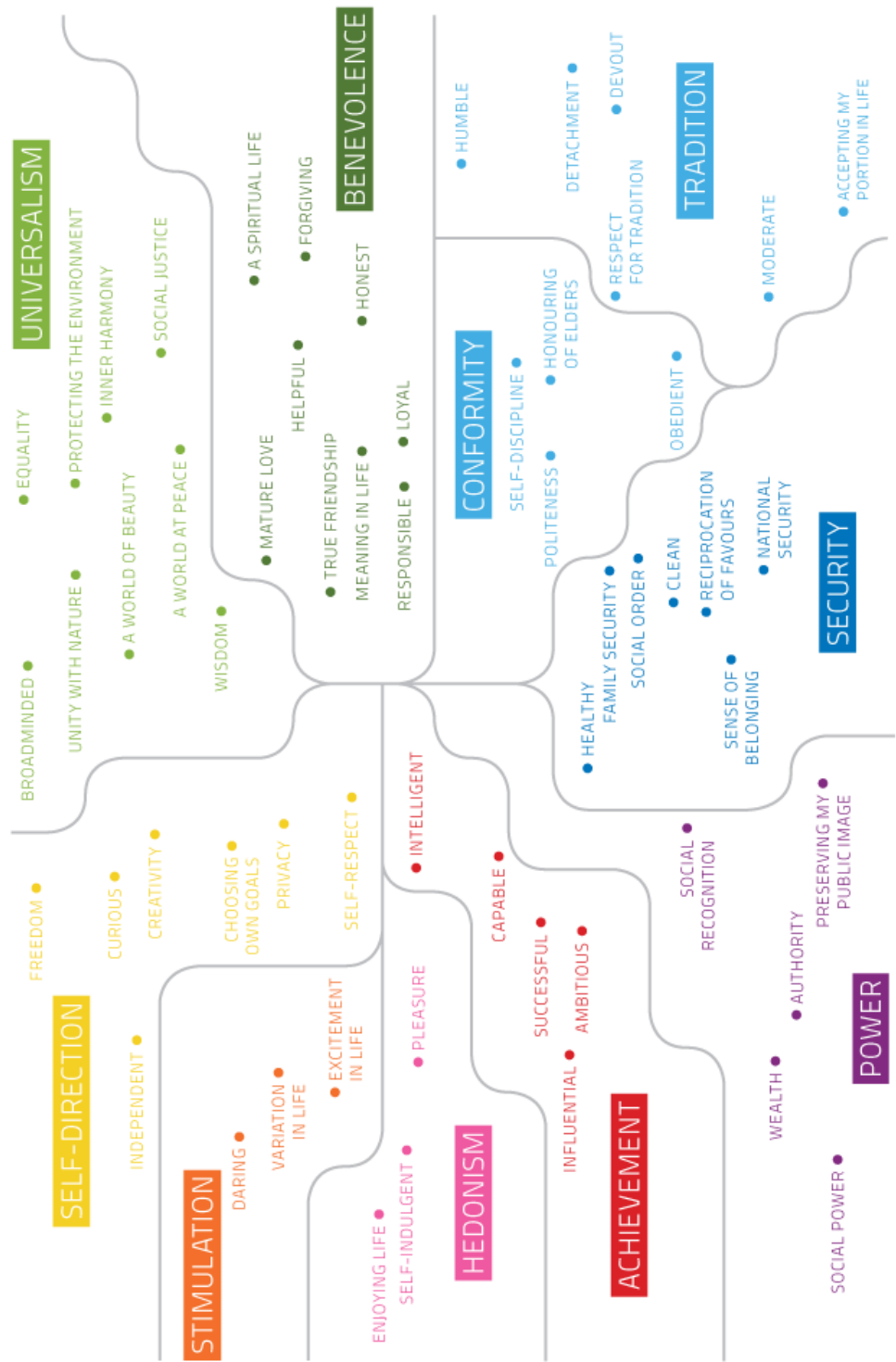
Figure 2: Definitions of the ten values groups

POWER
SOCIAL STATUS AND PRESTIGE, CONTROL OR DOMINANCE OVER PEOPLE AND RESOURCES.

ACHIEVEMENT
PERSONAL SUCCESS THROUGH DEMONSTRATING COMPETENCE ACCORDING TO SOCIAL STANDARDS.

HEDONISM
PLEASURE AND SENSUOUS GRATIFICATION FOR ONESELF.

STIMULATION
EXCITEMENT, NOVELTY AND CHALLENGE IN LIFE.

SELF-DIRECTION
INDEPENDENT THOUGHT AND ACTION – CHOOSING, CREATING, EXPLORING.

UNIVERSALISM
UNDERSTANDING, APPRECIATION, TOLERANCE AND PROTECTION FOR THE WELFARE OF ALL PEOPLE AND FOR NATURE.

BENEVOLENCE
PRESERVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE WELFARE OF PEOPLE WITH WHOM ONE IS IN FREQUENT PERSONAL CONTACT.

TRADITION
RESPECT, COMMITMENT AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE CUSTOMS AND IDEAS THAT TRADITIONAL CULTURE OR RELIGION PROVIDE THE SELF.

CONFORMITY
RESTRAINT OF ACTIONS, INCLINATIONS AND IMPULSES LIKELY TO UPSET OR HARM OTHERS AND VIOLATE SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS OR NORMS.

SECURITY
SAFETY, HARMONY, AND STABILITY OF SOCIETY, OF RELATIONSHIPS, AND OF SELF.

Values and food

How can we understand individual choices, community-level action and the societal and institutional frameworks that exist around food   all through the same values model? And can we draw lessons from this that can be applied in these different levels of the food system?

1) INDIVIDUAL CHOICES

There are many factors that influence our food decisions, but our choices are often constrained: we follow social norms and fashions; we may be more likely to go for convenience when we're stressed or rushed; we can't necessarily find the products we want locally; we form strong habits around what we buy; and we often feel we need to consult our wallets over our stomachs. But underneath many of our decisions, and indeed a number of these constraints, are our values.

Research in social psychology suggests a number of strong links between values and food. People who have greater 'universalism' values (meaning they are particularly concerned with the welfare of people and the environment) tend to:

1. Make more sustainable food choices   e.g. be vegetarian, eat less meat or choose free-range meat[13]and choose organic products.[14]

2. Show greater appreciation for health and quality over convenience/microwave meals and avoid genetically modified products.[15]

3. Consider the country of origin; boycott untrusted retailers; avoid excess packaging, and consider whether packaging can be recycled.[16]

Power values, in particular, tend to motivate opposite attitudes and actions on many of these food choices,[17] which in terms of the values map makes sense (as power is oppositional to universalism).

Values also connect food to wider issues. There is evidence, for example, that the more people are concerned about environmental and animal rights, the more likely it is they will support and consume organic food.[18]

For the reasons suggested above, not everyone has the privilege to choose what food to buy and how to cook it. Our choices can be limited by financial

constraints, but are also importantly shaped by our wider social environments. The people around us at home, in schools and in local communities, are a key influence in forming our knowledge, values and habits around food.

Lastly, our food choices can be affected in the moment by the framing of the situation at the time. Our values can be engaged in the moment, making us more likely to act on them in that moment. So if we are in a situation that connects with universalism values we are more likely to act in an environmentally friendly way. This means, potentially, that we can design and frame initiatives in ways that connect with these values.

2) COMMUNITY HEALTH

The same values that predict sustainable and ethical food choices are also intimately linked to community health. Good education and community work around food will strengthen the values of Universalism, Benevolence and Self-direction. We can encourage greater reflection and creative involvement in the subject of food, and, where possible, hands-on participation in the production and preparation of food locally.

In the UK, we have some great examples of community food initiatives that have utilised public spaces for this purpose. The Incredible Edible project, which originally started in a small town called Todmorden in Yorkshire, has spread to over 30 communities around the UK and New Zealand. They grow food and campaign for more local food production, with the aim of allowing more communities to be self-sustaining, at least with fruit and veg. All local schools, and many of their public spaces (housing developments; the fire and police stations) now have growing sites, which are looked after by volunteers. Not only does this make local food more easily available, but it also encourages more people to experience what it's like to grow food, and it changes people's perception of how public space can be shared and used. From a values point of view, this has a positive impact, because we care more about our environment if we experience being outside in nature, and we care more about people if we've got a chance to do something strong and positive as a community. Growing, trading and cooking local food can help us build healthier, happier communities.

VALUES AND COMMUNITY WORK: A CASE STUDY

'Our Common Place' is one example of a values-led approach to community work. In 2012 Waste Watch (now Keep Britain tidy) decided that they wanted to shift away from short-term interventions towards more systemic change, connecting the dots between sustainability, mental health and community development. They designed a project that allowed them to look not just at immediate environmental impacts of their work (recycling rates), but also at deeper shifts within the community.

They changed the way they monitored and evaluated their work, to include new outcomes like:

» Confidence and skills of the participants

» Sense of connection between volunteers and their community

» What cross-barrier relationships have been built

How did they do it?

Our Common Place brought values-thinking into the heart of Keep Britain Tidy's (KBT) work. Staff from KBT worked with residents of large blocks of flats across 23 communities in London to help them design projects they wanted to work on together. Morgan explains, *"We found that the best way to start talking about what's important to people, their values, is to start where people's interests lie. We're trying to allow for self-direction in how we work with local communities."* In one case, sewing classes were set up, in another, a 'help your neighbour recycle' scheme. One of the most surprising projects worked with a youth club to look at how sustainability flows through everyday life. In one session, young people analysed their favourite song lyrics to see what values they espouse.

As well as applying values to their external work, this project was a chance to transform the way the organisation worked internally. One of the first steps in that direction was to change the way decisions and strategies were made, so to include and empower people. As Tim explains: *"At Waste Watch now, everyone has been contributing to our new strategic direction, for example through our business plan or our approach towards change – and as a result there's a much more inclusive culture. Its not just formally but informally too – there's a lot of sharing lunchtimes, baking cakes for each other – we're actually building a community in the office as well as within our projects based upon the values we all live and work by."*

What to take away?

This work was challenging and exciting in a number of ways. By making a deliberate attempt to connect the dots between issues, they opened up possibilities for new alliances with different sectors and organisations. Importantly, the team understood that intrinsic values were already important in the lives of their audience   the question was how to engage with them, not to tell people how to live.

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Food projects in different communities, for example in schools, youth groups, drama groups, slimming groups and sports teams, can have transformative impact on values that affect not only food behaviour, but other behaviours related to social and environmental care.

But as mentioned earlier, there are multiple barriers to people being able to express their intrinsic values through their actions: either for their own households or within their communities. And there are many other reasons why our other set of values may be engaged within our lives, suppressing our motivation to eat in a sustainable way.

To get the full picture on this, we need to look at the societal level: questioning what values are being promoted by wider food industries and government policies about food.

3) SOCIETAL STRUCTURES

"We've got to actually face up to the fact that this [food security] is a complicated problem which involves vastly different levels of society and we need to be persuading policy makers not to think about food in isolation, not to think about climate change in isolation, not to think about water in isolation, not to think about energy in isolation. All of them are intimately related".
    Foresight Report on Food & Farming Futures', led by Prof. John Beddington.[19]

When it comes to the big issues, whether it's animal welfare, climate change, or social equality, we wield power as individual food consumers and members of communities. But there are also wider societal structures that influence the food system.

Values connect issues

We know that the systems we create, and how we respond to these systems, are strongly related to our values. One research project compared values across 20 different countries, finding strong relationships between values at the national level and a number of indicators: CO_2 emissions, maternal leave, child well-being and volume of advertising to children.[20] After controlling for GDP, countries that placed relatively higher importance on Power and Wealth (oppositional to the Intrinsic values), had higher emissions, lower

maternal leave, lower child well-being and more advertising per minute of commercial TV aimed at children.

In other words, values connect issues because of the motivational commonality that underpins them.

There are a whole host of systemic issues around food: food poverty, malnutrition and, on the flip side, numerous health issues related to obesity and overconsumption of fatty and sugary foods. The agricultural sector faces a number of issues itself: internally, such as the growth of big, corporate agri-business, high-input farming and supermarket standards, and external pressures from participation in global markets. It also has a large contribution in the massive scale of global biodiversity loss. Climate change also brings a number of challenges to our current system: unpredictable weather and considerations of changing land use. And so on. Values provide another way of viewing the connections between these issues.

Understanding policy feedback

There are important feedback loops between our values and our cultural practices. Policies and institutions are shaped by our values, but they also come to define and reinforce ideas of what we consider to be 'possible, desirable and normal' in society.[21] This means that we may create institutions that reflect particular values   a National Health Service based on equality and care for all, for instance   that also serve to strengthen those values over time because of the experience of those who use the service, in whatever capacity.

Our interaction with consumer capitalism may also represent a kind of policy feedback. We increasingly create spaces in which our consumer identities are encouraged, where our civic identities once existed (such as in public services). This framing engages and strengthens our extrinsic, materialistic values (such as Power, Security and Conformity) and makes us more likely to express these values in our decisions and interactions: more likely to act with concern for money over people, more likely to want to engage more with other consumer experiences, and more likely to create more consumer spaces.

So we must think carefully about how the food system affords or blocks us from expressing intrinsic values. We also need to broaden our scope, to

consider how we can build intrinsic values at the cultural level in other ways. Any intervention that fosters the values of Self-direction, Universalism and Benevolence will be good for wider social and environmental causes, food included.

Working on Common Causes

A 'Common Cause' is a campaign, intervention or policy that is likely to help strengthen Intrinsic values (or oppose Power and Wealth) on a societal level, for example in the following ways:

1. **Opposing inequality**, for example through welfare reframing and reform, through opportunities in the state school system, through advocating an intersectional approach in the workplace.
2. **Reducing commercial advertising**, for example through supporting calls to ban advertising to young children.
3. **Increase connection to nature** in children and adults, for example through improving outdoor education and access to green space.
4. **Reducing working hours,** for example through opting in to the Working Time Directive, obligating employers to offer workers a four-day working week and supporting a living wage.

Because values connect issues, Common Causes are in the interest of anyone working towards a more just and compassionate food system. We must look beyond changing specific food behaviours and start working with the bigger picture in mind. The more we work in coalitions to do this, the stronger we will be.

Designing projects through values

Since the publication of *Common Cause: The case for working with our cultural values* (2010), which first set out this approach, several organisations and initiatives have set to work turning the analysis into practice. We can summarise the key lessons from this work for designing projects as follows.

1. **Connect the dots** - taking into account the social *and* environmental impacts; strength and depth of relationships, and experience of equality and respect. Looking at issues through the lens of values, it is clear that there are a whole host of issues that are interconnected, and that it often doesn't make sense to address any of these in isolation.

   How? In designing the project, we can start from values: asking what values lie behind the outcomes we are hoping for, and designing based on these.

We can also seek to understand the numerous ways the issues are connected. Then we can ask such questions as: who are the actors, and how do they relate to each other (e.g. who does what to whom, and why? Where is the power? Who is participating and leading, learning or sharing?). We can sometimes directly observe the effect on interpersonal relationships and interactions, using the questions above as a guide. We can also gauge this through questionnaires and recorded interviews with the participants. During a project, much of this monitoring will be subjective and qualitative, rather than number crunching. However, a values-focus also provides us with new quantitative metrics: we can measure values directly, or attitudes that we know will be associated with particular values changes.

2. **Co-create projects** with the people it affects. Active, creative input from participants is a valuable output: it is likely to engage intrinsic values, and models a collaborative and empowering approach that can be transferred across other situations.

   How? Depending on the nature of the project, this usually demands a chunk of work, or even a dedicated role, from someone who is trying to identify and reach the right audience. In a local community, this might involve participatory social mapping   identifying local infrastructure (community halls, churches, leisure centres, skateparks etc.) and networks (schools, unions, scouts, WI, youth groups etc.) to find representative individuals who can be a point of contact and advice.

3. **Look inside as well as out** - at the values you promote within your own organisation, how decisions are made and how people are supported. The values encouraged within an organisation are the values that are most likely to guide the decisions and planning of those within the organisation.

   How? A good start is to identify the values you want to stand for as a group, and keep a visual reminder (for example, by sticking a values map on the wall, and all marking the ones that guide the work). We can also evaluate our working practices, like decision-making, hierarchies of responsibility, and organisational processes, by what values they currently engage. For instance, staff enjoying greater levels of autonomy or participation in decision-making is likely to encourage Self-direction and Universalism values.

4. **Measure what matters** - The way we set out to measure success is important for funders, but also for our own focus. If we focus too much on single quantifiable outcomes, like measuring uptake of individual behaviours around food, we can overlook the things that are harder to measure (like

social relationships), or not normally considered relevant (like the structure of our own work team).

How? Once we've identified which values hope to engage, and what behaviours might instantiate them, we can dig a little more into the nature of the values engagement, asking: *how deeply are people involved; how many people will be affected; how frequently people might participate?* It might not be possible to fire on all cylinders, but we can consider the trade-offs (our energy may be better spent reaching a few people on a deep level, for instance, rather than trying to get large numbers of participant who are passively or shallowly involved).

The present project

Through the course of three research seminars and three public events, we hope to explore how using a values approach might help to address some key questions about how to improve our food system. These might include questions such as:

1. What barriers do people face in expressing values in their food choices?

2. What types of initiatives and interventions can change people's food values, or better connect people's existing values with their food-related attitudes and actions?

3. What does good practice look like in values-led food education?

4. What policy changes or institutional shifts are the most strategic for changing the way we relate to food?

5. What 'Common Causes' can bring people together across the food industry?

   We see these questions as important opportunities to increase our current understanding of food and values, and an area we can start to explore with policy makers, educationalists and people working through all levels of the industry in Wales.

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