The Pursuit of a Sustainable Energy Culture at Taplow Court

A Space of Faith Where British Heritage and Japanese Buddhism Coincide

Karolina Ek

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LUCSUS
Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies

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Abstract:

As efforts to decarbonise energy systems have failed, attention turns to addressing disproportionate energy consumption through behavioural adjustments. Given the influence of religion on worldviews and behaviour, this thesis inductively and intimately examines the energy-related practises of the UK headquarters of the Buddhist organisation Soka Gakkai International. In its ethnographic approach, this thesis mobilises the Energy Cultures Framework and Gough's three stages of decarbonisation. The findings show that Taplow Court's energy culture emphasises production and efficiency, driven by energy prices and value creation paradigms. The study highlights the inhibitors of transitioning towards a sufficient energy culture created by tensions between the British culture of division and the Buddhist tradition of unity. The research demonstrates the influence of shared identities on behaviour in spaces of faith and the openness of these spaces to learn from and engage with external actors. The thesis advocates for participatory and ethnographic processes to understand the complex dynamics underlying energy consumption in spaces of faith and the diffusion of norms to other environments.

Keywords: Energy Cultures, Spaces of Faith, Sufficiency, Spirituality, Soka Gakkai, Soft Systems

Word count: 11,999

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Abbreviations

ECF	Energy Cultures Framework
INCH	Ikeda New Century Hall
LIPC	London Ikeda Peace Centre
SEE-FAB	Sustainable Environment on Earth for All Beings
SGI	Soka Gakkai International
SGI-UK	Soka Gakkai International - United Kingdom
SLNC	South London National Centre
UK	United Kingdom

1 Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

According to the latest IPCC report (2023), excessive energy consumption levels is one of the primary culprits behind global warming. Despite a reduction in the carbon intensity of new energy sources, it would take another 150 years to decarbonise the global energy system under current trajectories (Barrett et al., 2022). As pledges to meet the 1.5°C target fall short, attention is directed to behavioural and lifestyle changes in nations with disproportionately high levels of energy consumption, particularly in Europe (Barrett et al., 2022; Hettiarachchi, 2012; Linder et al., 2022). Meanwhile, energy affordability and fuel poverty have long been of concern in many European communities, particularly in discussions of well-being, thermal comfort, and excess winter deaths (Day et al., 2016). This complex context thwarts public acceptance of policies aimed at reducing end-use energy consumption across the board (Barrett et al., 2022; Callmer, 2019; Nyfors et al., 2020; Shove, 2003; Spangenberg et al., 2018).

A wide range of disciplines have engaged in studying the factors that shape behaviour and create behavioural lock ins, both at the individual and sociotechnical systems level (Barr & Gilg, 2007; Bell et al., 2014; Creutzig et al., 2016; Linder et al., 2022; Meadows, 2009; Sorrell, 2015). Shove (2018) claims that interventions to change attitudes and reduce final energy consumption, mainly through social marketing, have made only incremental progress. A principal challenge in this endeavour is the intertwining of energy behaviour with daily practises that become automatic, habitual, and normalised (Linder et al., 2022; Stephenson, 2018; Stephenson et al., 2015).

An emerging response within sustainability science conceptualises the climate and environmental crisis as a crisis of culture, a relational crisis caused by disconnection and separation (Bruhn, 2021; Wamsler et al., 2021). The central idea is that inner dimensions, such as values, beliefs, and worldview, are conducive to outer dimensions, such as lifestyle and behaviour (ibid.). The assumption is that by shifting values, i.e., what one believes is right and should prioritise, this will be reflected in one's actions and subsequently in society's priorities (Ives et al., 2020; Leal Filho & Consorte McCrea, 2019; Martin et al., 2016; Wamsler et al., 2021). Behavioural changes towards lower final energy demand must therefore consider both the internal and external dimensions and their interactions if they are to promote transformative sustainability (ibid.). How to develop environments conducive to such mental shift has been highlighted as a research gap (Leal Filho & Consorte McCrea, 2019).

A promising avenue to enable behavioural change is 'place-shaping for sustainability transformations' (Grenni et al., 2020), which emphasises the influence of people's environments on the formation of

cultures (ibid.). In this context, spaces of faith (or worship) have received attention due to the role of religion in shaping values, beliefs, and worldviews through the mediating role of moral identity and collectivity (Caldwell et al., 2022; Leal Filho & Consorte McCrea, 2019). Assuming that religion can influence people's values, beliefs, and worldviews, which in turn influence their behaviour, there is reason to consider whether and to what extent such religious communities within particular spaces of faith, can promote behaviour change towards more sustainable energy consumption.

Yet, despite signs of an 'ecological awakening' (Caldwell et al., 2022) among religious organisations worldwide, Leal Filho and Consorte McCrea (2018) found virtually no funded research projects focused on the ecological sustainability for religious organisations and expressed the need *"to test how best to bring sustainability to the world's religious communities"* (Leal Filho & Consorte McCrea, 2019, pp. 617-618). Here Buddhism proves to be a particularly interesting and under-researched example. Academically, Buddhism aligns itself much with deep ecology and eco-constructivism (Clippard, 2011; Daniels, 2010; Darlington, 2018; Hettiarachchi, 2012; Javanaud, 2020; Loy, 2019; Schmid & Aiken, 2021) because of the shared centrality of being-in-between and the interconnectedness of all things; the very same values that Bruhn (2021) and Wamsler et al. (2021) argue align with transformative sustainability. The alignment between principles of ecological integrity and Buddhist ethics is a relatively small area of research and is limited to Asian and American contexts (Clippard, 2011; Darlington, 2019; Kim & Choi, 2016; King, 2019; Locke, 2022; Mo et al., 2022).

Following the progress made by the Energy Cultures Framework (Stephenson et al., 2015) in addressing the need for a holistic approach to capturing the dynamics that lead to particular energy behaviours in a community, this thesis seeks to address the empirical gap in European Buddhist environmental consciousness while exploring the conceptual interface between behaviour, spaces of faith, and energy consumption. In doing so, this thesis positions spaces for religious or spiritual practises as sites for the production and reproduction of cultures, which in turn shape behaviour within that community.

1.2 Purpose, Aim & Research Questions

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of the behavioural dynamics related to (un)sustainable energy consumption in Buddhist spaces of faith in Europe. Situated in the United Kingdom, this ethnographic study, consisting of observations and interviews, is based at Taplow Court, the headquarter for the lay Buddhist Organisation Soka Gakkai International United Kingdom (SGI-UK).

The study departs from the Energy Cultures Framework with the objective to evaluate the prevailing energy culture at Taplow Court to inform a transition to a more sustainable energy culture at that space of faith. The research of this thesis is operationalized through the following research questions:

1. What is the prevailing energy culture of Taplow Court in terms of norms, practices, material cultures and external factors?
2. How does that energy culture relate to principles of energy efficiency and sufficiency?
3. What underlying behavioural dynamics drive or inhibit change towards achieving such principles?

The second question bases its assessment on Gough's (2017b) three stages of decarbonization: increasing eco-efficiency, recomposing consumption, and reducing consumption – elaborated on later.

1.3 Contribution to Sustainability Science

The study speaks to debates on ethnographic research in sustainability science (Clark & Dickson, 2003; Kates et al., 2001; Miller, 2013), and focuses on efforts that do not view religion and spirituality as an ethical complication, but rather embraces the power of faith and place in shaping and transforming culture and behaviour (Caldwell et al., 2022; Harper, 2011; Hettiarachchi, 2012; Ives et al., 2020; Leal Filho & Consorte McCrea, 2019; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993; Stedman, 2002; Wamsler et al., 2021). It does so through culturally informed place-based research that has a solution-orientated objective to help foster energy transitions within spaces of faith and their communities. In its ethnographic approach, this study is also the first known application of the Energy Cultures Framework to a space of faith, and the first to explicitly distinguish between the principles of energy efficiency and sufficiency in its evaluative stage. Redefining Gough's three stages of decarbonization as norms within a community, reflected in the practices and material culture, is an additional contribution of this study. This ethnographic approach responds to emerging priorities, not just within European climate debates (Barrett et al., 2022; Callmer, 2019; IPCC, 2023; Nyfors et al., 2020), but also within the Buddhist community's environmental movement itself (Clippard, 2011; Darlington, 2018; Javanaud, 2020; Loy, 2017; Miller, 2013).

1.4 Thesis Overview

This thesis is arranged in six main chapters. Chapter 1 has thus far introduced the problem and purpose statements, positioning the study in academic debates, and established the research questions. Chapter 2 develops the conceptual framework, drawing on literature on behaviour, spaces of faith, and energy consumption. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology employed and the ethical considerations. Chapter 4 outlines the character of the energy culture of Taplow Court. Finally, chapter 5 and 6 responds the research questions in light of the findings.

2 Conceptual Framework

2.1 The Energy Cultures Framework

As an integrating interdisciplinary conceptual model on behavioural dynamics, the focus of this thesis, the Energy Cultures Framework (ECF) was developed to bridge divides between socio-technical and individualistic research traditions (Stephenson et al., 2010, 2015). It is rooted in the concept of culture and a soft systems approach, suggesting energy behaviour as influenced by interactions between material culture, energy practices, norms, and external influences. In simple terms, the interactions between what you have, what you do, how you think, and your external environment (Figure 1).

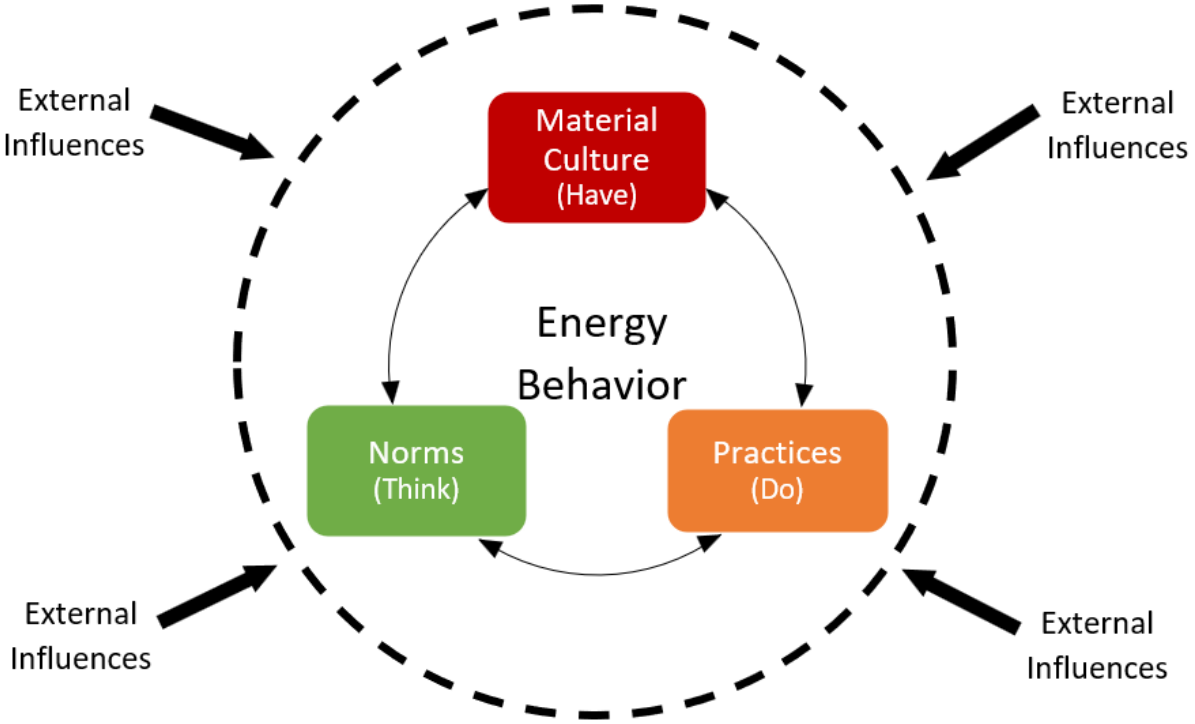

Figure 1: The Energy Cultures Framework. Adapted from Stephenson et al. (2015).

Stephenson et al. (2015) postulates *material culture* as the technologies, physical structures and infrastructure, and other assets that play a role in how energy is used. *Practices* include the routinised activities, but also actions that occur relatively infrequent (*ibid*.). *Norms* are defined as the internal expectations and aspirations about energy practices and material culture, both ideal and realized (*ibid*.) These three elements are self-determined and set the boundaries of the culture (or system) (*ibid*.). Beyond these are external factors, forming the context in which these interactions take place, and are outside of the subject's immediate control (*ibid*.). The dotted line in Figure 1 represents the

permeable nature between factors within and outside the boundaries of the energy culture (EC). This recognises that the subject is part of the contextual environment, contributing to and influencing a wider EC. Tension between the four elements or factors of the energy culture can have effects that sustain the EC, lock in behaviours, promote system change, or create resistance to change. This is where the interest of analysis lies. See Table 1 for examples.

Table 1: Examples of components of the Energy Cultures Framework.

	Description	**Examples**
Material Culture	Technologies, infrastructure, facilities, structures, and other assets that play a role in how energy is consumed.	Energy sources, heating devices, insulation, house characteristics, artefacts that influence heating and humidity requirements, appliances, solar PVs.
Energy Practices	Routinised and infrequent activities, that consume energy.	Heating settings, how you use and choose material objects, maintenance of technologies, activities that indirectly use energy.
Norms	Expectations and aspirations about practices and material culture, ideal and realized values, perceptions, mental models related to decision-making, knowledge, beliefs, and concerns.	Response to when it's cold, degree of importance placed on energy-efficient technologies, taboo behaviour, respect for tradition, expected comfort level, environmental concerns.
External Influences	The context in which the interactions between material culture, energy practices and norms take place.	Financial constraints, education, demographics, regulations and legislation, price structure, available technologies on the market.

The framework is informed by a range of theories, including socio-technical systems (Geels, 2002), practice theory (Shove, 2003), actor-network theory (Latour, 1993), theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), embeddedness in cultural processes (Lutzenhiser, 1992), and social context of environmental behaviour (Barr & Gilg, 2007; Wilk, 2002). The ECF acts as a tool for understanding the potentials and possibilities for sites of action to achieve behaviour change. It is designed to be integrative and can be used as an interpretative lens, an organizing principal, or as a detailed analytical instrument at different scales. It has been applied in studies on various topics, such as assessing the effectiveness of initiatives for household energy consumption (Scott et al., 2016), energy efficiency in the United States Navy (Dew et al., 2017), and drying technology at timber processing firms in New Zealand (Bell et al., 2014). Despite the flexibility of the ECF, this study is the first known application of the model to spaces of faith and religious practice as a unit of analysis.

The ECF is particularly useful for this thesis as it engages multifaceted analysis that can incorporate the role that norms related to spirituality have in shaping energy behaviour. But a primary challenge in operationalising the framework in this context is that is does not put emphasis on what a sustainable energy culture is, and what it is not, which will be addressed in in section 2.3.

2.2 Spaces of Faith

In my thesis, I conceptualise religion as a socio-cultural system that unites a group of people with shared moral norms, worldviews, ritual practises, ethics, and sacred places (Caldwell et al., 2022; Leal Filho & Consorte McCrea, 2019). In this context, physical places, and their surrounding social environments, whether called sanctified places, sacred spaces (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993), places of worship (Caldwell et al., 2022) or houses of worship (Harper, 2011), are important vehicles through which these socio-cultural dynamics play out. This thesis henceforth uses spaces of faith as a concept that encompasses all physical places with attached religious norms, including spaces that are not only for worship.

Several studies have provided evidence of the context-dependence of behavioural dynamics, particularly how one's social environment and ascribed, descriptive and injunctive norms and actions influence one's actions (Cialdini et al., 2007; Goldstein et al., 2008; Nolan et al., 2008). In their paper, Mazumdar and Mazumdar (1993) draw on concepts of place attachment and identity. The central idea is that the complex cognitive structures and emotional attachment to place, such as the sense of belonging that comes from sharing a space with people of the same social group, are an important part of one's identity and a reflection of one's socialisation experience, shaped by the norms, behaviours, rules and regulations associated with the use of the space of faith (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993). Spaces of faith are therefore widely recognised as sites for the cultivation of a non-declarative culture, where religious practitioners interact with those who share one's moral framework (Caldwell et al., 2022).

> "Stimulating the uptake and practice of environmental thought at the place of worship scale is an emerging and substantial challenge, potentially rife with sociocultural and political challenges tied to the idiosyncrasies of context, place, and community." (Caldwell et al., 2022).

Through the mobilisation of the ECF, these contextual idiosyncrasies that influence the behavioural dynamics of energy consumption can be uncovered within spaces of faith. Some of the socio-cultural and political challenges arise from the interaction between religious and broader social norms (Leal

Filho & Consorte McCrea, 2019). This tension is particularly interesting in the case of the Buddhist minority in Europe. Buddhism is distinguished from godly religions by its *"pervasive theme of interconnectedness and interdependence of all things in existence"* (Daniels, 2010, p. 956). This primacy of interconnectedness can be understood as challenging Western thought's perverse view of nature as subordinate (Caldwell et al., 2022; White, 1967). Relevant to this study, parallels have been drawn between the non-material value paradigm of Buddhism and the need for sufficiency consciousness to address overconsumption, particularly energy consumption (Hettiarachchi, 2012). There is thus reason to believe that Buddhist centres offer a unique space of collective deconstruction and reconstruction of relationships with nature and people.

2.3 Efficiency & Sufficiency

Determining what constitutes a sustainability culture (Stephenson, 2018) requires some form of normative position. In the demand-side energy debate, two complementary concepts are generally discussed: efficiency and sufficiency (Barrett et al., 2022; Gough, 2017a; IPCC, 2023; Nyfors et al., 2020; Shove, 2018; Sorrell, 2015). Literature agrees that the change-orientation in public policy is primarily towards increasing energy efficiency, mainly due to the appealingly nature such investments entail for industry and the economy (Barrett et al., 2022; Callmer, 2019; Creutzig et al., 2016; Hettiarachchi, 2012; Nyfors et al., 2020; Sorrell, 2015; Spangenberg et al., 2018). Sufficiency is a more traditionally challenging concept that is gaining traction amid the restricted success that energy efficiency initiatives have brought (ibid.).

Drawing on the terminology of Gough's stages of decarbonization (Gough, 2017b) this study defines a sustainable energy culture as one which actively works towards lessening the negative environmental impact of their operations. It is the sustained process of energy conservation resulting from:

1) ramping up of (eco-)efficiency;
2) recomposing consumption; and
3) reducing consumption.

Originally referring to climate policy (Gough, 2017b), this application interprets ramping up efficiency as material efficiency upgrades that can lead to the same output with less carbon-intensive input. This perspective is compatible with the notion of sufficiency and efficiency as complements rather than substitutes (Nyfors et al., 2020), and (sustainable) energy cultures as a process rather than a state. These technical concepts, grounded in human needs theory, contrast, and complement the behavioural systems perspective of the ECF.

Within the ECF, I conceptualise Gough's stages as a set of norms that, in a sustainable EC, is reflected in both material cultures and practices. The steps are not sequential, but rather complements that may be asymmetrically reflected in an energy culture, but that together constitute a way of examining the sustainability of an energy culture. Table 2 offers concretization of the three constituents.

Table 2: Description of the three constituents of a sustainable energy cultures. Based on Gough (2017b).

Component	**Description**
Efficiency	
Improving Eco-efficiency	Refers to decreasing the amount of energy necessary for conducting the same activities. Green growth. *Examples: improvements in eco-efficiency of production, retrofitting, insulation investments, heat-insulating curtains, regular servicing of fridges/freezers/heat pump/building envelop/radiators/etc., fix draughts and minimise unintended ventilation, smart interior design (i.e., paint with light colours make rooms appear brighter with fewer lamps), upgrading appliances to better energy efficiency rating/index.*
Sufficiency	
Recomposing consumption	The shift in consumption pattern from identified energy-intensive options to low-energy options, still meeting needs. *Examples: a change in the organisational fleet from petrol cars to electric vehicles, changing electricity source from fossil fuels to renewables, encourage carpooling, make certain activities online/hybrid to reduce travel, divestment, LEDs, locally produced food rather than imported, switching from gas to induction hob.*
Reducing consumption	Reduction of absolute levels of energy consumption. Post-growth. *Examples: voluntary emission or energy rationing (reductions), downscale vehicle fleet, turning appliances off during out of hours, using vacancy sensors and timers, schedule cleaning and other activities to make use of daylight, offer safe storage of bikes, use local teachers and practitioners instead of flying in someone from abroad, use landscaping to provide shade or allow sunshine through windows, decrease size or building portfolio.*

3 Methodological Approach

3.1 Research Design & Philosophy

This thesis employs an ethnographic approach that emphasises place-based research (Grenni et al., 2020; Miller, 2013). Theorizing consumption as a social process (Tilley, 2001), the ethnographic approach employed in this study allows for immersion into the lived reality of energy consumption in Taplow Court, while also providing insight into the potential discrepancies between attitudes and behaviour (Gobo, 2008) that arise from tensions within the energy culture (Stephenson et al., 2010, 2015). The evaluation principles derived by Gough (2017b) were used in the analysis phase to assess how the energy culture relates to the principles of energy efficiency and sufficiency. Due to the nature of the research, inquiring into potentially sensitive personal experiences, the study emphasises spending time and resources on building trust within the studied community (Pole & Hillyard, 2016). Ethical considerations are discussed in more detail in section 3.5.1.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

Because of the novelty of applying the ECF to spaces of faith, this study directs attention the energy culture within one centre. The desire for an English-speaking centre was motivated by the fact that informants may find it difficult to express their attitudes and beliefs in a language in which they may not feel confident or comfortable. Possible case studies were explored through personal connections within the European Buddhist community, particularly centres that had shown interest in the SEE-FAB project[1] (Lyne et al., 2023). An initial email expressing research interest was sent to a representative of SGI-UK, which led to the participation of their headquarters, Taplow Court.

This study seeks not generalizable knowledge per se, but rather to capture the lived experiences of European Buddhists in their spaces of faith, with Taplow Court serving as a case study. It is therefore important to note that this case is not representative of European Buddhism, Nichiren Buddhism or SGI as a whole. Caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from this study, as the findings are contextual.

[1] The SEE-FAB project, short for Sustainable Environment on Earth for All Beings, is an initiative run by SEfficiency LLC that works to adapt existing environmental management frameworks into a holistic tool to measure, monitor and decrease the environmental footprint of Buddhist centres across four areas: energy, water, biodiversity, and resources.

3.3 Data Collection

The research design comprises of ethnographic fieldwork through observations and interviews. Data was collected over the course of four weeks, two of which entailed fieldwork on site. An illustration of the methodological framework can be found in Figure 2.

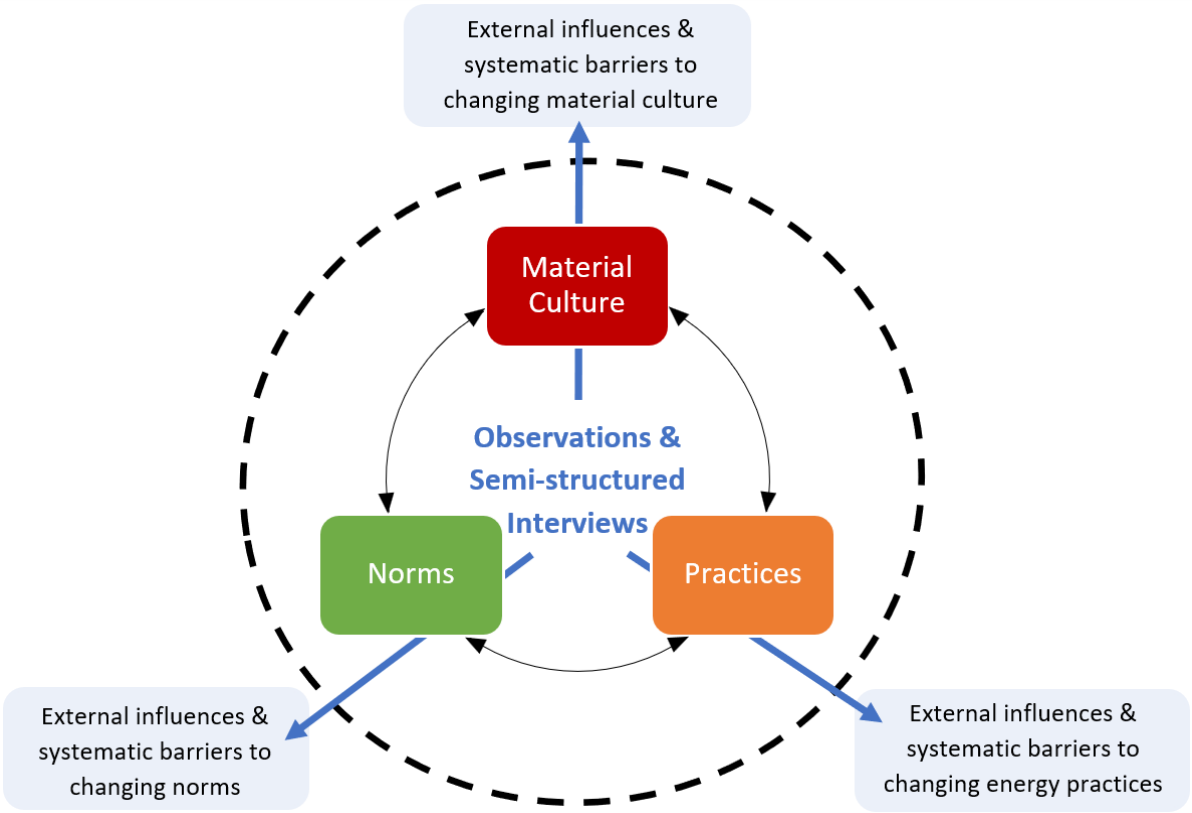

Figure 2: Methodological Framework. Illustration adapted from (Stephenson et al., 2010).

3.3.1 Informal Conversations & Observations

Informal conversations and observations were carried out whilst visiting the sites, including during a Gohonzon[2] receiving ceremony for new members. An informal version of walking interviews was an important component of this. This method is readily used on cross-disciplinary social science as a means of deepening understandings of lived experiences in particular places and determining their relationship of a social group with that specific place (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Observations were conducted primarily at Taplow Court, but also at London Ikeda Peace Centre (LIPC) and South London National Centre (SLNC). Conversations were not audio recorded. Field notes were kept in a diary and

[2] Gohonzon is the object of devotion of Soka Gakkai. It is a scroll entrusted to those embracing Buddhism.

typed up at the end of the day. Recognising that fieldnotes simply cannot capture the depth of encounters with a space of faith, and may pose as a distraction during interpersonal interactions, notes were taken both contemporaneously and post-ante to balance observation and immersion (Emerson et al., 2001).

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The main source of data collection was semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with the staff. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for flexibility in the topics of discussion depending on the experience and expertise of the interviewee (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). The first seven interviews were all conducted on-site at Taplow Court (see Table 3). Two additional interviews were conducted online with representatives from LIPC (IIX) and SLNC (IX). Care was taken in the length of the interviews to avoid stressing the staff who gave their time. The interviews lasted 30-50 minutes and were scheduled around organisational meetings and the staff gongyo[3].

The aim of the interviews was to elicit respondents' interpretations of the reality of lived reality rather than to obtain objective facts (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). The questions were therefore open-ended, both directly and indirectly, and were inductively adapted on the spot according to the respondents' expertise, experience, and interests. A major challenge with interviews is that they are based on self-disclosure and the results may be subject to self-reporting bias (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Responses were therefore compared between respondents to capture differences in perceptions and possible gaps in knowledge. All informants gave consent for the interviews to be recorded (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Pole & Hillyard, 2016) and transcripts were made afterwards. The interview guide can be found in Appendix 1.

[3] Gongyo is a daily practice, or ceremony, of chanting - reciting from chapters of the Lotus Sutra, the scripture upon which Mahayana Buddhism was established.

Table 3: Record of interviewees.

ID	Role within the Organisation	Location
I	SGI-UK Employee	Taplow Court, Main House
II	SGI-UK Finance and Facilities Manager	Taplow Court, Ikeda New Century Hall
III	SGI-UK Manager and Vice Director	Taplow Court, Main House
IV	Taplow Court Assistant Maintenance Manager	Taplow Court, Main House
V	SGI-UK Senior Manager for External Relations, Safeguarding, Study and Publishing	Taplow Court, Main House
VI	Taplow Court Health & Safety, Security, and Maintenance Manager	Taplow Court, Gatehouse
VII	Taplow Court Services	Taplow Court, Main House
IIX	Steering Committee Member of the London Ikeda Peace Centre, Men's Leader for the Central London Area, National SGI-UK Guardian Leader	Online, Zoom
IX	Women's Headquarters Leader for South-East London, Member of South London National Centre, Fellow at the Centre for Applied Buddhism, Eco Dharma Coordinator	Online, Zoom

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Thematic Coding

Field notes and interview transcripts were thematically coded in three phases using the computer-assisted qualitative-data-analysis-software NVivo (Given, 2008). First, statements were clustered by norms, practices, material culture and external factors (Stephenson et al., 2015). Content that related to two or more clusters was coded into all relevant categories. The categories were then divided into different themes that emerged from inductively thematized patterns. Particular attention was paid to distinguishing between cultural characteristics, change-enabling factors, and change-inhibiting factors. A third coding phase examined the weight given to improving eco-efficiency, recomposing consumption and reducing consumption within each overhead category of the energy culture, i.e., norms, practices, material culture and external factors. The final codes can be found in Figure 3.

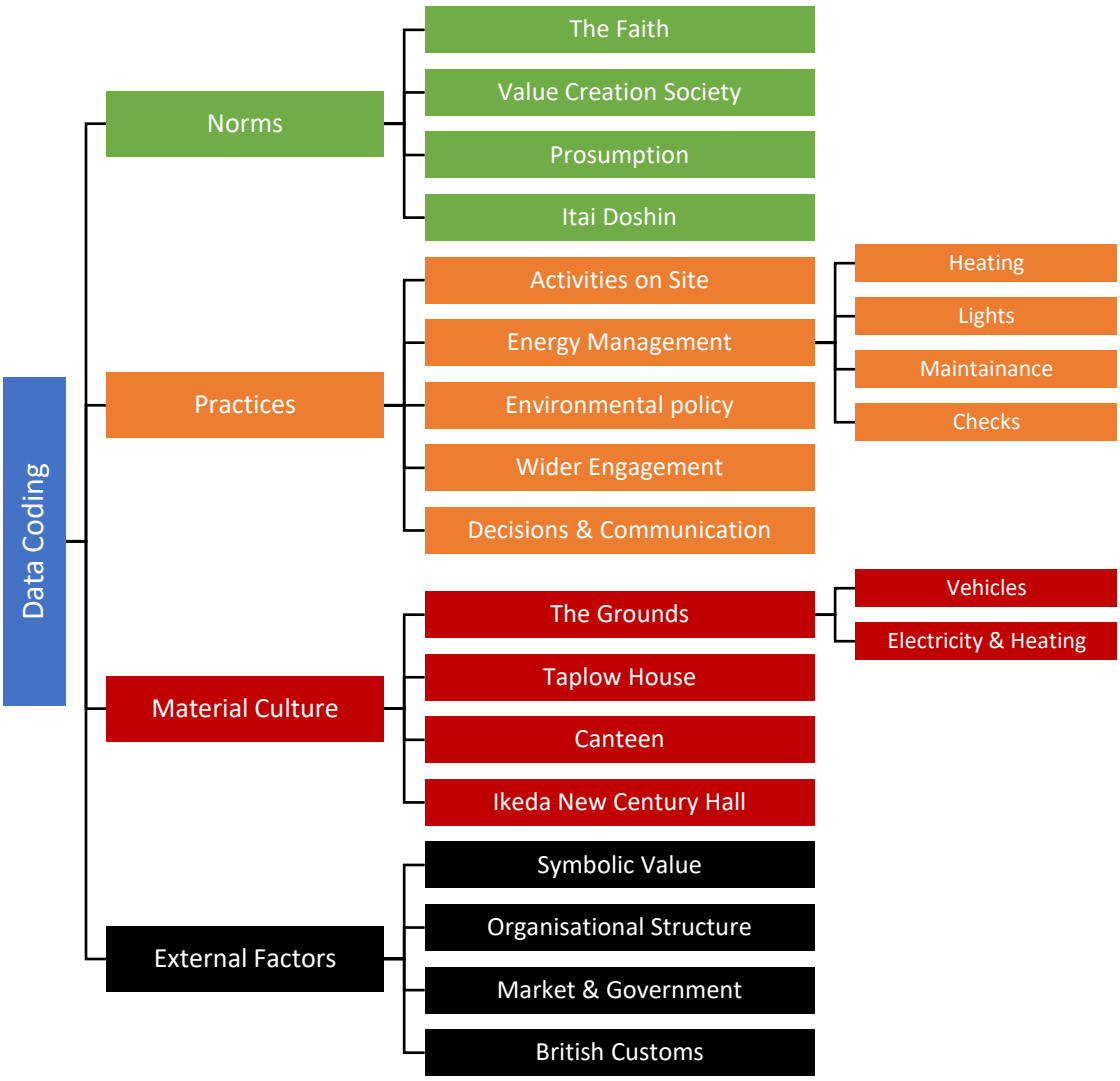

Figure 3: Coding categories. From own analysis.

3.4.2 Supplementary Material

Throughout the field research process, several reports and resources were brought up in conversations with respondents. These were added to the analysis to assist with the overall research project. The documents included the latest Trustees Report and Financial Statements available at Companies House (SGI-UK, 2022), the SGI-UK Environmental and Sustainability Policy (Harrap, 2021), and the website of the public body that manages the National Heritage List for England (*Historic England*, n.d.). Data was also shared on the gas and electricity consumption for the past 12 months.

3.5 Research Ethics & Positionality

3.5.1 Ethics

Ethical considerations were thoroughly examined prior to fieldwork through informed consent and open discussions (Pole & Hillyard, 2016). Informants could withdraw consent or abstain from answering the questions asked at any time during the interviews (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Pole & Hillyard, 2016). The completed consent forms were digitally scanned. One of the nine respondents chose to remain anonymous.

As it was anticipated that the data collected in the interviews would contain sensitive information, their names were erased. Sensitive information was redacted from the transcripts. To ensure continued prioritisation and protection of participants' welfare, interests, privacy and dignity, the recordings, scanned consent forms and transcripts were stored on a password-protected external hard drive. The recordings of the interviews were uploaded to the external hard drive on the day of recording and the local copy on the recording device was deleted. All recordings are to be destroyed on 1 June 2023.

3.5.2 Positionality & Reflexivity

The focus of this study is not on the propagation of Buddhism. Rather, the focus is on the potentials and opportunities for achieving more sustainable energy consumption in Taplow Court. Nevertheless, the focus of the thesis is on spiritual Buddhist philosophies as norms, in relation to energy cultures. In doing so, I recognise that it is not my role to write about the relevance of Buddhism in European society or how the tradition ought to be practised.

I am aware that the connections I have within the European Buddhist community influence my relationships in the fieldwork. My personal and professional experiences and familiarity with Buddhist

communities and British culture facilitate the building of the trust and sensitivity necessary to conduct this type of research (Pole & Hillyard, 2016). This familiarity also requires a clear delineation between my professional role and my role as a researcher in this study, particularly to avoid bias in my interpretations or in the way I present my findings. As a researcher, I had to be reflexive and not allow my preconceived view of Buddhist environmentalism to influence the study. There is some risk of bias if respondents believe that their answers will influence their participation in the SEE-FAB project. Therefore, great care was taken to clarify that I was conducting the research in my personal capacity and for the purpose of my studies (Pole & Hillyard, 2016). The organisation gave verbal consent for their name to be used in the publication of this thesis.

4 The Energy Culture of Taplow Court

This chapter begins by introducing the case and answers the first research question by presenting Taplow Court's current energy culture. All the themes are interrelated and overlap with several components of the ECF. For analytical purposes, they are assigned to the most prominent theme. The following information is drawn from interviews, as well as from observations and supplementary material consulted during the fieldwork.

4.1 Case Overview

4.1.1 Soka Gakkai International – United Kingdom

SGI is a worldwide network of Nichiren Buddhists whose membership stretches into 192 different countries around the world. SGI is a lay organisation, meaning it is aimed at those who practise Buddhism at home, as opposed to monastic practitioners such as monks and nuns. There is a strong tradition of coming together at the local level (SGI-UK, 2022) and a focus on peace, culture, and education. The tradition practised by the Soka Gakkai originated in 13th century Japan, where its headquarters are still located today. SGI as an organisation emerged in its current form in 1975 after the Second World War; *"[...] we've always been chanting for peace. We've always been chanting for nuclear abolition."* (V)

SGI-UK the UK branch of SGI is a registered charity running on contributions from its members. A National Committee provides direction for faith activities and policy. A Board of Trustees is responsible for the management of the organisation's assets and funds and ensures that activities comply with UK law and charity regulations. To support the movement, SGI-UK has four physical centres, all located in the south of England (Figure 4). The West London Centre, LIPC and SLNC are local centres serving their respective communities. Taplow Court is both a local centre for members living in the Thames Valley catchment area and the national headquarters of SGI-UK.

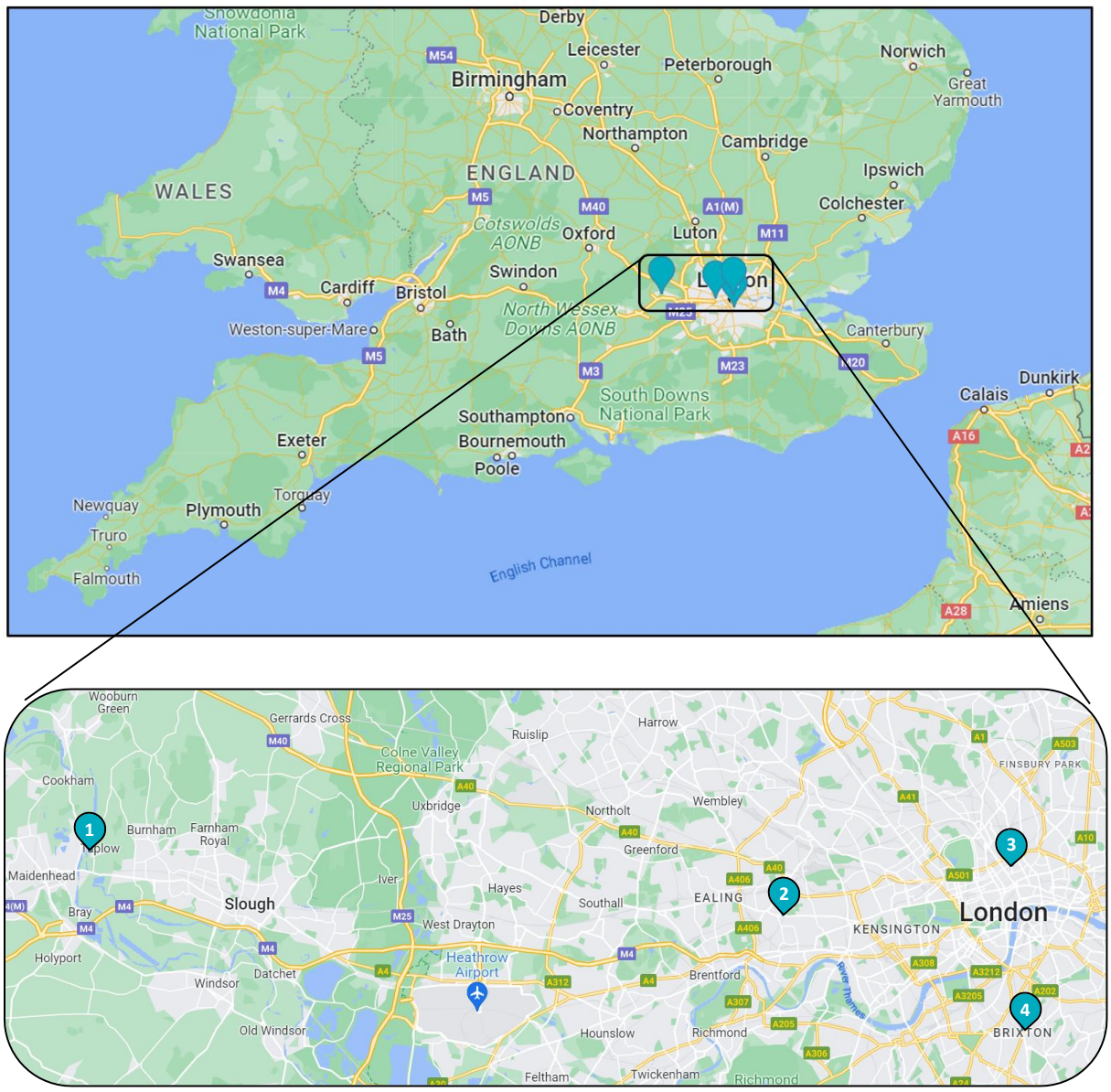

Figure 4: Map of the SGI-UK centres produced in Google Maps and Word, depicting 1) Taplow Court, 2) West London Centre, 3) London Ikeda Peace Centre, and 4) South London National Centre.

SGI-UK thus operates within the larger SGI structure, what is sometimes referred to as *"the reverse pyramid"* (VII) or a *"cell division structure"* (IX); *"[…] the leadership model is about taking on more responsibility and looking after more people"* (VII). Of the current 15,000 national members, approximately 20% hold a leadership position locally.

4.1.2 Taplow Court

Located in the village of Taplow, Buckinghamshire, Taplow Court was acquired by SGI-UK in the late 1980s. As a headquarters, Taplow Court is restricted by the organisational structure and directions set by the National Committee. Simultaneously, Taplow Court is the centre for decision-making, influencing the direction of the three other centres in the UK.

The 85-90[4] acre grounds are bounded the river Thames, parts of which is under the organisation's ownership. Most of the structures were built during the 17th century and the new chanting hall is reportedly built on top of Bronze age site. The ancient structures along with the park and gardens are Grade II[5] listed under the National Heritage List England (*Historic England*, n.d.). Figure 5 showcases the site.

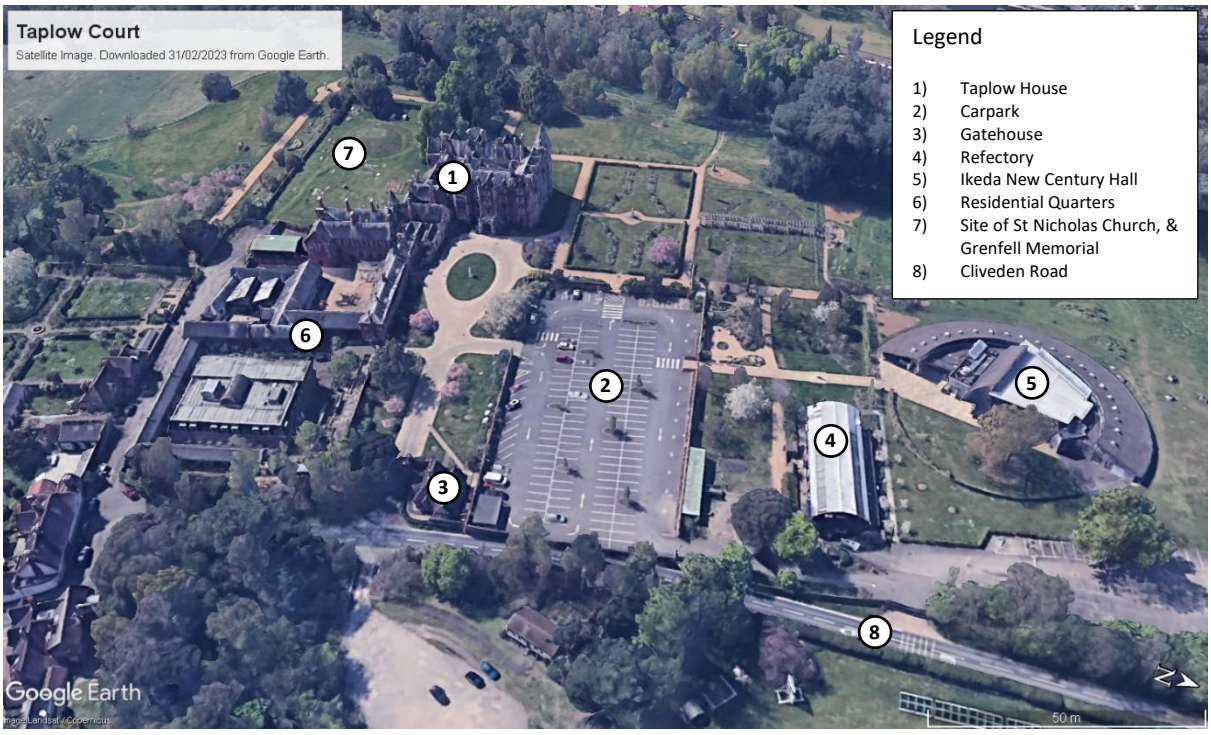

Figure 5: Satellite image of Taplow court buildings, generated using Google Earth. The full property is not displayed, only the buildings.

[4] Comparative to approximately 50 soccer fields.

[5] Grade II listed building is defined as a structure with historic or architectural significance that warrants its preservation. For example, the principal house (1165286), the park and garden (1000607), the gate piers (1124364), and Grenfell memorial (1124363).

4.2 Material Culture

4.2.1 Electricity & Heating

Pointing to the substantial gas bills, interviewees reported heating as one of the most energy-intensive practises on site. This is primarily attributed to the material culture. The age of the buildings and heating systems necessitates a certain level of heating to maintain structural integrity, generally 16 degrees Celsius. The systems themselves are inefficient and unreliable, which is further complicated by the fact that *"[...] every single building, every single room has its own idiosyncrasies, all of the setups are different [...]"* (IV). Space heating is mostly gas, although some of the boilers have recently been upgraded to *"[...] modern condensing type, which are more efficient [...]"* (VI). The slow heating system is supported by a few electric portable radiators. Water is primarily heated by gas, but due to external factors, particularly rising gas prices, a partial switch to electric alternatives has been initiated. None of Taplow Court's buildings have an energy performance certificate.

When procuring utilities, Taplow Court's status as a charity allows it to 'piggyback' on government negotiations with energy companies; *"[...] we don't actually do that much [...] in terms of investigating cost ourselves [...]"* (II). In doing so, they opt for the more expensive green electricity tariff. According to historical records, Taplow Court is heavily dependent on gas. In the period from March 2022 to March 2023, Taplow Court consumed 1,028,742 kWh of gas and only 228,065 kWh of electricity (Figures 6 and 7). Material constraints related to heating needs and building restrictions are likely the reason for the high spikes in gas consumption from December to March.

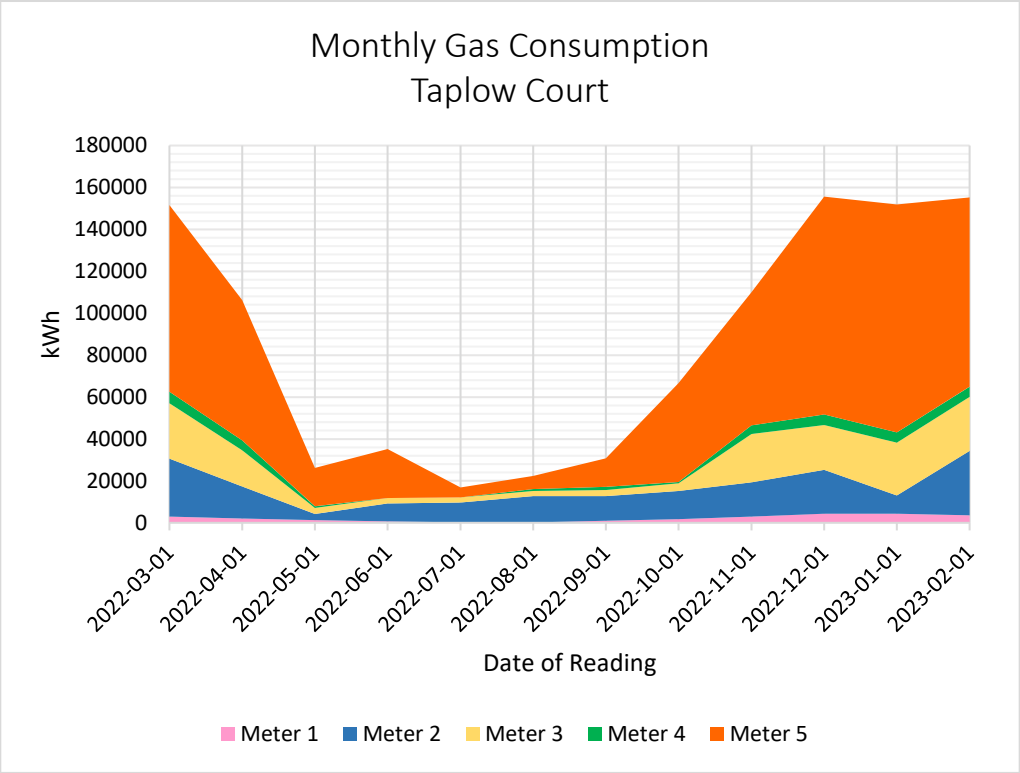

Figure 6: Monthly gas consumption for Taplow Court. Stacked chart, indicating each meter as a part of the total consumption. Data sourced from SGI-UK Finance and Facilities Manager. Graph produced in Excel.

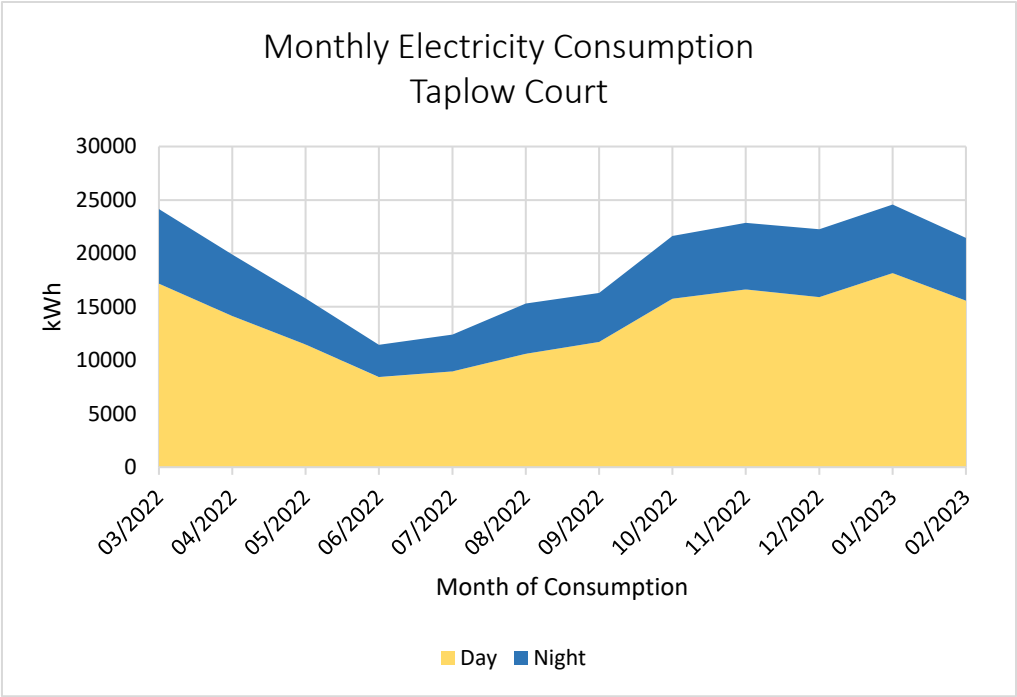

Figure 7: Monthly electricity consumption for Taplow Court. Stacked chart, indicating consumption during day and night as a part of total consumption. Data sourced from SGI-UK Finance and Facilities Manager. Graph produced in Excel.

4.2.2 Vehicle Fleet

To get around the ***gigantic*** estate, maintenance and gardeners regularly use bicycles. To mow the large lawns, the estate has a conventional ride-on diesel lawnmower and about 20 push mowers. The latter are needed to meet external expectations of the public, members and SGI who value the aesthetics of the estate's finer lawns. Two Vauxhall Zafira, efficient cars with conventional petrol engines, are currently used to transport members to and from the station. They have replaced the earlier, larger diesel minibuses, much to the displeasure of one of the volunteer drivers: *"[...] he [the driver] actually said, well, what if I bought one and gave it to you, what would you do? I said, if it's an honest gift [...] then we'll probably sell it."* (II) Two *"ancient"* (VI) Land Rovers are used on the estate to pull trailers and climb steep inclines. A diesel estate car has recently been replaced by a Toyota Prius, a high-mileage hybrid vehicle. As Taplow Court considers hybrid vehicles for the future, the expansion of charging stations in the car park is on the agenda. One interviewee explained that the cables are already in the ground, so the installation itself would be relatively easy: *"My concern is that they don't look ridiculous."* (VI)

4.2.3 Taplow House

Taplow House is a 17th century four-storey building with a Tudorbethan exterior and a Romanesque interior; *"[...] the ground floor is very... over the top. [...] It's used for special occasions. The top floors are really, really working places, and there's a few meeting rooms [...]"* (III) (see Figure 8 and 9). The windows are single glazed and most of them can be opened, allowing unwanted air to enter in winter. One respondent described the house as *"a large storage heater"* (II), so that in summer it is *"absolutely stifling"* (IV) upstairs. In winter, on the other hand, it takes hours for the heating to come on, if it comes on at all. The Assistant Maintenance Manager explained that what worked one day does not always work the next; *"It's just just, old pipes old system."* (IV)

The structure of Taplow House makes refurbishments particularly complicated; *"[…] to try and insulate some parts of the building is not really practical." (VI*), especially since the house is designed for air to flow through so it cannot be compartmentalised easily. One interview explained how *"[…] we had it refurbished 35 years ago and we haven't really done it since then […]"* (III). A smaller material upgrade that is ongoing is the installation of a platform lift for a disabled access. The process is nearing completion after almost two years. One interviewee explained how they *"[…] got to the point of drilling through the wall […], nobody guessed that the wall was gonna be over 20 inches thick."* (II) This meant that the construction counted as a new project, a new building permission had to be applied for.

Figure 8: Taplow House, Taplow Court, UK. Photograph Taken with Mobile Phone by Author 22/03/2023.

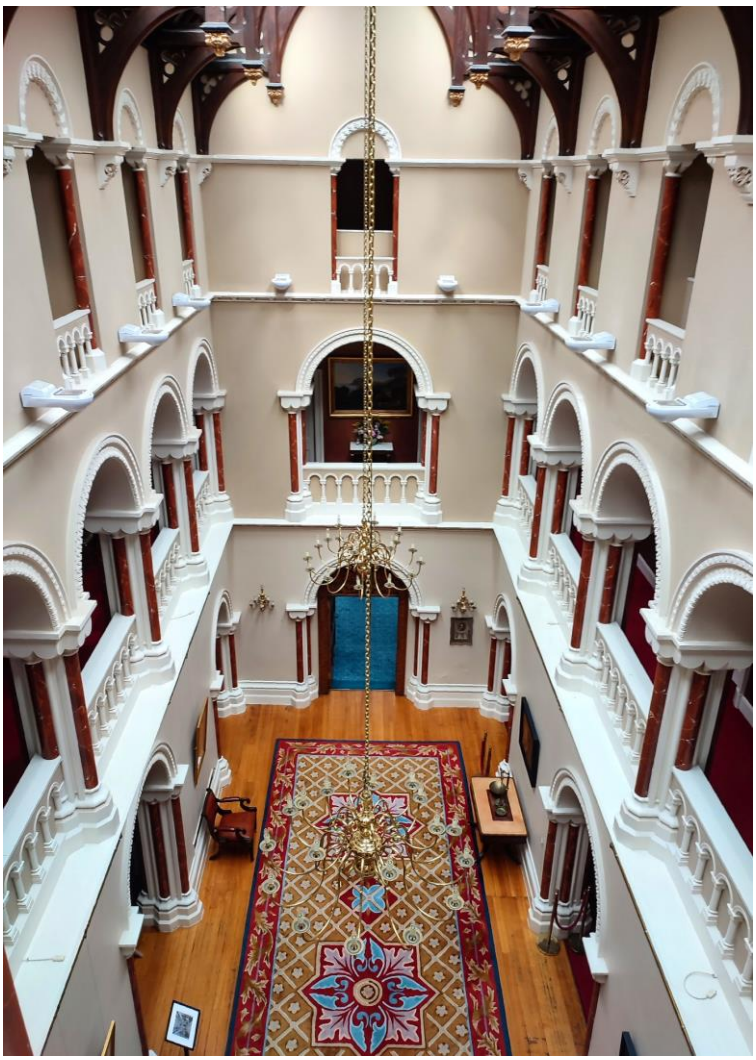

Figure 9: Taplow House, Interior. Photograph Taken with Mobile Phone by Author 15/03/2023.

4.2.4 Refectory

The refectory is a freestanding building which, *"[...] even though to the naked eye it doesn't look like a spectacular building [...] there's a great historical significance"* (IV) (see Figure 10). The building with its high ceiling is the former tennis court of Lord Desborough. Interviewees reported heating problems due to the huge space and the condition of the aluminium roof, which upon observation had numerous holes for heat to escape. There are aspirations to replace the ceiling, install solar panels and possibly split the building into two separate floors, but it is agreed that it *"[...] would be a pretty gargantuan effort to get the planning permission [...]"* (IV). As with Taplow House, external building regulations have a restrictive effect on material culture. The building also houses Taplow Court's kitchen, which contains a mixture of gas and electric appliances. There do not appear to be any guidelines on how decisions about replacing faulty appliances are made in terms of energy efficiency ratings.

Figure 10: Refectory, Taplow Court. Photograph Taken with Mobile Phone by Author 22/03/2023.

4.2.5 Ikeda New Century Hall

Ikeda New Century Hall (INCH) is the centre for events and member activities, with many rooms for smaller meetings (see Figure 11). The larger rooms in the building consist of two larger halls, A1 and A2, which can be combined into one large hall that can fit up to 500 people. One interviewee explained that before the Covid pandemic, *"It was getting to the point where we were maxed out in terms of resources from our team, [...] we had to constantly turn people away [...]"* (IV). This initiated an

expansion of hybrid capacity which has supposedly had several benefits for members, including cost of travel.

Built in 2001, the 1700 square meter building was designed environmentally friendly with skylights to harness daylight. The heating system consists of two rings fed by separate boilers. One is connected to A1+A2, the other is operated via an underfloor system to heat the smaller rooms and the shop. The heating system is reportedly quite slow, but the building has *"fantastic insulation"* (VI). While heating the building is worthwhile for large gatherings at the weekend, short and small gatherings in the middle of the week use a disproportionate amount of energy.

The construction of the INCH was not without problems. The solar panels on the roof were supposedly never connected but are still on the roof and have now *"[...] degraded so appallingly that the only thing they can do is really scrap them."* (VI). Similarity, the grey water recycling system never worked. The Maintenance Manager explained, *"[...] it was a bit of a nightmare because there were several systems in the building which [...] weren't quite workable. [...] wherever we could, [...] we've repaired them and we modified them."* (VI)

Figure 11: Photo of Ikeda New Century Hall. Taplow Court, UK. Taken by author.

4.3 Energy Practices

4.3.1 Getting Back to "Normal"

Taplow Court's premises are used by a variety of groups including staff, local members, SGI affiliated areas and districts, and like-minded organisations. Prior to covid visitors often came from *"[...] other European countries [...] [and] from overseas, particularly from Japan."* (VI)

Due to the Covid pandemic Taplow *Court "[...] completely closed for two years [...] And now, gradually, we're rebuilding"* (I). More staff now work partially from home and selected meetings remain online. *"Most of the work that goes on here during the week is administration based."* (III) and maintenance. At the time of writing, Taplow Court is open two days a week. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, *"[...] members can come in and practise here if they wish to and just be here [...]"* (I). "At weekends, it'd be more people here, you know, sometimes 1000 people milling around" (I), for both SGI-events and open days. During residential courses Taplow Court provides food and accommodation for 50-100 participants. *"We're just getting to the point now where we're going to be having our first [...] residential course, next month [in April]"* (IV).

Taplow Court's remote location puts pressure on providing services for visitors and members beyond just during residential courses. This includes the provision of food at the refectory and the pick-up service Taplow Court runs from the train station for visitors. Combined with office use during the weekdays, these provisions or practices constitute a big part of Taplow Court's indirect energy consumption.

4.3.2 Decisions & Communication

When decisions are made at Taplow Court, of changes in practices or material objects, the process depends on the suggestion's origin and the decision's scale. The Finance Committee can authorize expenditures of under £1000 without consulting the trustees, but larger decisions require a lengthier process. One interviewee from LIPC explained how *"[…] there is a whole kind of an accountable process for anything on how money is spent. And very strict as well, on that"* (IIX). One interviewee explained how, *"[…] if it's coming from grassroots as a suggestion, I think it's quite a palaver"* (IX). Most of which is dependent on knowing the right person to talk to. Simultaneously, many of the interviewees suggested "*[…] to some extent our environmental thrust is driven by members bringing to our attention things that we could be doing better as an organisation […]"* (V) - from the grassroots.

Within the Taplow Court staff, there seems to be an understanding that there is a clear thread of communication of how decisions are made. But when asked about the ways in which Taplow Court communicates such decisions and initiatives to members, this appears to be done on an ask-and-we-will-tell basis. *“[…] I would say that it's very easy for Taplow to decide something, but it's more difficult for that to all be communicated in a way that makes people feel engaged and ownership.”* (IX).

4.3.3 Progress with or without Policy Targets?

During the fieldwork, numerous references were made to the environmental and sustainability policies of Taplow Court and SGI-UK (Harrap, 2021). The two-page policy document serves as an action plan for all four SGI-UK centres and identifies reducing 'the use of energy' as a key priority, along with waste reduction and recycling, and reducing transport and travel. The policy does not include measurable targets, making it impossible to assess what impact it has had since it was revised almost two years ago. One interviewee acknowledged that the policy is *"[...] a little bit weak at the moment and it needs strengthening, there's no doubt about that."* (I). Another admitted; *"[...] I'm not sure to what extent we're successful, you know, because I don't think we measure that, particularly as staff. Although I could be wrong."* (V)

The policy states that it should be*"[...] shared more widely with our membership on the noticeboards of our centres."* (Harrap, 2021). However, during a visit to LIPC and SLNC, no reference to the policy was found on the reception notice boards. One interviewee, active within Eco Dharma, reflected on it; *"You probably know it better than we do. I should ask actually, what is our environmental policy?”* (IX).

When asked about whether Taplow Court has organised events or activities related to learning how to save energy, or similar, an interviewee said no, explaining how most activities related to environmental issues are *“[…] more on a worldwide scale […]”* (II). Indeed, a recurring talking point is the involvement of SGI-UK in COP26. Already in 1992, Taplow Court hosted pre-Rio Summit meetings, *but “[…] it’s raising awareness as opposed to changing legislation, cause we haven't got those, that’s not our venue. So it's education raising awareness, that kind of thing.”* (III).

4.3.4 Energy Management

High Maintenance

Most of the maintenance work at Taplow Court consists of repairs. This is attributed to both the age of the material structures and the small maintenance crew; *"[...] the less men that one has, the more the firefighting principle applies."* (VI) Servicing of appliances, such as boilers, are done by external

companies in a more sequenced manner. Contractors are hired for larger jobs, *"[...] but our men will [...] help to, like, finish off the work so so that it all fits in and looks nice [...]"* (VI). This tension between the high material maintenance demands and the shortage of relevant staff limits the time the team can spend on investigating and executing material improvements.

Blinding Lights

Taplow Court has been gradually replacing halogen and tungsten lights and chandeliers with LEDs in recent years, but staff still occasionally come across unreplaced bulbs, particularly in hard-to-reach areas. To save energy and time spent replacing bulbs, the estate is now proactively replacing lamps instead of waiting for them to burn out. While vacancy sensors are only installed in bathrooms with disabled access, staff members have expressed frustration with lights being left on in empty rooms, although opinions on the matter were mixed in formal interviews. Some staff members believe that in the current financial climate, leaving lights on in empty rooms is not a common occurrence. One interviewee explained that they *"[...] try and keep the lights to a minimum, [...] the main house here downstairs you can light it up like a Christmas tree, the amount the bulbs there are [...]"* (VII).

Hot N Cold

Typically, the maintenance team at the site is responsible for controlling the heating settings. The activity leader informs the team when the members are expected at INCH, and the Maintenance Manager, who resides on the site, ensures that the heating is on and set to the appropriate temperature in the morning or the evening before. After the weekend or on Monday, a staff member turns off the heating, using timers wherever possible. In Taplow House and some older buildings, there is a mutual understanding that the heating in the house is not very efficient and *"[…] It's either on or off, so they don't turn it on until they absolutely have to […]" (V)*. *"When it gets cold and the heating in the house hasn't come on […]" (V)*, portable radiators are available, but their use is restricted. During the summer, when the Taplow House offices become hot, interviewees stated that they always keep the windows open.

Double Checking

During the residential courses, detailed briefing packets are sent out and the central contact person of the organisation planning the event is responsible for reminding participants to turn down the radiators after use, *"[...] make sure taps are turned off, lights are turned off [...]"* (IV). On the day of departure, the team confirms with the central contact person that all rooms have been vacated*; "[...] whoever's here from my department will have done a recce of all of the accommodation to double check [...] [we] simply can't rely on members to remember everything."* (IV).

4.4 Norms

4.4.1 Nichiren Buddhism

As a space of faith, Nichiren Daishonin's interpretation of the Lotus Sutra constitutes the shared norms and worldview within Taplow Court. One interviewee emphasised the teaching of the *"[...] value of life, the dignity of life. That each person must be respected and cared for each individual life, not just people, but animals and plants, and the whole of the universe."* (I) The interviewees describe Nichiren Buddhism as *"[...] a very practical philosophy. It's about transforming people, transforming their lives from the inside out [...]"* (IV), *"[...] but it's not necessarily about behaviours, it's about attitudes, a spiritual transformation."* (III) This inner transformation is then reflected on the outside; *"[...] we believe the environment is a reflection of ourselves."* (VI) and that we are directly connected to our surroundings.

In Soka Gakkai *"[...] there's no rules, but it's self-education in a way."* (III) One interviewee further explained that control is the antithesis of Buddhism and that *"[A]ny Buddhist telling another Buddhist what they should do is not being Buddhist."* (VII). The belief that everyone has Buddhahood[6] within them and the potential to reveal it and become a free thinker is what unites the diverse community at Taplow Court.

Taplow court is first and foremost a space of faith, and respect for tradition is a strong norm; *"[…] I don't think we should get too political in an organisation like this because then you get division, […] but the one thing we all agree on is the fundamental tenets of our Buddhist philosophy. That's why we're all together. That I feel is the focus. That should always be the focus."* (VII)

4.4.2 A Value Creation Society

> *"[…] Soka Gakkai means value creation, so we are a value creation society"* (VI)

This founding principle has guided the much-discussed initiatives to reduce waste, replace plastic products with biodegradable paper and ceramic cups, and nourish the soil and grow a biodiverse garden. Soka Gakkai is also embodied in the desire to support or create value for the local community. This is attributed to the nature of SGI as a *"socially engaged form of Buddhism"* (IX).

Both in the context of creating value for members and for the wider community, the visibility of these values plays a major role*: "[...] for members on the ground, they don't see the difference. So you have*

[6] The ability to awaken, become enlightened.

to be able to really justify what you're doing, why we're doing it. So we have to explain it very carefully." (III). Money is expected to be spent responsibly: *"[...] our money is members' money. So yeah, we can't just be splashing out."* (V); *"[...] especially in these difficult times [...]"* (IIX) Several respondents pointed to the good relations between Taplow Court and the local community. Maintaining this positive perception is especially important to Taplow Court and has partially motivated its environmental efforts.

The importance of value creation is the primary norm that governs taboo behaviour on site. This is particularly reflected in lighting and heating behaviours. It is considered taboo to leave the lights on, and the heating is only turned on when absolutely necessary. As one of the interviewees noted, ripping out light bulbs to replace them with LEDs comes into conflict with this, in its disposal of fully functional lamps. However, the initiative was uncontroversial compared to a recent decision to serve only plant-based lunches.

4.4.3 An Energy Producing Society?

Producing electricity, as opposed to demand-side energy solutions, is a predominant aspiration born out of the expectation of value creation.

When asked what kind of initiatives, be them energy efficiency upgrades or energy sufficiency measures, staff were aware of, the absolute most common response was efforts to produce electricity on site. Two respondents linked this directly to the constraints imposed by the Grade II listing*; "[...] what can we do? [...] I think it's worth investing however much money [to get clean energy] [...]"* (VII). Something which is currently being economically assessed, is the installation of a hydroelectric power station in the section of the Thames with a weir, which is under the auspices of Taplow Court. There is great confidence in the potential of hydropower*; "[...] we could probably get all of our electricity from it [...] [the surplus] can go to the National Grid and then we get recompense for the cost"* (VI).

In addition to the hydropower project, the respondents expressed the desire to install solar panels on the listed buildings. However, they were pessimistic that this would be a smooth process if it is allowed at all. Only the Maintenance Manager acknowledged that solar panels on INCH were defective; *"I was always unhappy about the unused solar panels and never actually had the idea to go upstairs and suggest that we get some new ones and put them on there."* (VI). When speaking to members during the Gohonzon receiving, it was not clear whether members or staff knew that the solar panels were faulty. The potential of wind energy was briefly mentioned but considered less viable due to the impact on the aesthetic value of the property.

4.4.4 Itai Doshin

Much of the activities at Taplow Court are carried out by volunteers*; "[...] you could call it modern day Buddhist practise [...] you're doing it because you want to contribute towards the organisation. And also get the benefits of doing that."* (VII).

Itai doshin, translated as 'many in body, one in mind', represents the power of people with different characters and strengths coming together with one mind and working towards a common goal. In contrast, if *dotai ishin*, 'one in body, different in mind', prevails among people, they cannot achieve anything noteworthy. Respondents expressed that each person brings different skills to the Buddhist movement, and people are encouraged to use these skills to support the movement and their practise locally. For example, one interviewee explained, *"We used to have a chap working here, he was, his father [...] used to cut the grass at Wimbledon and some other things, the Lords cricket ground and some famous stuff like that"* (VI). In this sense, Taplow Court benefits from its diverse members, who not only have different opinions but also different skills, which shape the knowledge and abilities, reflected in the energy culture.

Being 'one in mind comes' with more complications because of the diversity of opinion within the staff and members. One interviewee explained that in dialogues *about "[...] how we run this organisation, I feel it's always about trying to find that sense of unity. Where can we agree and where we can agree, we can take action on. Collectively. And that takes a long time. And if you're an impatient person like me, it can be very frustrating [...]"* (VII). So, there is a constant process of negotiation undergoing of which norms should govern and determine the direction of Taplow Court.

4.5 External Factors

4.5.1 The Jewel in the Crown

Taplow Court is owned by SGI-Europe and was described as *"the jewel in the crown of the SGI worldwide structure"* (III). The interviewee illustrated its importance by comparing the staffing requirements, *"[...] a lot of other centres at SGI centres around the world would only have one person looking after the site [...]"* (III), at Taplow Court there are about 20 staff looking after the grounds and another 10-15 for administration.

This historical and organisational significance of the site influences TC in three principal regards. Firstly, the site attracts a wide audience, both Buddhists and members of the public and school groups. Second, any alterations must preserve the appearance of *"a nice stately home"* (VI), both because of

regulations and public perception. Thirdly, Taplow Court represents SGI not only in the community but also in Europe. Therefore, there is pressure to be able to offer services to visitors and create a certain feeling for members*, "[...] otherwise we [would] just buy a place on local trading estate."* (VI) This increases the demands on security, both in terms of security cameras, intruder alarms and security staff.

4.5.2 Market & Government

Apart from the regulations that come with being classified as Grade II, Taplow Court is also affected by external government policies and infrastructure developments.

Several interviewees expressed their displeasure with the UK government, particularly how it is handling the energy crisis. *"Particularly now with energy prices, the way they've gone, [the ordinary person] is struggling to look at green energy, even consider it now. Whereas a few years ago it was a sort of possibility, even though it was still quite expensive, but now it's almost out of people's reach."* (I). Staff expressed that they feel little to no pressure or support from the government to improve energy efficiency or reduce energy consumption on site. *"I think there was quite a lot of support in the past because of the financial situation the UK has found itself in recently, a lot of that support is kind of hiding at the moment"* (III).

Another impact is the expanded operation of the Elizabeth Line, which now runs throughout the week, whereas previously trains did not stop on Sundays. This means that more people can access Taplow Court more easily, and those who normally drive have the option of taking the train. This is likely to lead to increased fuel use as the shuttle service will be more popular. The shuttle service, being fully run by Taplow Court, is an important energy practice in its energy culture.

4.5.3 Under British Influence

A notable point raised in several interviews and evident in the field observations is the adaptability of the faith tradition. Taplow Court is a British centre and therefore has a markedly different composition of norms than centres in Japan. This was evident in some of the interviews, *"Now in Japan, the Soka Gakkai supports a political party called the Komeito Party. [...] What's wonderfully brilliant about the UK is everybody has a different opinion and so that could just never work [...]"* (IIX). This is reflected in the incredible diversity of Taplow Court members and staff. In one interview, a member of staff said: *"[...] I could [not] say to you, yeah the membership, you know, are very supportive of a progressive kind of environmental policy. Not at all. Some believe you should have 10 cars and then they still chant, and*

some believe you should have no cars and chant." (IIX). This provides an interesting contrast to the norms identified in section 4.4 and highlights the tension between Buddhist dematerialisation and traditional Western norms. This might lead us to believe that the more conservationist Buddhist norms might be realised through Buddhist practises that, through inner work and transformation, challenge the barricading effect of these external influences. Indeed, *"I think the misconception is that we're Buddhists, so therefore we're all vegetarian, we're all you know in in sort of this Zen like state. It's not the case at all."* (VII)

The tension can also be understood as showing how the British context of division and diversity influences norms in such a way that it leads to different interpretations of the teachings, where the goal or norms derived from the "shared" religious identity differ from person to person. Indeed, *"[...] catering for all of that, at the same time, trying to keep everyone happy, is a challenge at times"* (VII). This is further complicated by the fact that not only do members bring their normative baggage with them to Taplow Court, but so do staff. This affects the operation of Taplow Court, especially decision-making practices.

5 Struggling to Improve?

This chapter first answers the second research question by examining how the energy culture in Taplow Court relates to the principles of energy efficiency and sufficiency. It then outlines the underlying behavioural dynamics that drive or inhibit change towards the realisation of these principles. In this way, the third and final research question is answered.

5.1 Sufficiency & Efficiency at Taplow Court

Taplow Court's energy culture reflects a normative attachment to production and efficiency. The organisation's desire to produce its own energy and use alternative energy sources is motivated by high energy prices and is consistent with Buddhist norms of value creation. However, there is reason to believe that the desire for energy alternatives is a statement to members and the public rather than a mere reflection of pro-environmental norms, especially as it is not included in the environmental and sustainability policy and the solar panels on the new building have been deteriorating for over 20 years without any plans being initiated to replace them. Despite the material lock-in that Taplow Court is in (expanded on in section 5.2.3), improving energy efficiency is still at the centre of attention when it comes to energy consumption. Despite pessimism about feasibility given building regulations and costs. Even within energy efficiency paradigms, there is an evident value-action gap, primarily due to tensions between the desire to make "*things as efficient as possible*" (VII), lack of knowledge and time, and the purpose to advance religion (SGI-UK, 2022).

The recomposition of consumption (Gough, 2017a) is partly reflected in the energy culture, which is primarily driven by the norms of value creation and the interrelatedness of all things (sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2). This manifests itself in a hybrid work culture, plans to source food locally and plans to build a fleet of hybrid vehicles. However, norms of value creation also constrain the recomposition of consumption through aversion to waste.

Waste aversion norms also have a similarly restrictive effect in terms of reducing absolute energy consumption. As an international centre, it is also inevitable that visitors will fly in from abroad. Taplow Court's abundance of space, particularly in the main house, is a sign of status and aspirational identity. The challenge for Taplow Court, from a post-growth perspective, is to expand the understanding of the sufficient size of spaces of faith, as the abundance of space in the main house is a high impact way of living or operating. Evidently, the non-material values do not fully extend to normative post-growth.

5.2 Change-Drivers and Change-Inhibitors

A multitude of tensions between the characteristics of Taplow Court's energy culture identified in Chapter 4 both drive and inhibit change towards the principles of efficiency and sufficiency. Figure 12 illustrates these tensions, which are discussed in more detail below.

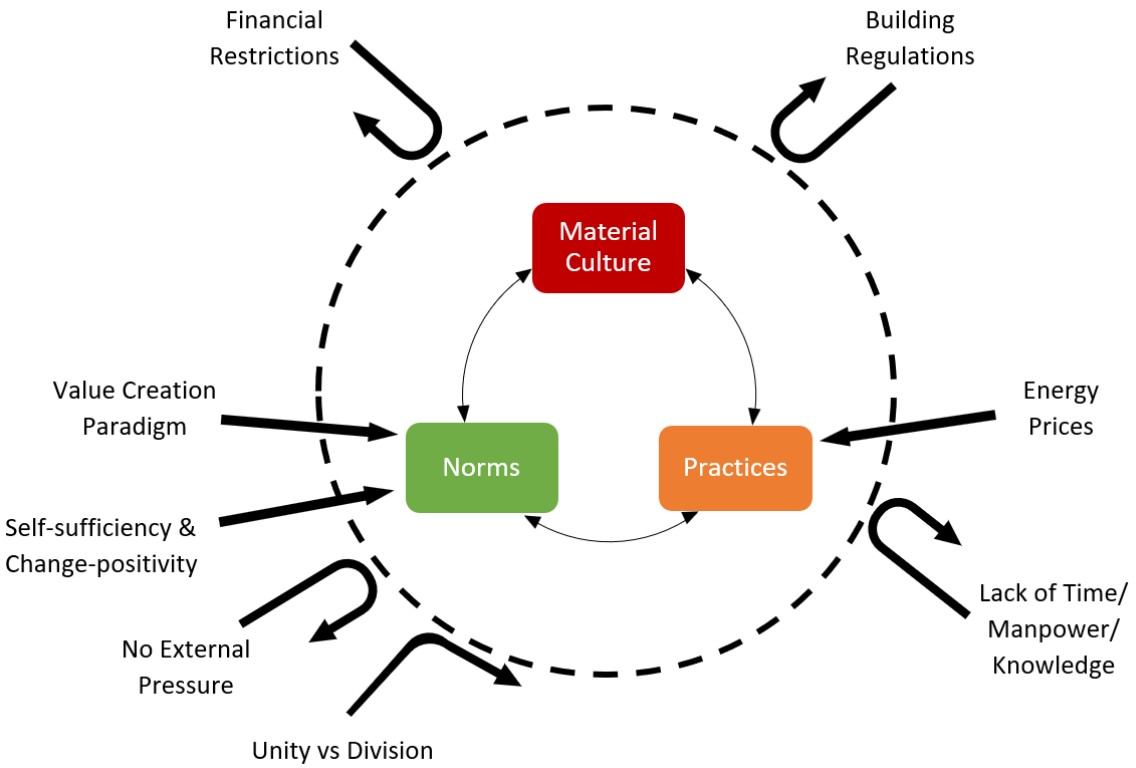

Figure 12: Change-enablers and change-inhibitors for achieving principles of energy efficiency and sufficiency within Taplow Court's energy culture. Produced in Word.

5.2.1 The Driving Norms

Taplow Court, through its longstanding religious philosophy, embodies a strong affiliation with the laws of cause and effect, particularly in relation to the environment and climate. The tradition represents a very engaged Buddhism compared to 'other-worldly' traditions that focus on transcending the world (Javanaud, 2020; Locke, 2022; Loy, 2019). Soka Gakkai focuses very much on the application of Buddhism in everyday practise for ordinary people, and how to live in the current world. One would therefore expect such practise to be mobilised to minimise Taplow Court's contribution to global warming.

It is the pro-environmental norms of some of the members and staff that drive the change Taplow Court; *"[...] people are passionate about it and they want to know how they can make a difference, and*

they want to know that we're making an effort on their behalf to make this centre and other centres as energy efficient as we can be." (IV) This assumption that a positive difference is necessarily achieved through efficiency improvements is a district norm that guides Taplow Court. As elaborated in section 4.4.3, the focus is on on-site electricity generation, despite the majority of energy consumed at Taplow Court coming from gas-fired systems.

The centre is run based on staff's collective impression of the energy culture, including their interpretation of members' norms and their understanding of energy-consuming practises and awareness of material culture. The consequences of this are discussed in more detail in section 5.2.3. Nonetheless, staff clearly expressed their openness to change, advice and any recommendations that this work produces.

5.2.2 Unity in Diversity?

Taplow Court is operating in an interesting nexus where British culture and Japanese traditions coincide, as illustrated in Chapter 4. The case demonstrates that the Buddhist primacy of interconnectedness and unity (Caldwell et al., 2022) challenges the British culture of division (Gough, 2017b). There is, therefore, a constant process of negotiation about which norms should govern and determine the direction of Taplow Court, its material culture and its practises. This negotiation is fraught with difficulty due to the relationships between actors within the energy culture. The staff are all members and many of them are also volunteers. Many members are volunteers and spend a significant amount of time on site but are not employed. Distinguishing which norms are whose is therefore a complicated process.

When positioning members' norms as an external influence, as in this study, the permeability of the energy culture boundary (Stephenson et al., 2015) becomes increasingly important. It is at this boundary where the negotiation takes place. This tension shows not only that Buddhist centres are a space of collective deconstruction and reconstruction of relationships but also of norms. This is consistent with the contextuality of behavioural dynamics (Cialdini et al., 2007; Goldstein et al., 2008; Nolan et al., 2008), but also with the disabling effect that such reconstructive processes have in translating norms into action. As discussed in the previous section, there is a change-positive culture at Taplow Court, but when it comes to setting direction and leading change, the negotiation for unity is time-consuming and often leads to defaulting to the more comfortable norms of efficiency. We can see that these efficiency-driven norms hinder the process of change through the material lock-in, caused by building regulations and little to no guidance or incentives from the government (Gough, 2017b) on how to navigate these.

Similarity, with unity comes the difficulty of pleasing all. SGI's focus on peace is an interesting point, as Taplow Court strives for consensus in all its endeavours, which is complicated by the demographic and cultural baggage that staff, volunteers, and members bring to site. It would also be a mistake to assume that all Buddhists have the same understanding of their practise. Each person has their own understanding and is at different stages of their enlightenment. This gives a very different leans to the expression unity in diversity.

5.2.3 Resource Constraints

The biggest tension preventing Taplow Court from moving to a more sustainable energy culture is limited resources; *"[w]hat can be done easily has been done."* (IX) The interviewee further explained, *"It's often a matter of money. It's often a matter of time, and it's often a matter of just sort of people power to somebody to be really on top of it and for it to be their brief, you know."* (IX). These constraints were often attributed to the structure of the organisation and the material culture: *"[...] it's expensive to look after so many buildings like this. So hopefully not too much goes wrong at the same time."* (VI). This again, echoes the material lock-ins inhibiting change in energy culture.

Within Taplow Court's energy culture there is a general lack of awareness of what is happening on the site in terms of energy use and production. This can be attributed to barriers caused by current communication and coordination strategies among both members and staff. The latter is partly due to the lack of monitoring practises, whether in terms of setting measurable targets or in terms of knowing which metre readings belong to which building.

"In a in an ideal world, I would have a swarm of more staff. [...] I think I could speak for every single person who works here [...] that we all have more on our plate than we have time for." (IV). To make matters worse, there is a lack of experience and expertise to decide what is worth investing in and what consumes energy in daily practise. This is possibly one of the main reasons why environmental and energy concerns remaining as aspirations rather than an expectation, i.e., a desired rather than a realised norm. The analysis highlights the limitations of looking at norms as the sole driver of change in an energy culture, and the usefulness of the ECF in understanding the dynamics of energy consumption.

6 Discussion Beyond the Case

6.1 Norms and Behaviour in Sustainability Research

The production and efficiency paradigm (Caldwell et al., 2022; Shove, 2018) is strong at Taplow Court. This challenges studies that assume Buddhist cultures as pro-environmental in their own regard, irrespective of the contexts in which they practised. Instead, this thesis supports the view of Buddhism as a living religion (Darlington, 2018), whereby religious culture and regional culture co-produces a hybrid culture in which there is a web of social norms and patterns of behaviour within a space of faith. This study demonstrates the influence that shared identities have in shaping behaviour in spaces of faith, particularly in directing the development of material culture and energy practises in that space. Such shared norms may also be found in other social groups and their ascribed spaces. Especially in environments where the social group is a minority and shared identity is particularly important (Leal Filho & Consorte McCrea, 2019; Stedman, 2002).

This case is an example of a bottom-up desire and demand for sufficient socio-economic pathways, within a more liberal state and market economy, as there is no apparent state pressure for Taplow Court to reduce its energy use. Expanding on this, further studies could examine the relationship between the welfare regime and spaces of faith, as reflected in their different climate strategies. This would shed light on how states - and what state characteristics can harness the transformative potential of sufficiency norms within spaces of faith. Learning how to enhance such norms could have the potential to challenge the current position of post-growth as a political non-starter (Gough, 2017b).

Furthermore, understanding the idiosyncrasies (Caldwell et al., 2022) that inhibit the realisation of norms or influence the weights between different norms will provide a more robust insight into reaching tipping points towards more sustainable systems. If sustainability science *is "to test how best to bring sustainability to the world's religious communities"* (Leal Filho & Consorte McCrea, 2019), it needs to broaden its perception of behavioural dynamics while acknowledging the contextuality of these dynamics.

Gough (2017b) asserts that reflexivity is one of the essential characteristics for an economy to be capable of recompose consumption. reflexivity in this account means, in practice, that a system's understanding of itself is a principal factor in its belief that it is capable of evolving into a more desired set of behavioural dynamics. This study shows that this is also true of Taplow Court. So, the study of practises, religion, or material cultures in themselves says little about the meaning behind them. It is

the study of the interactions between the meanings of energy cultures that sheds light on the driving and inhibiting tensions.

These debates would benefit from examining multiple centres of the same tradition in different countries. This would shed light on how external influences affect a tradition's energy culture by ensuring continuity in norms derived from the faith in the analysis. Additionally, a comparison between the different schools, Theravada, Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism, as well as newly founded Western Buddhist sangha, within the same geographical area or region, keeping the external factors and the regional norms relatively constant, will give an insight into the differences and similarities that certain faiths have on energy cultures within communities.

6.2 Reflections on the Approach

This thesis demonstrates that the use of ethnographic approaches in the study of behaviour, especially in religious contexts, requires great care to avoid pressuring participants to be useful and knowledgeable. It shows the importance of building relationships and acquiring knowledge before conducting fieldwork if ethical considerations are to be realistic, especially when the researcher is unfamiliar with the religious context. In cases where relationships have not been previously established, prolonged fieldwork may be required to get respondents to open up and share their experiences. The use of a central contact person at the space of faith, utilising inter-organisational relationships, can be helpful in this process.

The ECF posits an energy culture as a soft system with permeable boundaries. Practically, this means that the energy culture of space of faith has the potential to influence its external environment. This internal influence has not been investigated in this study. Such an investigation would require an extension of the methodological framework beyond spatial ethnography. The diffusion or mobility of norms from a space of faith to other spaces, such as homes or other workplaces, would be an interesting starting point for further research. One which could be encouraging for spaces of faith such as Taplow Court, who see their efforts as *"a drop in the ocean"* (IV).

A limiting factor in studies such as this is the risk of neglecting more systemic factors that shape energy behaviour, especially as these are not always evident from observations and are based on recollection and recognition in interviews. Data triangulation is necessary in this type of research as it becomes clear that there are tensions between perceived reality (what is said) and lived reality (what is done) in the space of faith. The approach used in this study could therefore be further strengthened by incorporating extensive external analysis, including document analysis, and surveying members. What

is highlighted in this thesis is the failure to explicitly consider the role of the state and its role in shaping the external influences that inhibit (or drive) energy cultures. If the ECF is to help bring about a broader transition to post-growth energy use within a timeframe that matches the urgency of energy consumption reductions, the inclusion of a theory of the state and its role may be necessary. At the very least, such extensions of the framework should be considered by researchers using it. In this sense the ECF has, within its ambiguity and soft approach, the ability to be adapted.

Conducting research at Taplow Court as it is gradually recovering from the pandemic, sheds light on cultural tensions that might not otherwise have become apparent. This is also true of the current cost-of-living and energy, which inflated the role of energy prices. While the approach of this study has highlighted an ambition towards energy efficiency at Taplow Court, it cannot conclusively say how this can be extended to bring the energy culture into the final of Gough's (2017b) three stages. However, the analysis presented in this thesis can help develop an internal strategy to enhance beneficial norms. Policymakers can also benefit from better insight into how to enable public support for sufficiency and encourage it to grow at the grassroots level (Callmer, 2019; Creutzig et al., 2016; Nyfors et al., 2020; Shove, 2018; Sorrell, 2015).

A primary takeaway from this study is the evidence that ethnographic work with faith-based groups can be mutually empowering, and that faith spaces are open to learning from and engaging with external actors. This thesis thus encourages other researchers to do so.

7 Conclusion

With the aim of contributing to a better understanding of the behavioural dynamics related to (un)sustainable energy consumption in Buddhist spaces of faith in Europe, this thesis has inductively and intimately examined the energy-related practices of the UK headquarters of the Buddhist organisation Soka Gakkai International. Using the Energy Cultures Framework and Gough's three stages of decarbonisation, this work used an ethnographic approach consisting of interviews and observations.

The results show that the energy culture in Taplow Court is characterised by a variety of features. These are illustrated in Figure 13. The energy culture was found to emphasise production and efficiency. While the norms explore the recomposition of consumption, they do not fully extend fully into post-growth sufficiency.

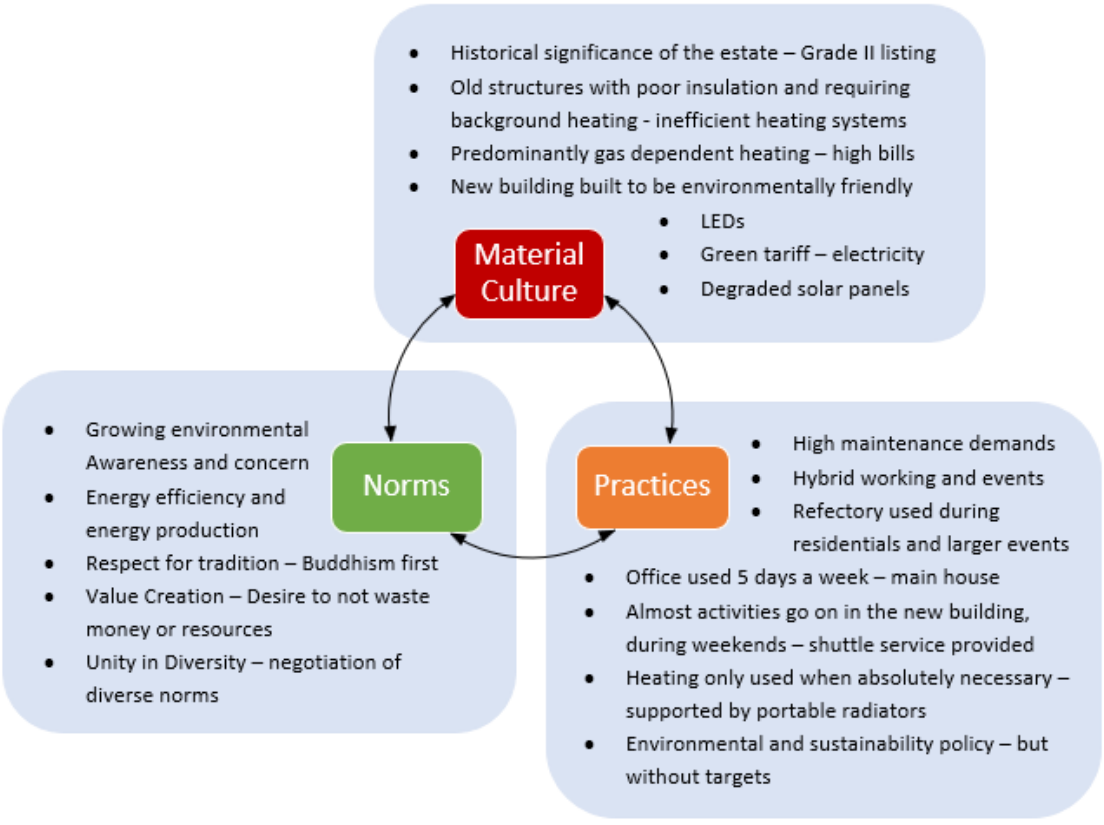

Figure 13: Summary of the characteristics of the energy culture at Taplow Court. Produced in Word.

The values and beliefs rooted in Buddhist faith lead to an obvious drive to reduce or at least decarbonise energy consumption in Taplow Court. However, the study also shows that maintaining these values in the face of material lock-in and resource constraints is challenging. One of the major tensions inhibiting this change process is the hybrid culture created by the clash between the British culture of division and the Japanese tradition of unity.

The study has demonstrated the influence that shared identities have on behaviour in spaces of faith, particularly in governing and directing the development of material culture and energy practices in that space. Furthermore, the study shows the openness of spaces of faith to learn from and engage with external actors. This thesis therefore encourages other researchers to do so.

Participatory processes can learn from the intricate and complex dynamics that underlie energy consumption in spaces of faith. Understanding how people think within a system helps to understand the decisions they make collectively and makes it easier to encourage and support them as they transition through Gough's stages. An interesting starting point for further research would be the diffusion or mobility of norms from spaces of faith to home, school, leisure, and other environments.

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9 Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

About the project

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me.

My project looks at how the interactions between norms, practices and material culture at your centre produce a certain energy behaviour. In doing so, I want to know more about the barriers that exist to reducing energy consumption, and develop an understanding of the potentials and possibilities for sites of action to achieve more sustainable energy culture.

The purpose of this interview is for me to ask you a few questions of how the operations are run at your centre, your engagement with energy-related initiatives, and the challenges you face in doing so. I will first ask you about your role at the centre and about your tradition and centre in general. Then we will move into the more energy-related aspects. The interview will take around **30-40 min**.

Fill in consent form

All information is confidential and will not be revealed or associated with your name unless you agree to it. If you do not want to answer a question please tell me, the interview is entirely voluntary, and you can discontinue it at any moment. If you want me to explain a question, please do let me know.

The interview will be recorded and stored on a password-protected external hard-drive. The recording will only be used by the interviewer to write transcriptions, and it will be destroyed on the 1st of June 2023.

Background Questions

1) Interviewee information:
    a) What is your role within the centre, and within the organization as a whole?
    b) How long have you been with the centre?

2) Tell me about:
    a) The tradition that you practice.
        i) How do you believe it affects the way SGI-UK approaches environmental issues, and sees its role in society?
    b) The activities at centre where you practice.
        i) How does a normal week look like at the centre?
        ii) Which activities do you think are the most energy intensive? (tensions)
        iii) Online vs offline activities?
    c) Tell me about the centre itself.
        i) How is it owned/constructed and how does that impact improvements you can make?
        ii) Recent renovations/retrofitting

iii) How has the recent energy crisis and energy price spikes impacted the centre/organization?

<u>Energy-specific Questions</u>

3) Do you have an environmental policy in place (that is less than 5 years old)?
    a) What does it include? How was it decided and how is it communicated?
    b) How would you describe the four centres involvement with sustainability? Social/env?

4) Which initiatives or impact-areas are you/have you/will you target(ing)?
    a) Consider (ask about) areas of operations:
        i) Electricity use
        ii) Other fuel use
        iii) Heating, cooling and, ventilation.
        iv) Transport and travel
        v) Lighting
        vi) Offices, activities or others.
        vii) Water use and heating
        viii) Insulation and renovations
        ix) Etc.
    b) Consider (ask about) the three elements of sustainable energy cultures
        i) Improving eco-efficiency
        ii) Recomposing consumption
        iii) Reducing consumption

5) How are decisions made, both in terms of the centre's-priorities but also environmental action?
    a) Identification of the need, and where do the ideas come from?
    b) How are energy-saving initiatives funded?

6) What impression do you get from your members and visitors – do they tend to get involved in energy-related discussions and initiatives?
    a) How do you communicate initiatives/changes/results?
        i) To members
        ii) Between centres

7) What do you believe to be the biggest obstacles for decreasing the energy use at your centre? – what limits you – what changes would you like to see and what is stopping you from getting there?
    a) Think about the energy-demanding appliances you have.
    b) Think about the activities you conduct that require energy use.
    c) Think about the forces that are out of control.