Mangoes, Meat and Motors:
Confronting the Climate on Manchester's Curry Mile

A report on a community event
held as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Sciences
at the Whitworth Art Gallery

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Introduction

Mangoes, Meat and Motors was held at the Whitworth Art Gallery in November 2022. It was part of the annual Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Festival of Social Science, which showcases how research can improve public understanding of the causes of and potential solutions to complex social issues. The purpose of the event was to engage local people in friendly and generative discussion of the challenges and opportunities for making the Curry Mile a place that serves people and the environment better. In advance of the event, there was an open call for photographs that capture positive and negative impressions of this iconic Manchester street. At the event, attendees took part in a 'World Cafe' guided by the question: ***how does life, work and play on the Curry Mile help and hurt the environment?*** The answers generated by the World Café discussions, along with insights and photographs shared by participants, are the focus of this report.

Inspiration for the event came from the *Towards Inclusive Environmental Sustainabilities* (TIES) project, which is working to challenge the dominant Western/Global North and middle-class conceptions of sustainability that inform much socio-environmental policies and research. TIES aims to explore how the knowledge and practices that people bring with them when they move from climate-challenged countries of the Global South can contribute to socially just and sustainable environments in the UK. It draws on research in the fields of sustainable consumption and environmental justice. The concept of environmental justice (EJ) emerged out of the activist struggles of racially and ethnically minoritised people and people of colour (PoC) to document and resist the links between racism, poverty and environmental degradation. The EJ movement is well known internationally for expanding the concept of 'the environment' to include more than natural green and blue spaces; from an EJ perspective, environments are where the majority of people on the planet 'live, work and play' (Bullard 1994; 2001).

The event was attended by around 50 people, including local residents, business owners, university students and Manchester City Councillors and officers. The majority of participants (56%) were of South Asian heritage, and a quarter were white British. The make-up of the group allowed us to centre the perspectives of PoC discussion of sustainability, which is a rare occurrence in a field overwhelming dominated by white people (RACE Report 2022).[1]

[1] The Racial Action on the Climate Emergency (RACE 2022) Report finds that just 7% of people working in the environmental sector identify as people of colour or belonging to racially/ethnically minorities groups.

Photo: Sherilyn MacGregor

'The Curry Mile feels like a piece of Pakistan broken off and placed in Manchester. Yes, it has its problems – from housing, increased crime rates and violence – but slowly over the years, it's become a formative part of the city. Without Manchester, there is no Curry Mile. Without the Curry Mile, there is no us.' (Saleem 2022)

The Curry Mile

The Curry Mile is a half-mile stretch of road running North-South from the top of Wilmslow Road to Platt Lane. Currently the Wilmslow Road/Oxford Road corridor is considered the busiest in Manchester, in part due to its passage through Fallowfield, where a large segment of the student population in Manchester reside (Robertson et al. 2017).

Since the 1950s, the Rusholme area of South Manchester has been home to a large population of immigrants from South Asian countries, particularly from the Punjab region of India and Pakistan. They established cafes and shops in the area, which became important places for diasporic communities to socialise. Sanam, the oldest restaurant (opening in 1963), is still trading in 2023.

It was in the 1980s that the large number of South Asian restaurants gave rise to the nickname 'The Curry Mile' (Khan 2022). In 2008 Manchester City Council put up banners to officially embrace the name. Today, the Curry Mile is a famous destination in the city, with venues catering to tastes from all over the word, many from South Asia and increasing numbers from North Africa and the Middle East.

Why ‘confront the climate’ on the Curry Mile?

Understanding the social and environmental impacts of consumption in the city of Manchester is vital to the creation of impactful sustainability policies in the Greater Manchester region. Much work has been done by local authorities to calculate carbon emissions, set reduction targets and promote technical and infrastructural solutions. Relatively less attention has been paid to the social and cultural dimensions of this policy agenda. This imbalance needs to change because acknowledging the views of a diverse range of residents, workers and business owners is necessary if environmental policies are to resonate with the majority of the population.

With this in mind, the *Mangoes, Meat and Motors* event invited participants to think about the Curry Mile in relation to ‘the climate’ in two senses of the word. One is the environmental sense: thinking about how human activities might contribute to the causes of the climate emergency. The event was timed to coincide with the COP27 climate conference taking place in Egypt. Sustainability and sustainable consumption are two key ideals that have long shaped policy making and everyday practice with the goal of mitigating the negative impacts of human activities on the planet.

The other sense of the word ‘climate’ is the social climate or general atmosphere of a place. Here the question is how the Curry Mile, as a place of consumption, culture and cuisine, is perceived and experienced by the people who own businesses, work there, and visit it. It is no secret that perceptions of the Curry Mile can be polarising and contradictory. For many people, it is a place to meet friends and family for social events or a place to buy food that reminds them of home. For others, however, it is seen as a degraded environment with too many cars and too much rubbish, a hub for criminal activity and a venue for street harassment (Vinter 2023). It is an interesting context in which to consider the tensions between environmental sustainability, cultural diversity and social justice.

The following contextual dimensions and challenges are worth noting here because they provided the backdrop for the ideas and photographs generated as part of the event.

Environmental challenges

While it serves local needs and creates a vibrant and diverse community in the heart of Manchester, as a place of consumption, the Curry Mile also faces a number of environmental challenges.

Waste production: in high consumption areas waste is inevitable, and on the Curry Mile waste is created by leftover food and disposable packaging, which is often poorly recycled and littered across Rusholme and Moss Side.

Food miles: the international nature of the shops and restaurants on the Curry Mile means that a lot of food is imported from places far away from Manchester. Although this feature serves needs, and adds to the culinary experience, it can also mean high levels of carbon emissions from the transportation of non-local produce.

Meat consumption: is ubiquitous on the Curry Mile where businesses offer a wide range of halal meat options. The environmental cost of meat production and consumption, in terms of water use and greenhouse gas emissions, are well documented (Clark et al. 2019).

Transportation: it is often claimed that one of the busiest bus routes in Europe runs through the Curry Mile, which might be good from a public transport perspective, but there is also a high volume of cars and delivery vehicles using the area on a daily basis. This leads to problems with congestion, parking and poor air quality. In 2016 the Council built Dutch-style cycle lanes along Wilmslow Road as part of a city-wide plan to promote greener forms of travel.

Socio-economic challenges

A well-known Manchester landmark, the Curry Mile attracts tourists and consumers from far and wide to enjoy its buzz and vibrancy. At the same time, many would agree that a number of socio-economic challenges, reflections of wider social conditions in the UK, contribute to a contentious atmosphere (Saleem 2022).

Xenophobia and Islamophobia: The Curry Mile is home to a variety of restaurants, sweet shops, cafés, takeaways, jewellers and other businesses run and staffed by people whose roots are predominantly in Muslim-majority countries. Given the 'hostile environment' of the Conservative Government and anti-immigrant attitudes shared by a significant proportion of the UK public (especially since Brexit) (Abbas 2020), people from these communities can experience an unwelcoming atmosphere in Manchester. It is also possible to detect an Islamophobic undercurrent when people talk of the Curry Mile. For example, in 2019 a Conservative Party candidate was removed after he named the Curry Mile 'the P*** mile' on social media (Williams 2019). The negative assumptions about Halal meat, namely that it is cruel and exempt from government food standards,[2] also contribute to a hostile climate.

An underserved urban area: The Curry Mile is located in an area of south Manchester that has some of the highest proportion of people living in poverty and other forms of deprivation - between 30 and 40% according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS 2022). There is also an underlying sense among business owners that it is an area that is degraded socially and economically in part due to a rise in crime, a lack of policing, and insufficient support from Manchester City Council (Tweed 2023).

Cost of living crisis: The cost of living crisis has hit these areas hard and has exacerbated the struggles of Curry Mile residents and traders. With increases in rent, energy and electricity, businesses are seeing decreases in customers and profits (Greater Manchester Combined Authority 2022; Tweed2023). Many business owners in the UK have been struggling financially since the Covid-19 pandemic and those on the Curry Mile are no

[2] Halal meat has to be prepared according to Islamic standards. It is considered controversial because it is exempt for religious reasons from the requirements for the animal to be stunned before slaughter (The Week 2019). Nevertheless, a study by the Food Standards Agency looking at shechita and halal meat slaughter methods found 95% of poultry and 89% of red meat was stunned before slaughter (Defra 2022).

exception (Aston University 2020; Heales & Parker 2021; Saleem 2022). Other factors, such as a shortage of skilled staff due to immigration policies, combined with a lack of prestige due to the family business nature of many restaurants and second and third generation immigrants going into professional fields, may be factors that can compound the economic issues faced by Curry Mile businesses (Weerasena 2021).

Photo: Sherilyn MacGregor

What is a World Café?

A World Café is a method of facilitating group discussion. Through organised conversations using predetermined questions around tables, groups can engage in knowledge sharing and dialogue. The setting is modelled on a café, using small tables to create an informal atmosphere. Questions and props are used to guide the discussion and create a dialogue, and there are usually several rounds of 20 minute timeslots so participants can move around and discuss different topics with each other. Ideas from participants are gathered verbally, or through post-it notes to engage participants who may have different levels of comfort with expressing their views in social settings. Participants are encouraged to be open-minded and empathetic, to explore and listen to all sides of the issues under discussion. The ideas are then 'harvested' in a feedback round, and these ideas are summarised as the outcome of the World Café process (*The World Cafe* 2023).

A World Café in the Whitworth Café

The main activity of the *Mangoes, Meat and Motors* event was a World Café discussion. This method was chosen to enable interaction and sharing of a broad range of opinions and ideas about how activities in the Curry Mile either help or harm the environment. The World Café was facilitated by climate activist/educator and member of the TIES research team Zarina Ahmad. She introduced the purpose of the event and explained how it was related to the TIES research on enabling greater inclusion and diversity in the field of sustainable consumption. She reminded everyone that the overarching question was "*how does life, work and play on the Curry Mile help and/or hurt the environment?*" Also as part of the introduction, two guest speakers -- Zahid Hussein, Manchester City Councillor for Levenshulme (and author of the novel *The Curry Mile*) and Dr Safina Islam (Director of the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre) -- gave short commentaries to frame the event and inspire discussion.

Participants sat at small tables in the café area of the Whitworth Art Gallery. Each table had a specific question displayed on large sheet of paper along with a selection of pens and post-it notes. They had 20 minutes to discuss the question before moving on to a different table with a different question. This means all participants had the opportunity to discuss four different questions relating to sustainability on the Curry Mile with a different mix of people. Each table had a rapporteur, whose role was to listen to record key points raises in each conversation on a laptop.

The four topics used to guide the conversation were:

- The sustainability of **imported produce**;
- The sustainability of take-away food **packaging**;
- The sustainability of local **supermarkets**; and
- The sustainability of **transport** (specifically cycling) on the Curry Mile.

After the three 20 minute discussion rounds, there was a 'harvest round', where feedback from the tables and additional comments by participants were summarised by the rapporteurs. It is important to note that, although we used questions to generate discussion on the tables, we do not believe there are right or wrong answers and made sure the participants were aware of this. The questions were designed to prompt debate that opens up space to challenge the common assumption that sustainability and making 'environmentally-friendly' consumer choices are easy and obvious to anyone who has received the right scientific information. In most cases, as we will see below, there is significant room for ambivalence that stems from the complexity of environmental issues when social, cultural, religious, political, and economic factors are taken into account.

What participants said…

…about imported produce:

The question used to guide the discussion was: *'which fruit is (perceived to be) more or less environmentally friendly and why?'* On the table was a photo of a banana and a Pakistani mango for people to compare.

This question is interesting because the UK imports 46% of its food (as of 2020), and there are debates about the environmental impact of our food system (Defra 2021). It is a general assumption that locally sourced produce is more sustainable than imported because it has fewer food miles. And yet it is estimated that, as of 2021, only 16% of fresh fruits are grown in the UK, so most of what is consumed comes from faraway places with better growing conditions (Defra 2021). Bananas are imported from Latin America, West Africa, the Caribbean and the Middle-east (BBC 2018; Banana Link 2023). Mangoes also come from most of these regions, as well as from South Asia; several mango varieties that are indigenous to Pakistan and India are imported from May-September. The environmental impacts of these fruits stem from a range of factors including transportation, processing, storage and packaging (Frankowska et al. 2019). But there are other things to consider when answering our question, including cultural, economic and social justice factors.

For some participants, the fact that Pakistani mangoes are only available to buy in Curry Mile shops when they are in season, suggests that they are more environmentally friendly than bananas, which are available year-round. The fact that mangoes are seen as special and more expensive, in addition to having a longer shelf life, means they are potentially less wasteful than bananas. Bananas are also often sold in plastic bags and have a much shorter shelf life than mangoes, meaning there is often more waste. On the other hand, some participants argued that bananas are less wasteful because ripened bananas can be used in a variety of dishes and the whole of the fruit, including the skin, is edible. They are also seen to be more in demand and therefore cheaper than mangoes.

For both fruits there was uncertainty about the working conditions of farmers and pickers. Large supermarkets were perceived to be underpaying their labourers; there were also comments in the same vein about mango farmers in Pakistan which were assumed to be underpaid. These factors affected participants' views on the 'sustainability' of these fruits. It is possible to buy fair-trade bananas, so the worker conditions are typically regulated, whereas there was uncertainty about this point regarding mangoes. The issue of mono-crops and crop dependency was touched upon. An exchange of ideas about supermarkets included concern about the power of monopolies to shape the market and drive down their prices. Some felt the large food retailers who label their produce as 'responsibly grown' may actually be misleading consumers on the ethical origin and production of their produce for economic benefit. This led to a discussion of 'greenwashing' where the idea of bananas becoming more sustainable was mentioned, with shops selling them loose instead of in plastic packaging.

Some participants thought that mangoes could be sourced in an environmentally friendly manner, such as by being transported from a mango farm in Pakistan to the UK by relatives in the farming industry. This way it is possible to know about the provenance and production of mangoes. The impact of a ban by the EU on mangoes was seen to impact south Asian families. On the whole, mangoes were assumed to be produced by family farms, whereas banana farming was perceived to be in the hands of large corporations like Del Monte. Several people expressed commitment to buying mangoes from local, independent stores, which others agreed seems preferable to buying bananas from major supermarkets.

In all the groups, mangoes were associated with positive and nostalgic themes, with some people considering them to be the 'king of fruit' in the South Asian community and remarking on the mango-based food their relatives used to enjoy. They were also seen as a luxury item, whereas bananas were associated with more commonplace contexts such as school lunches. Participants went on to name a range of produce such as blueberries, peaches and nectarines, which are grown in the UK yet are available all year round due to imports. Some conversations focussed on the economic and ecological costs of global agriculture; others considered how capitalism has promoted health benefits and organic growing methods of fruit as marketing tactics to justify higher prices.

Photo: Yahya

… about takeaway food packaging:

The large number of businesses selling takeaway food on the Curry Mile inevitably leads to significant waste generation. It is common knowledge that poor 'binfrastructure', litter and fly-tipping are longstanding problems in the area, which lead to a number of health hazards and give surrounding neighbourhoods a negative reputation (Halle-Richards 2018; MacGregor & Pardoe 2018). Must it be this way? In other cultures, it is common to use less environmentally impactful containers for takeaway food, such as tiffin boxes as are widely used in the Indian subcontinent. And even in the UK, a restaurant owner in Bradford estimated he reduced his plastic container use by 20,000 every year through his use of tiffin boxes (Meek 2020). To prompt thinking about waste from takeaway meals, we asked participants to discuss '*which type of takeaway container is more environmentally-friendly: a single-use polystyrene box, a lidded plastic container or a stainless steel tiffin box?'*

Photo: Sherilyn MacGregor

Litter generated by the polystyrene boxes and other takeaway packaging seemed to be an issue of concern all round. Many participants expressed concern with waste generated from food consumption on the Curry Mile, which makes them feel guilty whenever they get a takeaway. But groups also discussed why people come to the Curry Mile, agreeing that is an important hub for culture and a convenient place for Muslims to find culturally appropriate foods. Given this importance, it was seen as problematic that the area is infamous for rubbish on the pavements and overflowing bins.

Participants thought that tiffin boxes would be 'a hard sell' in Manchester because they don't fit with the culture here. Indians and Pakistanis use them 'but British people won't', unless perhaps as a middle class trend. Perhaps predictably, some people expressed scepticism about the health and safety of reusable metal containers for hot contents. Others said people don't want to be carrying them when on the go from one shop to another. On the other hand, some participants wanted to discuss the historical and cultural background of

tiffin boxes, given that they are widely used by people in South Asia and therefore are 'normal' for a substantial segment of the population. There was also an interesting debate among participants over whether introducing tiffin boxes in Manchester would be a problematic form of cultural appropriation.

There were some lively debates too over what could be done to reduce litter, which boiled down to either punishment (hard to do, since the Council staff has been cut) or incentives. People generally thought that the answer lies in introducing a culture of circulation and reuse to counteract the throwaway approach. Some participants thought that reusability would be impossible with polystyrene and difficult with plastic, so other ideas such as reusable bottles or sending your own container with the Deliveroo driver were entertained. So, here of course we can bring the focus – and debate - back to tiffin boxes (!), although the views were still quite mixed. All in all, though, people generally agreed that an alternative to single use packaging would be accepted especially with some kind of financial incentive for reuse, with the key element of businesses also needing to come on board.

…about local supermarkets:

In keeping with the theme of turning 'sustainable consumption' on its head, we asked participants to discuss *which supermarket in Manchester they considered to be more environmentally friendly and why: the Unicorn or Worldwide Foods*? Both are mid-sized, independent food retailers that cater to niche markets. Worldwide Foods is located at the top of the Curry Mile and sells Halal and imported products, from South Asian, African and Middle-Eastern countries, which are less readily available in mainstream supermarkets. The Unicorn is a workers' cooperative selling wholefoods (organic, vegan, etc.) located in Chorlton, seen as a relatively affluent area of south Manchester. Participants were invited to compare attitudes and assumptions about Worldwide Foods and the Unicorn to explore understandings of what it means to sell and buy in a 'sustainable' way.

The location of, and travel to, the stores was one aspect participants considered when comparing environmental impact. Participants thought that there is probably more footfall for Worldwide Foods compared to the Unicorn, due to its location at the busy Curry Mile. Both supermarkets are easily accessible by bus and both have large carparks, but only the Unicorn has a cycle parking area.

Participants also noted that produce in both Worldwide Foods and the Unicorn may be sourced internationally and is flown in when in season in other parts of the world (e.g., organic lemons from Spain, mangoes from Pakistan) thus reducing sustainability. However, they thought it is more likely that the Unicorn's produce has relatively fewer food miles, since Worldwide specialises in foods imported from countries of the Global South.

The Unicorn sells organic, ethically sourced 'bulk' goods in small sizes, whereas it is possible to buy large supplies of staple dry goods like rice, lentils and flour at Worldwide Foods. Participants said buying food in large quantities, which is common in South Asian households, may be more sustainable or 'green' even though it isn't typically acknowledged as such in mainstream notions of sustainable consumption. At the same time, it was noted that such cultural practices are prone to change: younger generations are moving away from these

traditions. One participant reminisced how her grandmother used to buy in bulk and carry heavy shopping bags home and now she and her husband receive 'judgemental looks' whenever they do so.

The Unicorn and Worldwide Foods were considered similar in the way they catered to the local communities and typical customers. Participants perceived the Unicorn to be a trendy and ethical store catering to a largely middle-class clientele. It was perceived to be more environmentally-friendly than Worldwide due to how its fresh fruit and veg are displayed (mostly non-packaged) and its meat-free status. But Worldwide Foods also sells non-packaged produce on racks and in cardboard boxes outside the store. It is interesting to note that detailed discussion of meat and its ethical, environmental and cultural impacts was largely avoided during the World Café, perhaps because of its controversial nature.

An overarching theme in discussions of the Unicorn was that it is in a relatively wealthy area and this leads to expensive products catering to middle class tastes, values and budgets. This makes it less accessible to those with low incomes, and perhaps leads to a perception that 'green' and ethical shopping is exclusive. Some people speculated that the atmosphere in Worldwide Foods is more welcoming to diverse customers of all income levels, compared to the Unicorn where there might be a 'holier than thou' attitude. Some suggested that Unicorn inadvertently creates an uncomfortable atmosphere compared to Worldwide Foods, but this may be due to cultural differences. In terms of aesthetics, Worldwide was considered to be rather shabby and downtrodden, whereas the Unicorn was perceived to be clean, bright and colourful. In terms of politics, the criticism was made that it would be impossible to feed the world based on the Unicorn model, which led to debates about the benefits of trade unions, food inflation and the increasing cost of living.

Participants agreed that Worldwide Foods is a place to go to buy produce not sold at typical British supermarkets. Cultural practices were a common theme, with participants emphasising the importance of using all parts of the animal when consuming it, limiting the waste. Also, participants mentioned that Asian and African communities may be less likely to waste food due to their food practices, such as making their food from scratch and using storable, bulk-purchased ingredients.

When conversations turned to solutions – how to make food shopping more sustainable for everyone -- a few ideas emerged. One was developing a charter for businesses on the Curry Mile to buy local and engage more proactively with sustainability. However, it was also suggested that this would be unlikely because business owners are generally assumed (rightly or wrongly) to be uninterested in sustainability. Some participants felt no store could ever be truly environmentally friendly due to the excesses in plastic packaging. But regulations and penalties, such as banning single use plastic or charging for plastic bags, were seen as successful strategies for dealing with this aspect.

Photos: Sherilyn MacGregor

…about transport and cycle lanes:

According to Manchester City Council, Wilmslow Road transports over 10,000 cars, 1,800 buses and 1,400 cyclists every day and the numbers are only expected to grow (Robertson et al. 2017). It is therefore important to consider the impacts of transport on/to the Curry Mile. In Manchester, the Council's drive to increase green and active travel has at times come into conflict with the needs and wishes of local businesses. In trying to make the Curry Mile more environmentally sustainable, Dutch-style cycle lanes were completed in April 2016. The creation of these cycle lanes dramatically increased the number of cyclists leading to greater sustainability in the Wilmslow corridor (Robertson et al. 2017). While some would embrace these as much-needed progress, critics claim they are poorly designed from a safety perspective and detrimental to local businesses (Arnold 2022). Recognising this controversy, we asked participants to debate *the pros and cons of cycle lanes on the Curry Mile from a sustainability perspective.*

Participants discussed the ways in which the cycle lanes have improved the quality of life as well as the challenges they have introduced and how these have affected residents. There was a resident of 20 years in the group who had a lot of experience of the cycle lanes. They said that the cycle lanes are beneficial because they make cycling easier and safer for confident cyclists, encouraging more cycling. At the same time, they acknowledged a number of problems: drainage is horrendous, some of the paint is really old, it is hard to see cyclists (even with lights), people park on the lanes, and pedestrians get hit by cyclists. This participant noted that the bike lane is very narrow, that some of the cyclists, especially students, are not as courteous as they should be, and that Wilmslow Road has become very congested, especially on Friday and Saturday nights.

The most common view expressed by participants was that the introduction of cycle lanes on the Curry Mile has created conflict between cars, cyclists and pedestrians. The architecture of the cycle lanes makes it dangerous to cycle, especially during rush hour, since the cycle lanes have made the roads narrower. One person noted that there is a particular point where pedestrians have no choice but to walk across the cycle lane in order to access the bank machine, and the cycle lanes are sometimes used irresponsibly, with some cyclists going 30 mph. However, they did agree that the Curry Mile is tremendously busy, it might never be never safe for pedestrians. Cyclists and pedestrians could share lanes, but nobody is used to that in Manchester: people tend to congregate on the pavement. It was also noted that Wilmslow Road gets very busy during football matches and Eid celebrations, so it has been a victim of its own success as thousands of people come to the Curry Mile every day.

There was a view expressed that Curry Mile businesses owners weren't properly consulted, or weren't listened to, when the decision was made to build the cycle lanes. Some participants knew of businesses that had to close down as a result of the impacts. Some thought that cycling, as a mode of transport for commuting to and from work or university near the city centre, may be more common among a middle-class population, who may not be aware of (or sympathetic to) the knock-on effects of the lanes for small businesses and local neighbourhoods.

When it came to imagining solutions, participants agreed that it would be good to dramatically reduce car use: car ownership is very expensive, especially with the cost of living crisis, and having no cars would lead to cleaner air. One participant, a local councillor, shared their vision of getting a tram line down the Oxford/Wilmslow Corridor: it would remove traffic jams and be far more environmentally friendly than the current mix of cars, buses and bikes. This vision received ambivalent responses. Some feared the inevitable disruption from years of construction, while others worried that it would be hard for older people to get used to riding trams. There were several calls to pedestrianise the Curry Mile. This idea had some support because of the conflict between the cyclists, pedestrians and vehicle drivers, which is particularly problematic during busy times (Eid was mentioned as one example). Many also pointed out that banning cars would improve air quality, noting that vehicle fumes are harmful to the pedestrians and cyclists. However, participants agreed that in practice it would be costly and difficult to pedestrianise the Curry Mile and the buses are essential for public transport.

Photo: Amani

Conclusions

We organised the *Mangoes, Meat and Motors* event to 'confront the climate' on the Curry Mile because, as a microcosm of Manchester society, the Curry Mile is an exceptionally rich space for exploring contrasting ideas about the social and environmental impacts of everyday life in a large, multicultural city. The event was well attended and received with enthusiasm by a mix of people who don't often have the opportunity to engage in constructive debate about these issues. The fact that it took place during COP27, when the media focus was on how climate emergency is being tackled (or not) at the global level, helped us to shine a bright light on how local concerns about environmental quality and social justice are often overlooked.

A positive conclusion we took away from the evening is that people enjoyed the chance to question dominant assumptions about what sustainability means and to share perspectives and practices that are often marginalised or invisibilised in mainstream (i.e., white, middle class) discussions of climate change. This goes some way to affirming the benefits not only of making social science research and methods more accessible in this field, but also of creating welcoming spaces for friendly debate, collective reflection, and the sharing of experiences and perspectives. From the World Café discussions, photo exhibition and informal networking over food during and after the event, we learned the following key 'takeaways':

First, while trying to understand the challenges posed by the social and natural climate of the Curry Mile, it is also important not to allow these challenges to obscure its existing value as well as its potential for positive change. The example of food retailers such as Worldwide Foods, which encourage bulk buying and eliminate plastic waste by selling loose produce, suggests that sustainability is built into the fabric of food provisioning practices on the Curry Mile, even though they may not be widely recognised as such. In addition, the diversity of residents and visitors to the Curry Mile, many of whom come from non-Western cultures, are already quietly engaging in sustainable practices, which - if and when implemented by the wider public -- undoubtedly advance the 'green' agenda. Cultural practices of the typical consumer who shops on the Curry Mile, such as buying in bulk, eating fruits when in season and supporting neighbourhood shops and cafes, are pro-environmental and should be regarded as such. This will help to expand the dominant understanding of sustainability and make it more relevant to a wider array of people.

Second, there is both a need and potential for greater collaboration between business owners and the City Council to support and raise awareness for green policies. Such an approach is necessary as it means the onus for improving sustainability within their industry is not exclusively on business owners, who are already struggling with the ongoing economic crisis. Through more effective collaboration, the Council could support business owners to implement greener practices, such as reducing waste and improving energy efficiency. However, we heard that tensions currently exist between the needs of Curry Mile businesses and the Council's sustainability agenda. For instance, the implementation of bike lanes has made green and active travel accessible to more people, but the removal of parking spaces and lack of pedestrian access has meant a perceived reduction in consumers. Some business owners feel that they are not properly consulted by the Council on decisions which affect their businesses (Tweed 2023). There may be a lack of trust that stems from

the perception that businesses in other parts of the city (e.g., wealthier, white-dominated) are given more respect and consideration than those on the Curry Mile. More collaboration, therefore, could improve relations between both parties and create policies that are sustainable, inclusive and economical. We learned that there is currently no active organisation or network for businesses on the Curry Mile through which to coordinate and represent their concerns and interests. This seems a missed opportunity, not just for improving relations, but also for creating more effective communication around sustainability issues.

On a final note, writing up this report as undergraduate students leads us to reflect on the relationship between the universities and the Curry Mile. Thousands of students travel to and from two major universities (University of Manchester and Manchester Met) along Wilmslow Road every day. Since students no doubt form a significant percentage of customers on the Curry Mile, it is vital that they be encouraged by the universities they attend to practice respectful, responsible and sustainable consumption. This encouragement could include educating students on the history and culture of the Curry Mile, hosting halal food festivals during freshers' week, and displaying posters and leaflets on student halls of residence reminding students to cycle safely and avoid littering while out and about on the Curry Mile.

Photo: Rosol

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Nuura and Saabira were employed as research interns on the TIES project for eight weeks in summer 2023. Both are actively involved in organising a fundraising campaign with Islamic Relief and Human Appeal to send aid to Somalia and Northeastern Kenya to help communities affected by the climate emergency.

Zarina Ahmad is climate activist and PhD researcher working on the TIES project. She was co-organiser and lead facilitator of the Mangoes, Meat and Motors event.

Sherilyn MacGregor is Professor of Environmental Politics and principle investigator of the TIES project. She was co-organiser of the event.

About the TIES Project

Towards Inclusive Environmental Sustainability (TIES) is a three-year research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust that explores how the knowledge and practices of immigrants from countries in the Global South contribute to building just and sustainable cities in the Global North. The research asks people who have moved to Manchester from Somalia and Pakistan about how their experiences of migration shape their perceptions of sustainability as well as about the barriers to and motivations for engaging in environmentally significant practices in daily life. The overarching purpose is to challenge Eurocentric assumptions about 'environmental behaviour' as well as to broaden the dominant conceptions of sustainability that inform research and policy.

Photo: Zaim Ali

Photo: Nafis Ahmad

Photo: Sherilyn MacGregor