



THE PERMACULTURE ASSOCIATION BRITAIN

# The Next Big Step: Permaculture, practices, passions and priorities for collaborative working

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Findings from international surveys 2015-2016



*The Next Big Step: Permaculture, practices, passions and priorities for collaborative working*  
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Cover photo: IPC UK 2015 Thematic topics for the Next Big Step

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## **Summary of key findings**

### **Background and approach**

Permaculture offers practical and effective solutions to help people address global issues at a local level. Grass-roots diffusion of knowledge has led to an estimated 3 million practitioners worldwide. However, there are currently few systematic opportunities for permaculture practitioners to collaborate globally. In 2014 a team began work to better understand what enhancing coherence across the permaculture movement might mean for practitioners and organisations.

Online surveys were available from June 215 to July 2016 in English, French, and German. Surveys were sent to a) to individual practitioners via an open invitation, and b) selected permaculture organisations, targeting the highest strategic level of organisation in each country. A total of 451 people from 36 different countries answered one of the surveys for individuals. The majority of these respondents were from Australia (33%), the USA (22%) and the UK (16%). The organisations survey was completed by 52 strategic organisations in 34 different countries. The majority of these (53%) were European (from 20 different countries), with 16% from North America, 10% from Oceania, and 10% from Africa.

### **About the individuals**

Respondents tended to be well-educated; with almost two-thirds having a qualification of degree level or higher, most often in a subject aligned to land and nature stewardship, and least commonly in finance and economics. Most were passionate about learning new things, most skilled in sharing information about their own practice, and most desirous of improving permaculture design skills. Fundraising was the area that fewest people felt skilled in or passionate about, and showed the greatest contrast between this and where they would most like to improve. Two thirds of respondents hold a Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC) as their highest level of permaculture qualification, and almost twenty per cent had progressed to a Diploma. Almost seventy per cent use permaculture at a personal level with over half considering it as a lifestyle choice, and forty five per cent working in permaculture.

### **About the organisations**

There has been a continuous increase in the number of permaculture organisations since the 1970s. The majority of the strategic organisations that responded to the surveys are not-for-profit organisations and networks, often run by a small number of highly motivated staff and volunteers. They act as hubs for local projects and practitioners, offer free permaculture advice and organise meetings and network activities. Most identify as being effective in knowledge-sharing, team work and achieving their day-to-day work, and many offer training in the PDC. The majority of those who responded would like to additionally offer Diploma training and organise national convergences. Most would value support with fundraising, making the best use of volunteers, learning from mistakes, and longer-term maintenance of the organisation.

### **Priorities for permaculture**

Select global issues as a priority for permaculture were developed from open-ended responses from key individuals in permaculture. Of these, "Developing resilient and self-reliant communities" was prioritised by most respondents followed by "Restore ecosystems." "Join our voices in a clear message to the world" was the least popular option,

and comments recognised that “permaculture means a lot of different things to different people” which gives both value and limitation to its effectiveness. In terms of achieving these goals, the majority of respondents felt that “developing the credibility and visibility of permaculture as a solution” was fundamental. When asking about research in permaculture, the main priority was “provide reliable evidence for effective permaculture practices and approaches” further suggesting that building a strong evidence base to enhance the credibility of permaculture is a priority amongst respondents.

In terms of priorities in education and training, “Teaching permaculture in mainstream (school) curriculums” was most valued, perhaps for the broad scale impact that this option offers. Options for standardising the PDC and teacher training curriculums were polarising with comments on this recognising both the value and the limitations of this approach. Several comments suggested a compromise: “[Have a] *basic minimum standard and beyond that a flexible system that promotes the wonderful diversity of teachers and supports them to continually improve.*” Others showed that supporting teachers to develop effective approaches and helping them to connect with potential students would be of benefit.

Overall, there is a strong desire to participate in meaningful activity that empowers and inspires individuals, changes local environments and communities for the better, and contributes to solving global level issues through local impacts. There was support for greater coherence, particularly in helping existing teachers, organisations and emerging networks to develop and connect with each other, but a strong caution that a top-down or highly centralised approach would not be sympathetic to the ethos of the permaculture movement.

### **Key areas for attention at a strategic level**

Drawing this together, there are several key elements of practice that could be improved through greater coordination of efforts. Work towards greater global coherence would be most effective if it could:

1. Facilitate connections between organisations in permaculture, and aid the development of mutually beneficial support structures for teaching, leadership, and organisational development.
2. Develop a credible evidence base for permaculture, drawing on both extant exemplars and investigating the effectiveness and applicability of approaches. Support the wider dissemination of such findings to expedite real change at local and regional levels, and ultimately across the world.
3. Recognise the strength of the diversity in the movement and enable organisations and individuals to connect and collaborate more effectively on areas of mutual passion.
4. Facilitate connections between permaculture organisations and allied organisations to enable more effective action on shared issues.
5. Enable social eco-entrepreneurial activity to ensure the longer-term viability of organisations and to enable more practitioners to put their creativity, energy and skills into the kind of work they find most rewarding.

## **1. Introduction**

Permaculture, as an ecological design system for sustainable living, offers practical and effective solutions to help people address global issues like food security, poverty, and the impacts of climate change at a local level. Grass-roots diffusion of knowledge has led to an estimated 3 million practitioners worldwide. However, apart from biennial international convergences, there is currently no systematic operational process for permaculture practitioners to collaborate globally.

Following discussion of this issue at the International Permaculture Conference (IPC) in Jordan in 2011, and a decision to create a team to investigate this at the IPC in Cuba in 2013, the Next Big Step project began. The mission of the Next Big Step initiative is to serve and facilitate the wider permaculture community to progressively enhance the coherence of the movement in order to be more effective locally, regionally, and internationally. The core project team were from the UK, USA, Australia and Chile

We started by seeking to understand the skills, needs, and desires of people involved in permaculture around the world. We aimed to understand how greater international coherence might benefit practitioners and permaculture organisations, and to explore the challenges and opportunities in achieving this.

## **2. Method**

Results reported here are compiled from online surveys in English, French, and German<sup>1</sup> to a) strategic permaculture organisations, and to b) all permaculture practitioners. Limited response questions (e.g. ‘which of the following..’) were compiled from open-ended responses to a preliminary survey that was sent to selected individuals highly active in, and representative of, permaculture.

Surveys were available online from June 2015 until July 2016. Responses were encouraged through key representatives and their professional and organisational networks. The main distribution periods were June-July 2015 and following the IPC in September 2015. Although .pdf versions were created for areas with less internet access, there were few downloads and no returns of these.

In addition to the online set of surveys, the conversations were also carried out at permaculture convergences, and site visits to the Middle East by Alice Gray. The results from these surveys informed key strategic sessions over five days of the IPC UK in 2015. Videos of the results presented are available here for '[An introduction](#)', '[Where are we now?](#)' and '[Increasing coherence and effectiveness](#)'.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Crowd-sourced’ translation of a further 10 languages was sought, but complete translations were, unfortunately, not obtained.

### 3. Demographics

#### 3.1. Who answered the survey and how representative is this?

In total, 451 people from 36 different countries answered one of the surveys for individuals.

Of the 399 individuals who gave a country, most were originally from Europe (35.6%), Oceania (33.3%), and North America (23.6%) (Figure 1). The top three countries were Australia (32.6%), the USA (21.6%) and the UK (16.0%) (Figure 1).

We know that this doesn't represent the true pattern of permaculture as there are many practitioners in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Further research needs to consider more effective mechanisms to generate translations of the survey, and for widening access beyond internet and convergence gatherings. The challenge of engaging people across language, technological and financial barriers is present in many research fields, but it is particularly important that we enable the voices of everyone involved in permaculture.

As you read the results presented here, please be aware that it offers a sample of permaculture practitioners drawn largely from English-speaking countries rather than a complete picture of all permaculture practitioners.

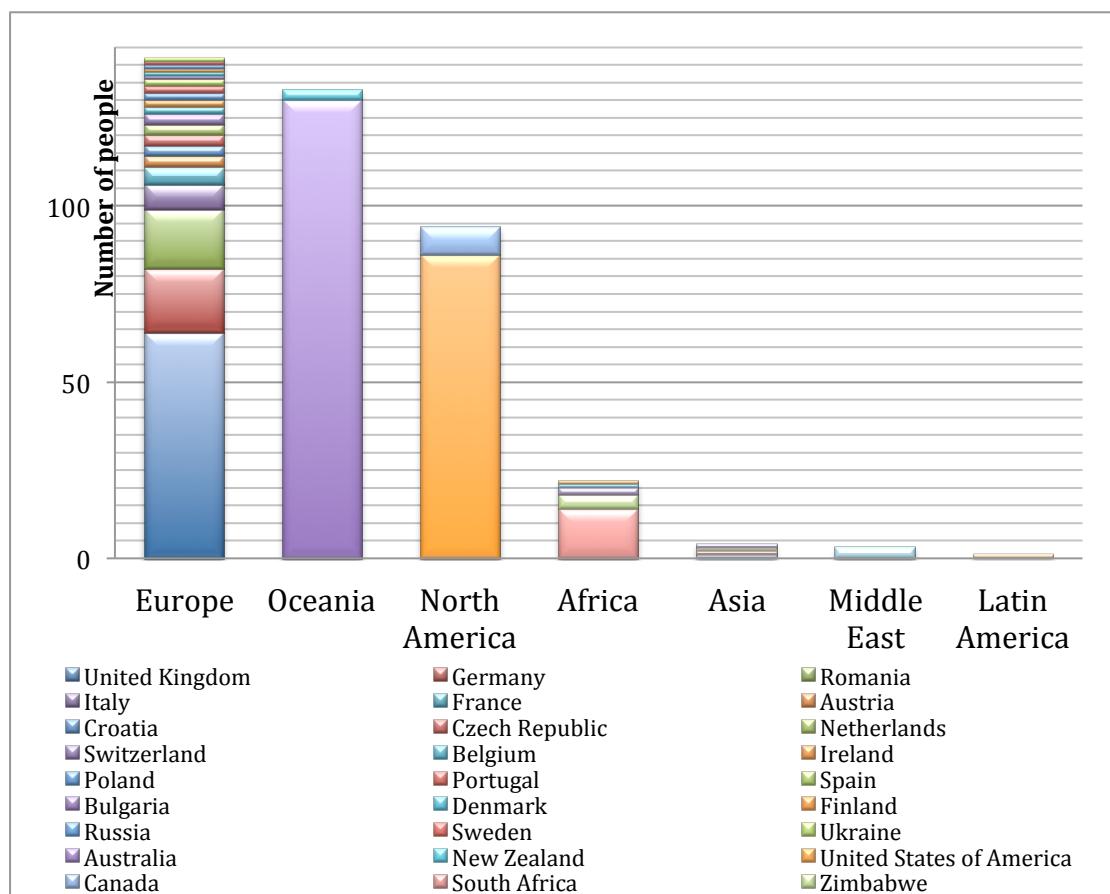


Figure 1 Distribution of individual participants

Of those that answered the questions about country of origin and of main habitation, 10.6% had spent most of their lives not in their country of origin, and 4.7% were currently living in a different country to their place of origin or where they had spent most of their lives.

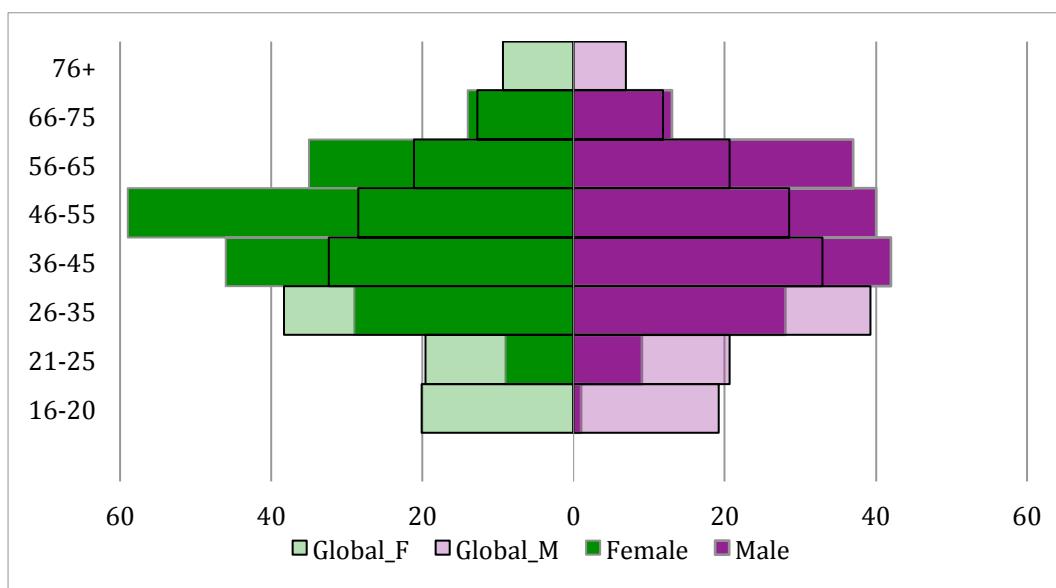
According to UN figures<sup>2</sup>, globally around 3.3% of people lived outside their country of origin in 2015. Our figures show a higher rate. Optional explanatory comments show some people have dual nationality, some have lived in two or three countries, two consider themselves travellers, and two have lived and worked in 33 and 'over 50' countries, respectively. Countries listed are from Asia, Africa, North America, and Europe so there is no particular pattern of migration among respondents who have moved within and between these regions.

### 3.2. Demographics of respondents

#### 3.2.1. Age and gender

Only adults (over 18 years old) were asked to complete the survey. Figure 2 shows how the age structure of permaculture respondents differs from the global population<sup>3</sup> (adjusted for total number of people and excluding children). Overall, there are more people 36-65 and fewer younger people (16-25) involved in permaculture than might be expected from the wider population.

This discrepancy also holds true when compared to the UK population<sup>4</sup> (Figure 3) suggesting that this pattern is not due to growing populations (higher numbers of young people) in countries less represented by this survey.



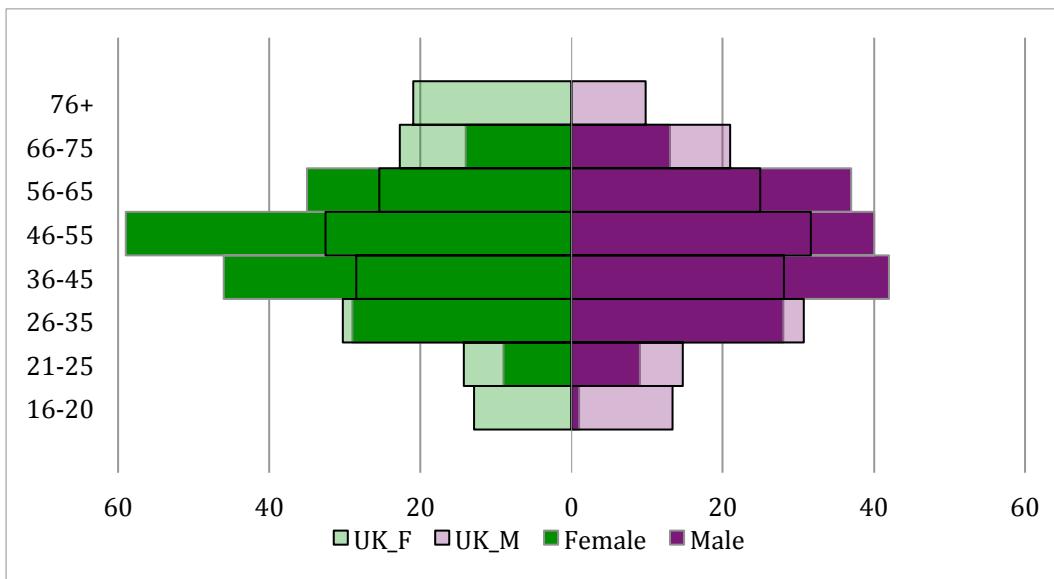
**Figure 2 Population pyramids for permaculture respondents compared to global population in 2015.** Dark colours show the distribution for permaculture, and pale colours with black border show the global equivalent for each gender and age group (n = 362).

Women comprised 52.3% of respondents, men 46.3%, and 1.4% of people selected a different identity ('both' and 'neither' were offered as options). Optional comments for the latter options included 'transgender' [both] and 'somewhere in between' [neither]. Eighty-four people chose not to share their gender and eighty-two did not share their age.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Population Fund <http://www.unfpa.org/migration> [Accessed August 2015]

<sup>3</sup> Global data obtained from <http://populationpyramid.net/world/2015/>

<sup>4</sup> UK data obtained from <https://populationpyramid.net/united-kingdom/2015/>



**Figure 3 Population pyramids for permaculture respondents compared to the UK population in 2015.** Dark colours show the distribution for permaculture, and pale colours with black border show the UK equivalent for each gender and age group (n = 362).

### 3.2.2. Education

Overall, respondents tend to be much more likely to have continued to higher education than the wider population. The majority of those who answered (total 371 respondents) had a degree or higher qualification (65.5%) (Figure 4). Even assuming that none of the 78 people who did not answer this question had a degree level or higher qualification, this figure would still be 54.1%. This is much higher than national averages for educational attainment. In the UK, approximately 36.9% of people aged 16-74 have a degree level qualification or above<sup>5</sup>, in Australia this is 44% of 15-74 year olds,<sup>6</sup> and the USA 28% of adults aged 25 or over<sup>7</sup>. Across Europe, 31.7% of people aged 25-54 and 19.5% of 55-74 year olds have a tertiary education qualification<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Nomis 2017, UK Labour market analysis: Qualifications

<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/gor/2092957698/report.aspx#tabquals>

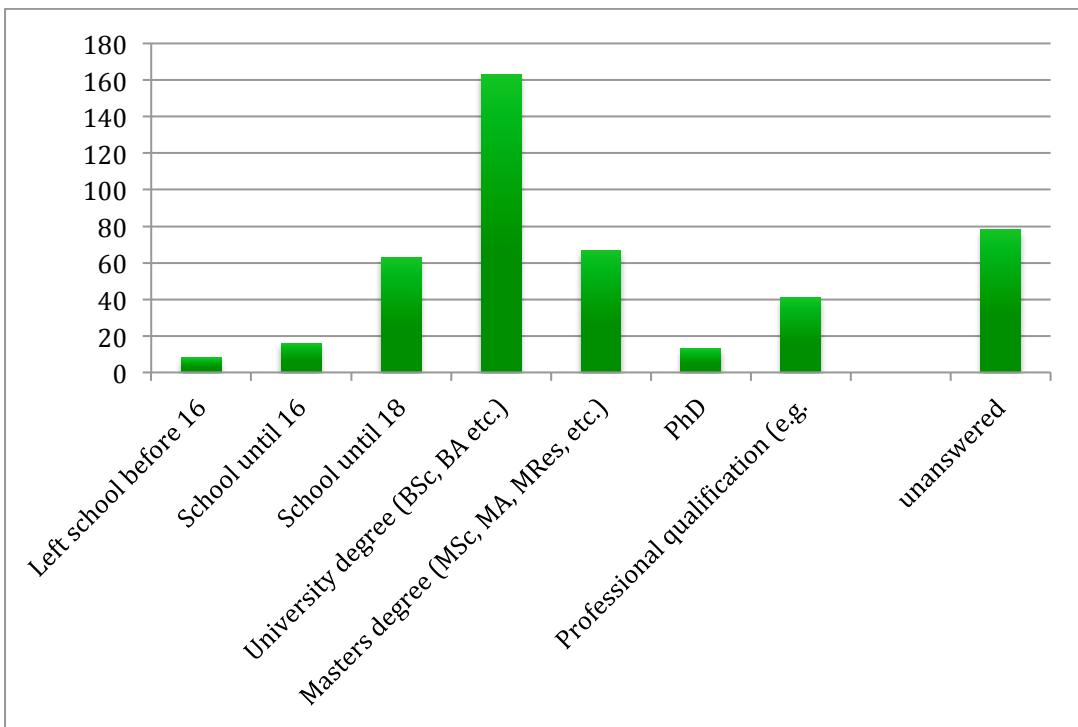
<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2016 “6227.0 - Education and Work, Australia, May 2016”

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6227.0>

<sup>7</sup> USA Census Bureau 20012 “Educational Attainment in the United States: 2009”

<https://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p20-566.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Eurostat, 2015 “Tertiary Education statistics” [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Tertiary\\_education\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Tertiary_education_statistics)

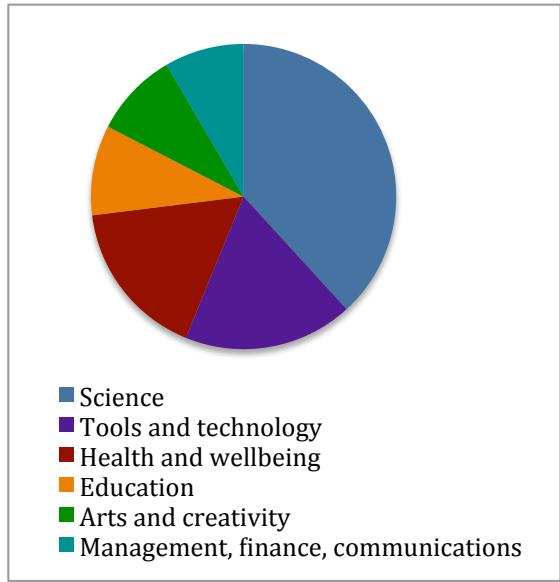


**Figure 4 Highest educational attainments of respondents (n = 371)**

It seems that respondents enjoy learning. On top of the 65.5%, a further 11.1% of respondents indicated a professional qualification as their highest level of educational qualification. Fields of specialisation (described by 178 people in relation to professional qualifications and/or degrees) are varied and include science (38.2%), building, planning and IT (18.0%), health and wellbeing (16.9%), education (9.6%), arts (9.0%), and management/ finance/ communications (8.4%) see Figure 5.

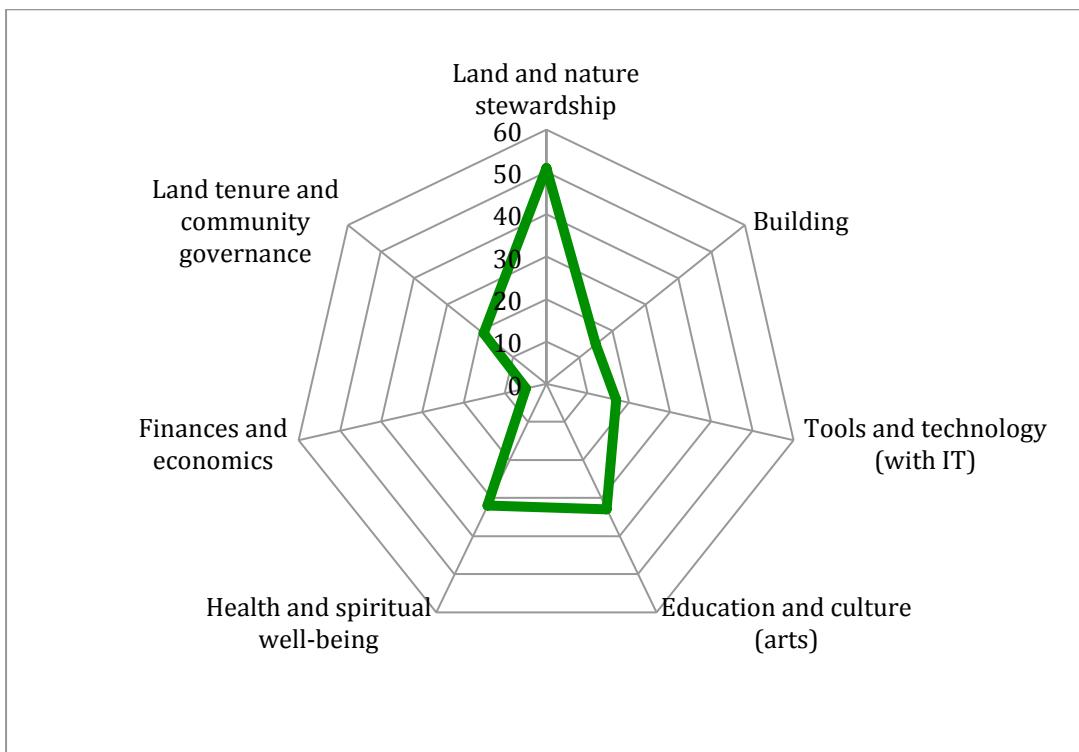
Interestingly, when we put these areas of specialisation in the context of the Holmgren flower, which illustrates seven key areas ('petals') of permaculture activity, (Figure 6) we see a disproportionately high number of people specialising in land and nature stewardship (28.7% of respondents; *comprising life sciences* (27% of all respondents) especially *agriculture and horticulture* (9.6%), and *including environmental science/studies* (4.5%) as well as *permaculture* (3.4%)). Education and culture (18.5%) and Health and well-being (18.0%) are also higher than might be expected if all 'petals' were equally as popular.

In contrast, finance and economics accounts for only 2.9% of all respondents, being considerably less popular. Also less than might be expected are tools and technology (9.6% of all; *here IT* (5.6%), *chemistry* (3.6%) and *physics* (0.6%)), land tenure and community governance (10.7%; *here international/ sustainable development* (4.5%))



**Figure 5 Qualifications of respondents, by sector**

management (2.8%) communications (2.8%) and law (0.6%) and building (11.8%; here architecture and surveying (4.5%) engineering (2.8%) and manual trades (4.5%)).



**Figure 6 Distribution of stated qualifications compared to the Holmgren flower of permaculture activities**

### 3.2.3. Ethnicity

This was open-ended, thus self-defined, and answered by 260 people. People answered based on nationality (92 people), modern geographic region e.g. 'European' (15), geographic origin e.g. 'Celtic' (39), with a further 27 stating two or more nationalities/locations/ origins. People also responded by colour e.g. 'white', 'black' (70), origin and colour i.e. Caucasian and Hispanic (65), religion (2, mentioned by 6), or more broadly as 'human' 'it doesn't matter' and 'permaculturist' (15) (Table 1).

Ethnic origin responses, therefore, largely reflect the nationality of respondents. Of those who specified colour, the majority were white. Whilst this supports conclusions drawn by Ferguson and Lovell (2011)<sup>9</sup> that permaculture is under-represented in ethnic minority groups, and these figures are lower than national averages for the main countries (Australia (indigenous people 2.5%)<sup>10</sup>, USA (77.1% white, 13.3% Black/African American, 5.6% Asian,<sup>11</sup> UK (86% white, 7.5% Asian, 3.3% Black/African/Caribbean<sup>12</sup>), it is difficult to draw deeper conclusions given the range of response types. It must also be reiterated that this sample is unlikely to be representative of the global permaculture community (see limitations to method in section 2).

<sup>9</sup> Ferguson, R. S., and S. T. Lovell. 2015. Grassroots engagement with transition to sustainability: diversity and modes of participation in the international permaculture movement. *Ecology and Society* **20**(4):39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-08048-200439>

<sup>10</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics

[http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/0?opendocument&avpos=220](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/0?opendocument&avpos=220)

<sup>11</sup> United States Census Bureau <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>

<sup>12</sup> Office for National Statistics

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandnationalidentityinenglandandwales/2012-12-11>

<b>Geographic regions and People origins</b>		<b>% of total (260)</b>		
Australian	26	10.0	Mokai)	
Anglo/Anglo-Celtic/Anglo Saxon	19	7.3	Palestinian	1 0.4
Australian, European/Anglo/Celtic origin	15	5.8	Polish	1 0.4
Romanian	10	3.8	Swedish	1 0.4
European	7	2.7	Tibetan	1 0.4
British	6	2.3	Western European	1 0.4
Celtic	5	1.9		
English	5	1.9		
American, European origin	3	1.2		
German	3	1.2		
American	2	0.8		
Croatian	2	0.8		
Czech	2	0.8		
Danish	2	0.8		
Indian	2	0.8		
North American	2	0.8		
Northern European	2	0.8		
Scandinavian/Nordic	2	0.8		
Arab	1	0.4		
Asian	1	0.4		
Belgae	1	0.4		
Canadian	1	0.4		
Eastern European	1	0.4		
Greek	1	0.4		
Hungarian	1	0.4		
Middle Eastern	1	0.4		
Norwegian	1	0.4		
Pacific (Nga	1	0.4		

<b>Colour and origin</b>	<b>People</b>	<b>% of total (260)</b>
Caucasian	63	24.2
Hispanic	2	0.8

<b>Colour</b>	<b>People</b>	<b>% of total (260)</b>
White	33	12.7
White British	17	6.5
White European	5	1.9
White Caucasian	4	1.5
White English	3	1.2
White African	2	0.8
White Australian	2	0.8
Black African	1	0.4
White Canadian	1	0.4
White German	1	0.4
White Scottish	1	0.4

<b>Mixed and alternatives:</b>	<b>People</b>	<b>% of total (260)</b>
Mixed - two	11	4.2
Mixed – three or more	16	6.2
Human to "doesn't matter"	15	5.8
Jewish	2	0.8

Table 1 Open-ended responses to ethnicity, grouped by type and response rate

### 3.3. Summary

Overall, respondents were from a range of countries and regions, although Latin America was significantly underrepresented (largely due to issues with translation to Spanish), as were Asia and the Middle East. A greater number of people from Africa responded, but the majority were from Europe, Oceania, and North America and tended to be English-

speaking. Ethnicity was largely in line with nationality, but tended towards more people identifying as white.

Respondents were from a range of adult ages with slightly fewer from the youngest and oldest age categories than might be expected. In the 66+ brackets, this may be due to lower likelihood of accessing the online survey. Reasons for the lower numbers in the 21-25 year old category are unclear and merit further investigation. Both males and females were well represented.

Respondents tend to have achieved higher levels of educational qualifications than would be expected. This is largely in the life sciences, education and health. Relatively few respondents specialised in finance or economics, or in physical or chemical sciences.

It is important to remember that this survey is just a snapshot of the whole community of permaculture practitioners and those from poorer countries are significantly underrepresented.

## 4. Global issues and permaculture priorities

### 4.1. What are our priorities?

When asked 'If we were to join our energy to focus on global issues, what is it most important to achieve?' most people prioritised developing resilient and self-reliant communities (302 as highest priority) and restoring ecosystems (277) (Figure 7). Of the options available, these choices are perhaps most closely aligned with the systems-based thinking at the root of modern permaculture.

All answer options were prioritised by some people with no response having less than 28% of respondents seeing it as of highest priority (more than one priority per respondent was possible).

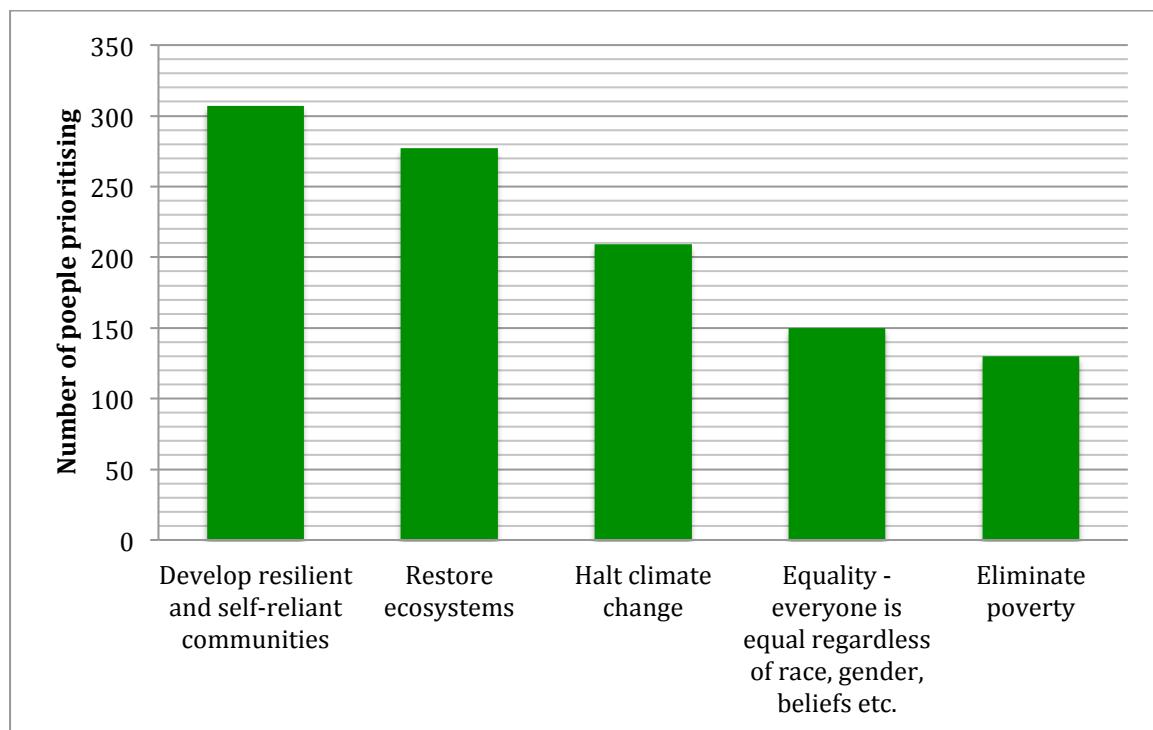


Figure 7 Global issues prioritised by respondents

Open-ended comments on this question provided some interesting depth and consideration of alternatives.

*"Communicate with huge corporation that bring negative impact and help them understand the danger they are creating for all (including them and the future of their family)."*

*"Government policy integrating permaculture into the country development plan in every country."*

*"get rid of the bankers, royals and their cousins. completely redesign the control system on the foundation of freedom. build the system that makes the other obsolete..."*

*"Stopping gmo's should be our immediate concern."*

*"Take down the 1%. Their greed and the earth's destruction will not stop till they are dealt with."*

*"Resilience on the way to power down and build alternatives to the growth paradigm of economy."*

*"paradigm shifts, developing sustainability literacy in the head heart and hands. generating financial resources and directing them to regenerative projects."*

*"The transitional steps from destructive agriculture to regenerative agriculture."*

*"work on better invisible structures and social networks"*

The question of "poverty" provoked some interesting and insightful responses, and perhaps rationale for being less of a priority among respondents:

*"With permaculture we can live a fulfilling life even in poverty."*

*"I have very little material possession but I am rich in experience and capacity."*

*"Spread wealth of money to support wealth of physical, spiritual, communal."*

*"The concept of poverty involves a judgement that I can't wholly accept."*

*"Maybe eliminate the definition of poverty to be a monetary value. Subsistence farmers are not impoverished even if they don't make a dime."*

*"Poverty is a red herring. Indigenous people or those not in the cash economy are not "in poverty" due to some simplified metric that labels them as "less than"."*

*"I didn't tick the work focusing on poverty/equality as many groups and organisations already work on these areas. Better to focus, and not get the work and message spread too thin."*

Some people recognised that the issues, and especially poverty, were interdependent and prioritised accordingly:

*"I think that eliminating poverty is part of achieving equality."*

*"Poverty can definitely be eliminated via permaculture/ecosystem restoration."*

*"Poverty eliminates by itself in a self-reliant permaculture based society."*

*"I think restoring ecosystems (earthcare) and developing resilient communities (peoplecare) underpin any efforts to improve equality or eliminate poverty (both fairshare)."*

*"The first 3 [halt climate change, eliminate poverty, restore ecosystems] are nothing but excuses for grandstanding / energy wasting quagmire / paradise for Facebook debaters - let's concentrate on the real problems we can actually solve, please. Get 4 and 5 done [develop resilient and self-reliant communities, equality - everyone is equal regardless of race, gender, beliefs etc.] and the first 3 will disappear or substantially decrease."*

*"The first 4 problems are the symptom of the dysfunctionality of human culture. We must establish a regenerative model and the others will areas will solve themselves over time."*

Some pointed out that the assumptions underlying this question, and/or the language used in, were not valid:

*"I fundamentally disagree with the notion that we should join our energy to focus on global issues. Nature works by dissensus - not consensus."*

*"Stop using the word "solution" to refer to complex systems like climate change, hunger, ecosystems, it's the wrong word and overstates what can be done. Eliminating poverty is an absurd framing. New challenges will emerge, system conditions will change, natural and human caused disturbances and discontinuities will occur, and we'll want to be resilient and responsive and adaptive. Nothing we will ever do will "solve" these issues. As systems change people we should know better and use more accurate and empowering frames."*

Many felt that these proposals were too ambitious, and/or a local scale approach was needed:

*"Be practical And focused."*

*"The final 4 [exc. Climate change] would all be nice but are I believe unachievable. If framed as minimisation there would be more weight to their consideration."*

*"Not that the last two [develop resilient and self-reliant communities, equality - everyone is equal regardless of race, gender, beliefs etc.] are less important - just not as achievable"*

*"Obviously in PC there should be a local focus, and some of these suggestions may be overwhelming in that context."*

*"Global climate change should not be a priority, it masks very different local issues. Local climate change, addressed through regional revegetation and water management plans is a problem that permaculture can productively address."*

*"Urgh. we should be focused on what is actually within our power as a community to do. we're not going to halt climate change. we can maybe locally eliminate some forms of poverty and do community resilience and ecosystem restoration."*

*"Some aims are beyond our scope. As designers we should be practical and assist in things which are more realistic. Everything else will come after we move local societies..."*

*"If we can create systems for resilient and self-reliant communities world-wide, a lot of the other pressing issues will be dealt with as part of that. Acting Local - thinking global."*

## 4.2. Variation by region

Interestingly, when we take a regional view of these figures, we see that 'developing resilient and self-reliant communities' is most prioritised by people from Oceania (Australia and New Zealand), North America, and Africa, whereas people from Europe and the remaining combined regions (Asia, Middle East and Latin America) actually most prioritise the 'restoration of ecosystems' (Figure 8).

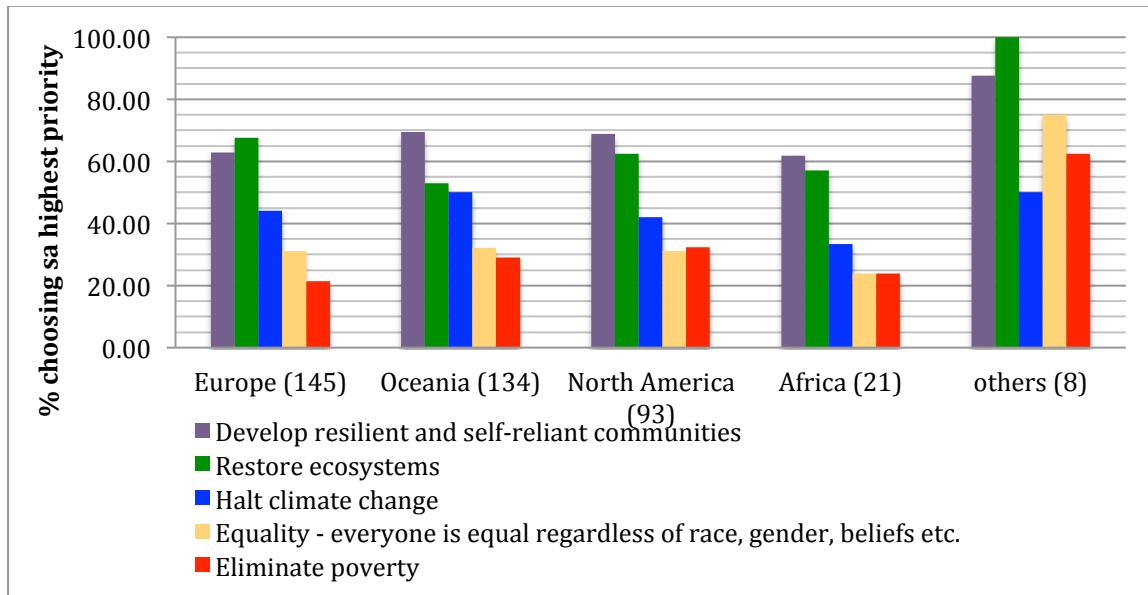
Halting climate change is prioritised in third place by all regions except in combined Asia, Middle East and Latin America ('Others'<sup>13</sup>) where it is deemed a priority by the fewest

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that the 'Others' group includes only 8 respondents so any one opinion has a significant impact on overall impressions. Therefore these results should be interpreted lightly.

number of people, but still 50.0% (The same as Oceania, and more than Europe (44.1%), North America (41.9%) and Africa (33.3%).

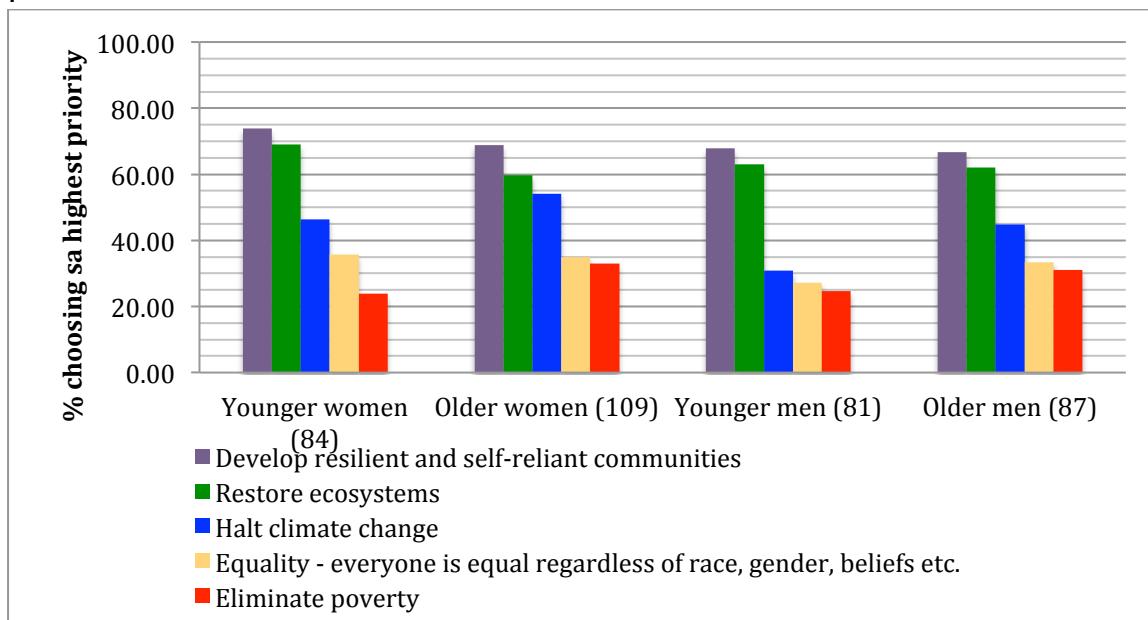
Generally, fewest people think that permaculture should prioritise the elimination of poverty, except in North America where equality falls slightly behind this.



**Figure 8 Permaculture prioritisation of global issues by region (Numbers after region show number of respondents who identified their country of origin in this region)**

#### 4.3. Variation by demographic

The overall pattern of priority between younger (<45 years) and older (46+ years) women and men is consistent, although more older women tended to rate climate change as a priority than the other groups (Figure 9). Younger men consistently prioritised developing resilient communities and restoring ecosystems higher than the three other issues.



**Figure 9 Permaculture prioritisation of global issues by age/gender (Numbers after age/gender are the number of individuals who identified their gender in this way)**

#### 4.4. Achieving action on global issues

In relation to the above, we asked “What do you think are the most effective ways we can work towards making the global-level changes in the previous question? Please rank, with 1 being the most effective”. The majority of people (60.8%) felt that developing the credibility and visibility of permaculture as a solution was most important (Figure 10). A similar number of people prioritised “Individual and grass-roots action” (43.7%) as “supporting those who can influence policy decisions” (42.1%). Joining with strategic allies was prioritised by 36.6% of people, and joining voices was least popular (27.5% prioritised this).

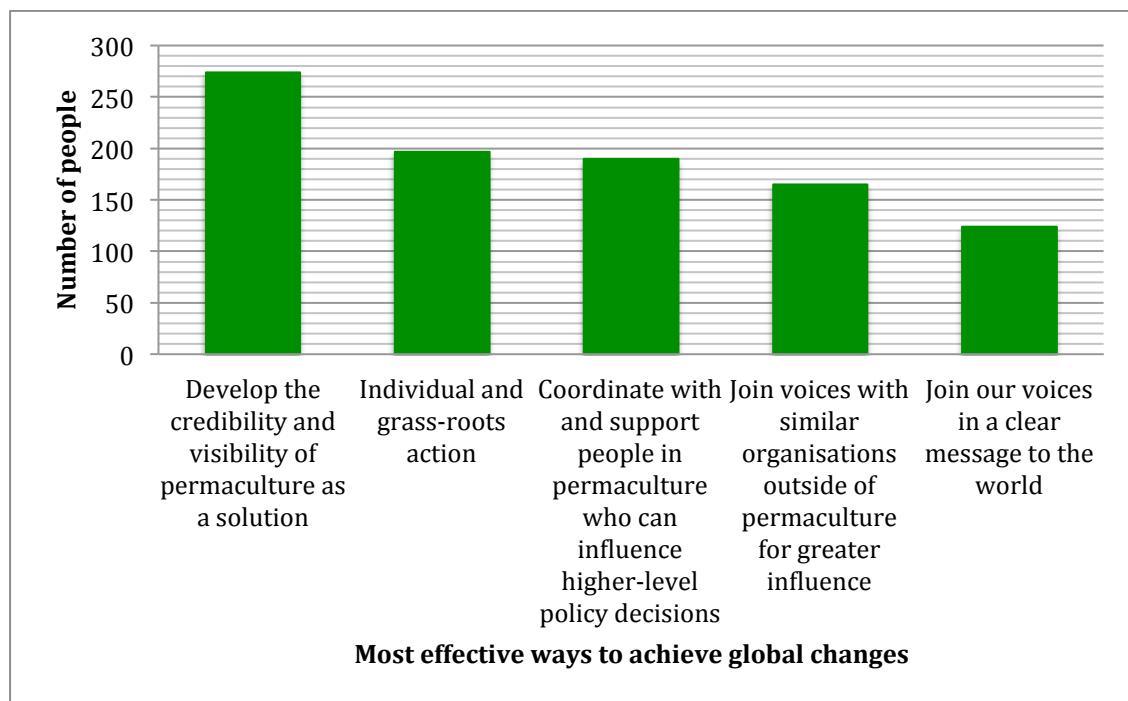


Figure 10 How can we most effectively work together towards achieving global action?

Open-ended comments again provided interesting perspectives and ideas on this. Some called for direct action, either to halt practices that contribute to issues, or to spread practices that tackle them:

*“Name and shame (both publicly and privately) the CEO’s and top managers of companies that are against the points listed above. Via peaceful civil disobedience, block their company buildings day in and day out, post and demonstrate in front of their homes”*

*“get into the villages, give free talks to farmers. Design their land for free. farmers discounted pdcs. posters in the streets. Graffiti art. Make permaculture a word that people see every where before they know what it is.”*

*“Build a network of fully sustainable ecological farms/communities that can serve as model/alternative to current model, and then promote it into mainstream culture/media.”*

Many identified that wider, systemic change is needed:

*“Don’t try to fix a faulty system. Build a new one.”*

*“To get people off the work-eat-sleep-shop wheel! And start/continue doing/showing an possible and positive alternative!”*

*"taking down the capitalists system and replace it with an ethically based work owned enterprises"*

Some suggested caution within permaculture,

*"I'm not convinced (as a professional designer myself) that permaculture on the whole does have the credibility internally to push it too hard as a solution. It's too ill-defined and means a lot of different things to different people. Which is fine, but the faster it grows, the more shonky operators will use the moniker."*

*"A lot of this depends on how it is done, of course."*

*"Call permaculture something else. No-one gets the name and it's a barrier to progress."*

*"I think credibility is the crucial issue for permaculture to take off. At the moment it looks more like a MLM [Multi-level Marketing] where some people attend expensive courses and then try to get the money back organizing other courses. In this world full with marketing manipulation, the rest of the permaculture messages get lost..."*

Or questioned why we, and our allies, haven't been effective enough in the last 30 years:

*"I'm not sure what the most effective route will be. After all, Bill and the team have been trying to do exactly this for 30 or more years."*

*"There is plenty to do that does not require influencing policy decision makers. Our energy should be directed towards action, not attempting to change policy or lobbying. See the environmental movement for the last 50 years for an example of wasted energy, emotion and frustration."*

Some advocated joining with allies, or supporting those already able to effect change:

*"Join with the world wide LETS [Local Exchange Trading System] network to spread the word."*

*"Good ideas and notions come from many disciplines. there is more value in a collective then a brand."*

*"Target and acquaint key people of influence to spread permaculture from there. Focus on very specific problems, present tailored solutions, explain how they can be implemented."*

Some called for a focus on grass-roots action"

*"It is vital that people decentralise their decision making away from government and take charge of their local environments for themselves and nature..."*

*"I realize I'm not sure how to answer this. Putting my energy into grass roots actions feel the most effective. Yet, it's through connecting globally via internet I feel inspired and get more answers for local projects."*

*"Without healthy local permaculture guilds in many locations, we can't be effective. Need help there."*

Several comments supported creating a global permaculture structure or collective

*"Create and maintain a Global Permaculture structure that functions at all levels on all elements that is self funding through ownership of a global network of farms which in turn are universities where we share the surplus to build a greater chain."*

*"All of the above. What we are missing is coherence. We are a fragmented non-epistemic community"*

*"It is only collectively that we can make a real difference globally. Influencing policy makers and reaching out to other like minded groups strengthens the message of what needs to be done and how to go about it."*

#### **4.5. Summary**

The two areas rated by most people for action by permaculture practitioners are developing resilient and self-reliant communities and restoring ecosystems. These may be prioritised for a combination of reasons including they are most closely related to the unique offering of permaculture, they offer areas for tangible action at a local scale yet have a global impact, and they are seen as fundamental to resolving the other issues.

Opinion seems divided on whether personal and local action is more effective, or if collaborative action in the higher levels of existing systems might yield more results. Although more people tend to the former, it should be noted that this was offered as a single action alongside three different actions at the collective scale (empowering those who can influence policy, joining with allied organisations, and collective action). The "act local, think global" idea seems to be well recognised in relation to this. The comments suggest dissatisfaction with current social systems (including economics and politics), and consider that decentralised and grassroots action is a valuable alternative, and aligned with permaculture.

In terms of enhancing coherence across permaculture, there does seem to be recognition that greater coordination within permaculture (and with allied organisations) at all levels is most likely to be effective. Although people do not want an analogy of the current social systems, wherein a few people have control, they recognise that collaboration across permaculture can have significant benefits from connecting with and being inspired by others, to supporting distributed networks of demonstration sites, and permaculture projects that provide tangible examples of alternative solutions. There is a recognised need to increase the credibility of permaculture and broaden its reach.

## 5. Permaculture education and experience

### 5.1. Existing knowledge and skills

Most people (65.9%) hold a Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC) as their highest level of permaculture qualification (Figure 11). This is considered to be the fundamental permaculture qualification as well as a route to teaching others. The PDC is awarded following completion of a training course that is notionally a minimum of 72 hours, based around a core curriculum and with a final design presentation. However, although some organisations publish suggested content, there are no official universal guidelines for content and no institutional oversight.

The PDC is a pre-requisite for the Permaculture Diploma, which 19.8% of respondents hold. This is the highest level of recognition in permaculture in which participants present a portfolio of ten permaculture designs, following advanced one-to-one training.

Although many people had undertaken training in practical skills in addition to specific permaculture training, just 2.7% of people listed only practical skills. In total, 11.5% had done an Introduction to Permaculture course without continuing to a full PDC (Figure 11).

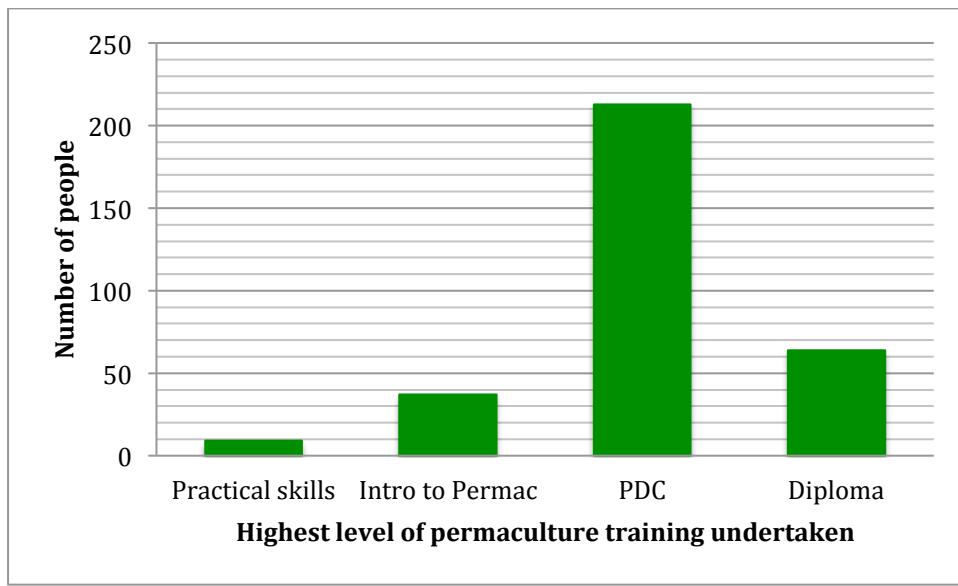


Figure 11 Permaculture qualifications and training

Practical skills training has seen the sharpest increase in numbers recently (Figure 12). Given the small proportion of people who have done practical skills without a PDC, it is likely that this increase is not from new comers, but from people looking to supplement their PDC training with additional skills and techniques. This supports the idea that people engaged in permaculture tend to be highly motivated to learn new things.

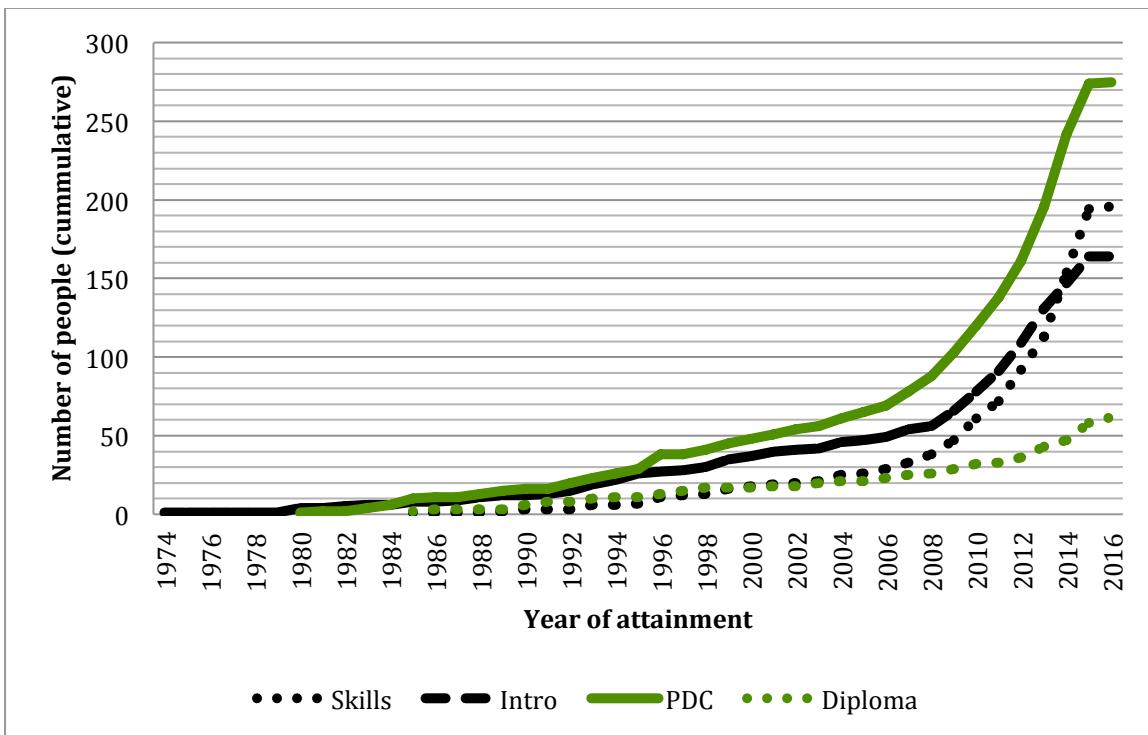


Figure 12 Cumulative numbers of people having undertaken permaculture training (the apparent plateau in 2016 is likely as the survey ended in July of that year)

In terms of how people use permaculture in their lives, most respondents (69.2%) use permaculture in their home and garden (Figure 13). It is also largely seen as a tool for personal development and learning (56.5%) and as a lifestyle choice (55.9%).

A high proportion of respondents (44.6%) work in permaculture, usually in addition to using it in their personal lives. Teaching (27.5% of all respondents) and work in a networking/advocacy organisation (25.9%) are slightly more common than permaculture design work (24.4%) (Figure 13). Of those working in permaculture, 49.3% combine two or more work aspects.

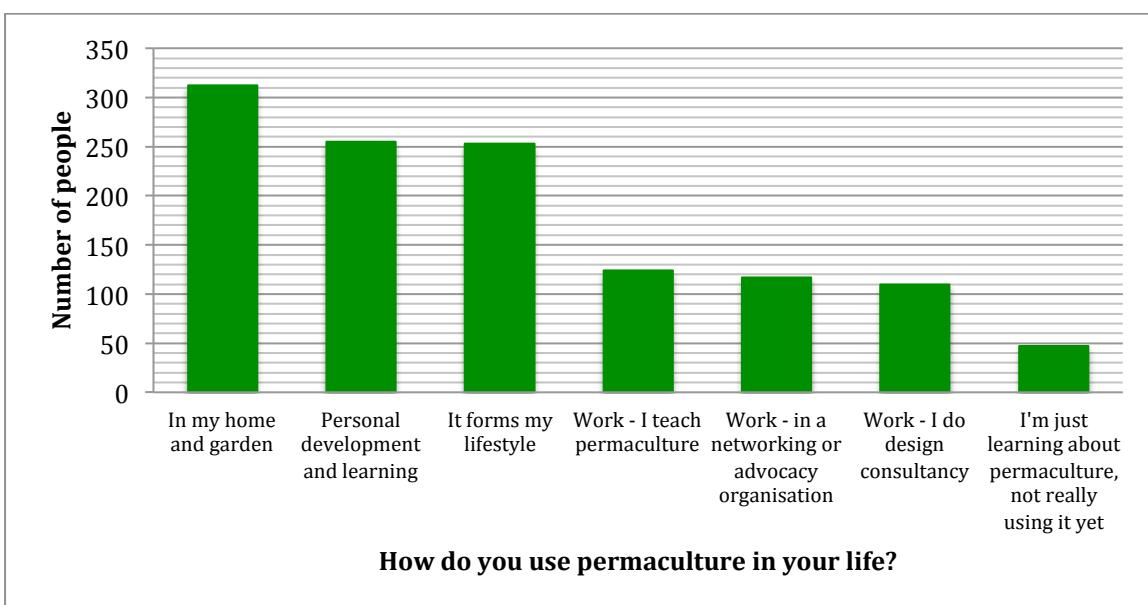


Figure 13 Responses to "How do you use permaculture in your life (select all that apply to you)?"

## 5.2. Variation by region

The overall pattern – with most people using at home, at a personal level and as a lifestyle choice – is consistent across regions (Figure 14) however, the latter two are less common in Oceania. Permaculture teachers form a high proportion (52.4%) of the respondents from African countries.

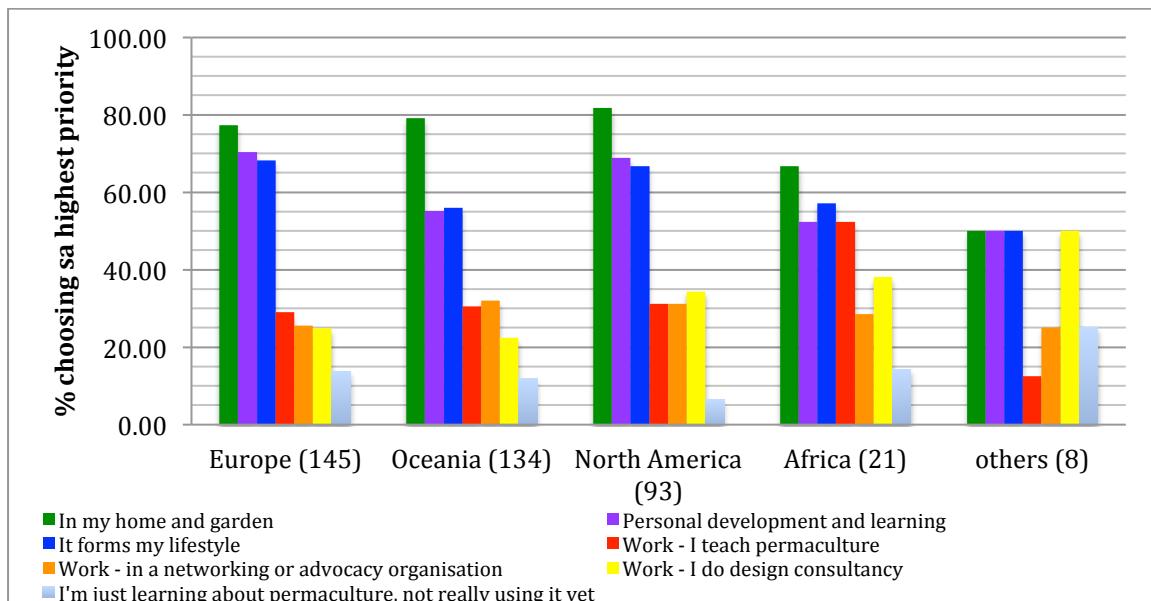
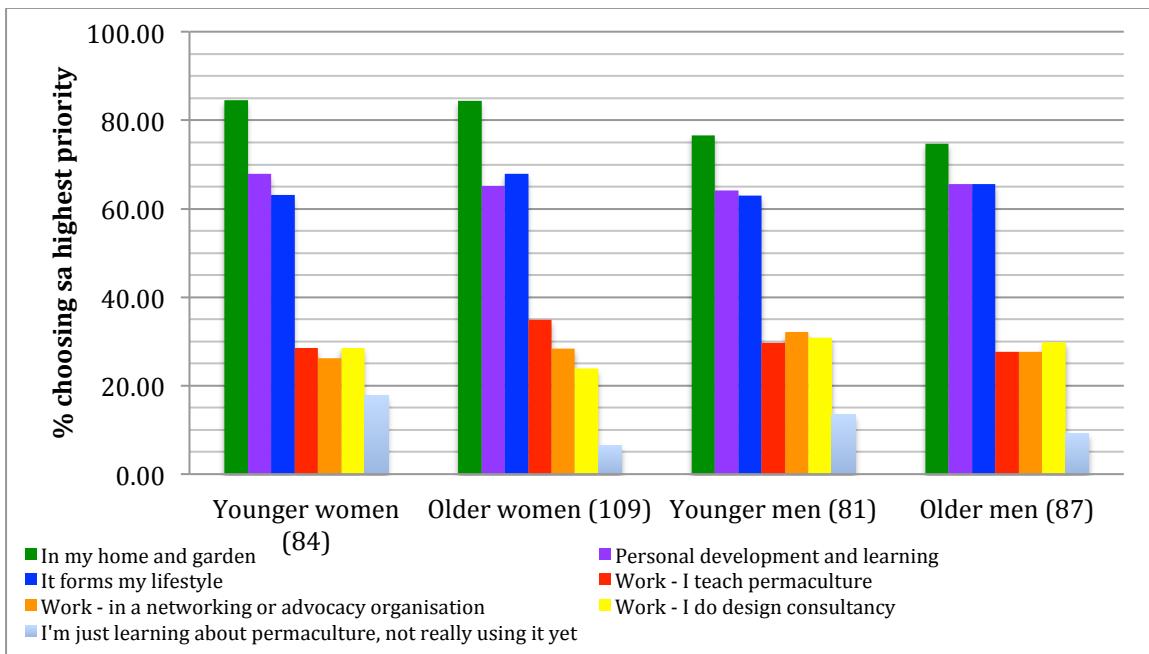


Figure 14 Regional variations in the use of permaculture (Numbers after regions indicate number of respondents in each area)

## 5.3. Variation by demographic

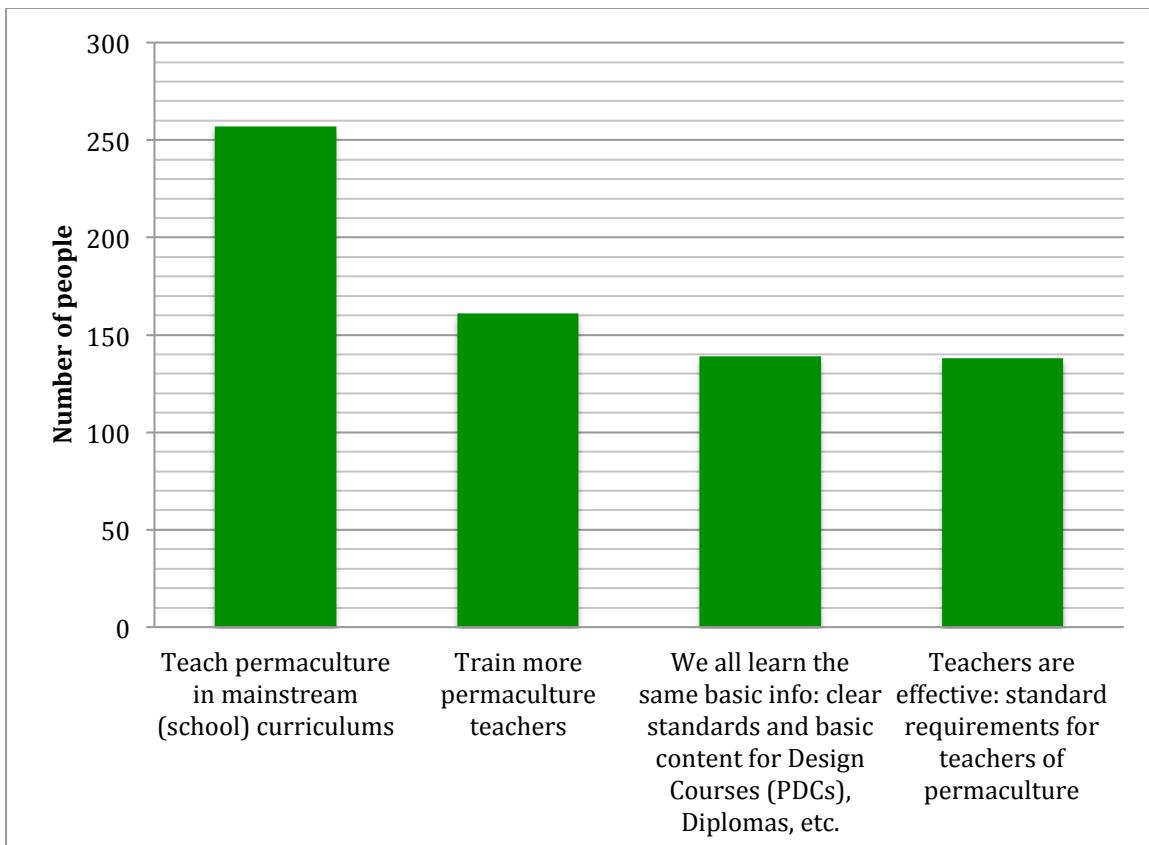
Looking across the age/gender categories (Figure 15), it seems that women are more likely to be practicing permaculture in their home and gardens, and men are slightly more likely to be working as design consultants. Younger people are slightly less likely to consider permaculture as their lifestyle and more likely to be just learning about it.



**Figure 15 Demographic variations in use of permaculture (Numbers after age/gender indicate number of responses in each group)**

#### 5.4. Existing excellence and areas for further action

Looking at the direction of education and training in permaculture at a holistic level, most people (57%) felt it was most important that permaculture was taught in mainstream (school) curriculums (Figure 16). Training more teachers was prioritised by 35.7% of respondents. Setting standards for content (30.8%) and teachers (30.6%) were prioritised by fewer people.



**Figure 16 What is it most important to achieve in permaculture training and education?**

The open-ended comments given in response to this question show an interesting array of opinions. These recognised the complexity of the global situation and key differences in educational systems, motivations and approaches between countries:

*"[I] would not do that [teach in schools] with german teachers, because a lot of teens like to learn outside school much better / would do that in african schools when kids love to go to school"*

*"These questions are rather restrictive for the diversity of the global audience for PC"*

*"Trainings in local languages or translations in local languages"*

They reflected on meeting the needs of, and limitations to, individuals:

*"I cannot do a 72 hour PDC as I breed animal and need to be at home to care for them"*

*"I have not done a PDC - the knowledge is available to those who seek it. I have learned through reading many books, reading many articles and spending very many hours observing and interacting with the living world"*

*"more teachers - more flexibility. Not everyone learns in the same ways (PDC's are hard for a large population - mothers, seasonal workers, low income, etc) more formats of PDC's and similar and teachers who understand the bioregions & populations of where they are teaching."*

*"Have modular PC awards to cater for all ages and abilities. Starting with basic awareness for young children, through school group work, and on to PDC and Diploma. All supported by specialist subject modules that could be done standalone at each level."*

The suggestion of having standardisation was particularly polarising:

*"Must establish credible accreditation for permaculture qualifications - both learning & teaching.*

*Without academic rigour, permaculture will not establish as a credible discipline for learning, teaching, research etc."*

*"the standards have dropped considerably from the first generation of Permaculture. It is paramount to rebuild and maintain these through a Global College."*

*"Don't make the diploma a prerequisite for teaching a PDC. It limits many good teachers."*

*"No-one has done research into what kind of teaching is the most transformational. Until that's clear, I'd be VERY wary of imposing standards."*

*"If you know a little bit----teach a little bit."*

*"I think standardization would hinder rather than support the movement of Permaculture."*

*"think "teachers are effective" is very important. For me it doesn't necessarily follow that there are \*standard\* requirements, but that there is basic minimum standard and beyond that a flexible system that promotes the wonderful diversity of teachers and supports them to continually improve."*

*"I am not so sure standardization is so good. This mimics a broken education system. Sometimes i think it is important to trust the network and the organic intuition of the network."*

*"Make sure that this does not become a centralised tyranny"*

*"Yes we need clarity. There is way too much competition and individualism. While we need to allow for diversity and autonomy, we need some emergent collective coherence."*

Quite a few suggestions were for basic minimum standards or requirements, whilst allowing individual tailoring and expression:

*"a minimum standard should be adhered to...but excellence should not be inhibited."*

*"For me it doesn't necessarily follow that there are \*standard\* requirements, but that there is basic minimum standard and beyond that a flexible system that promotes the wonderful diversity of teachers and supports them to continually improve."*

Other priorities and approaches were also suggested e.g.:

*"None of these. Establish storytelling as our basic modus operandi - as the basis for communicating our values and principles. [...] this focus on 'teaching; as we currently understand the term in our industrial paradigm is, again, part of The Problem and has no place in devising a solution."*

*"I'd say train more practitioners. Many teachers don't always practice what they preach."*

*"More learning/demonstration sites, of all sorts of sizes. A curated online library of really good videos and articles...that cover a lot of the basic/core info on permaculture."*

Several suggestions noted the need for more structure and organisational support around teaching:

*"It's a nice idea to train more teachers, but I think that creating demand for teaching opportunities is arguably more important"*

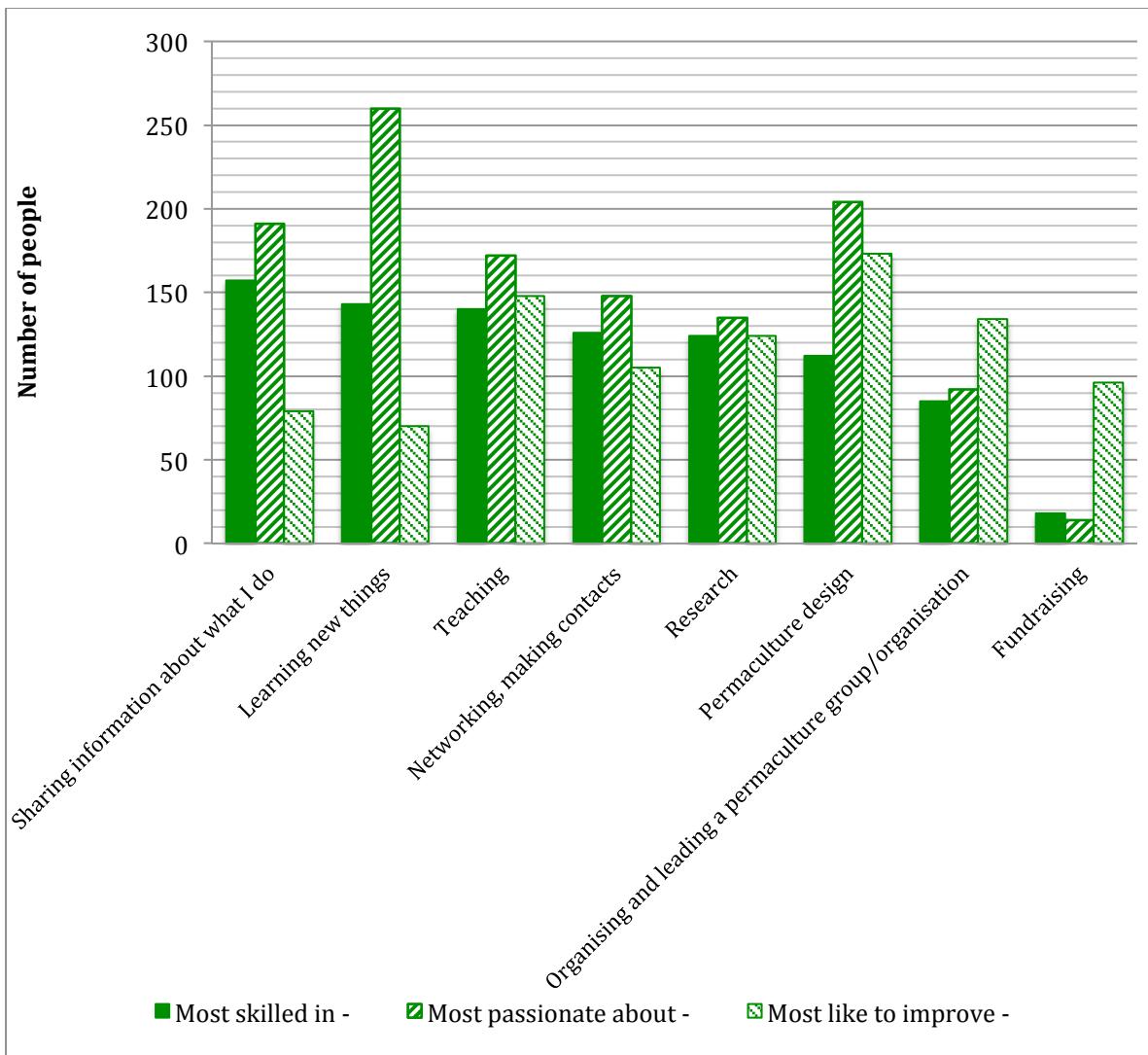
*"Effort should be made to give teachers insight into positive teaching styles and strategies in addition to more knowledge about Permaculture."*

*"Training teachers is useless unless we create networks to help them find students. Otherwise, none of them can survive by teaching."*

### **5.5. Individuals' skills, passions and needs**

Focusing down on personal skills and needs, there were interesting differences between areas of excellence, passion, and where support might be needed (Figure 17). People expressed a high level of passion for learning new things, corroborating the interpretations made in the sections on education (Sections 3.2.2. and 5.1), and for permaculture design and sharing information about their practices. They tended to feel they were good at the latter and at learning and teaching and didn't need much support with these. However, there was a high desire to practice permaculture design (which was also the area of least employment (Section 5.1)).

In contrast, very few people felt that they were skilled in fundraising, nor were they passionate about this (Figure 17). Although this wasn't an overall priority for improvement, it is perhaps the area where the current skill level and the desired level show most contrast. This is, perhaps, also linked with the lower level of finance-oriented qualifications (Figure 6). Relatively few people felt skilled in, or passionate about, leading a permaculture group or organisation and this is another area where many people would like support to improve (Figure 17).



**Figure 17 Areas of skill and passion, and those needing further support**

### 5.5.1. Variation by demographic

Regional differences in these responses show some interesting patterns. Europeans and Africans feel that teaching is their area of highest skill (Figure 18). Those from Oceania consider themselves most skilled in communicating what they do, and North Americans play a fairly even game, with research coming highest (Figure 18).

Learning remains the strongest passion in most regions (Figure 19), except in Africa where the higher proportion of teachers as respondents may explain the passion for teaching.

Improving permaculture design and teaching are the top goals for Europe, Oceania, North America, and the combined other regions, whilst Africans prioritise improving fundraising (Figure 20). In all regions people are confident in their existing abilities to learn and share information about their practice.

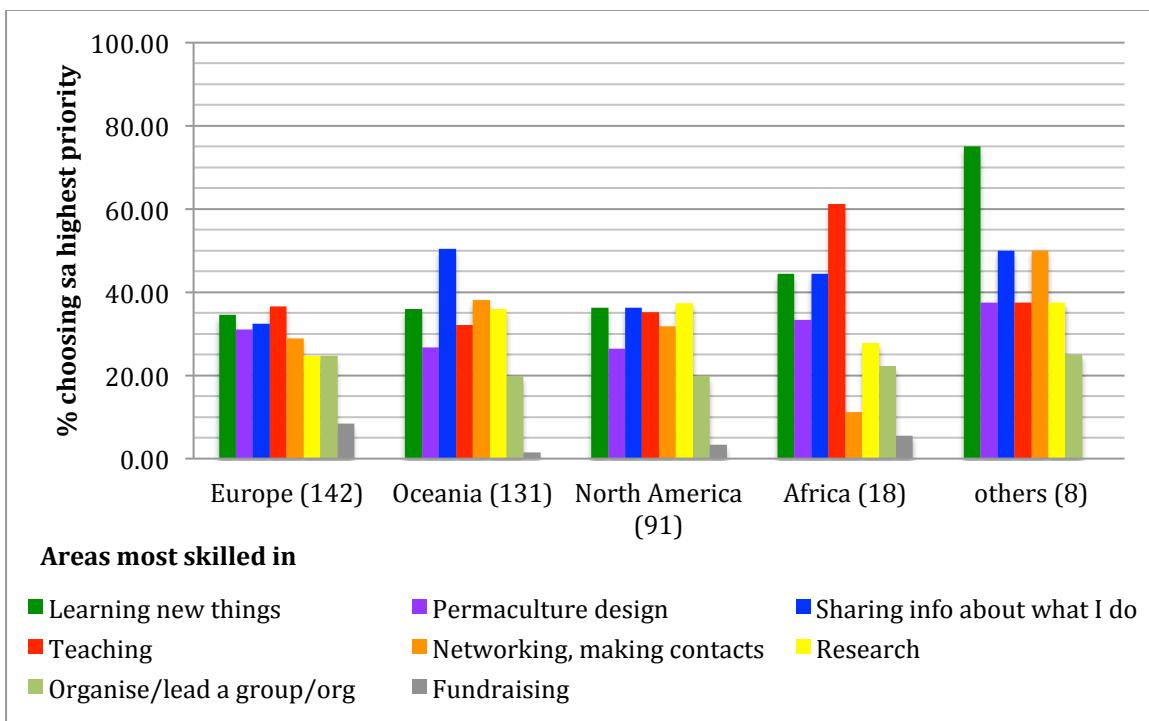


Figure 18 Regional differences in areas most skilled in (number in brackets indicates number of responses from region)

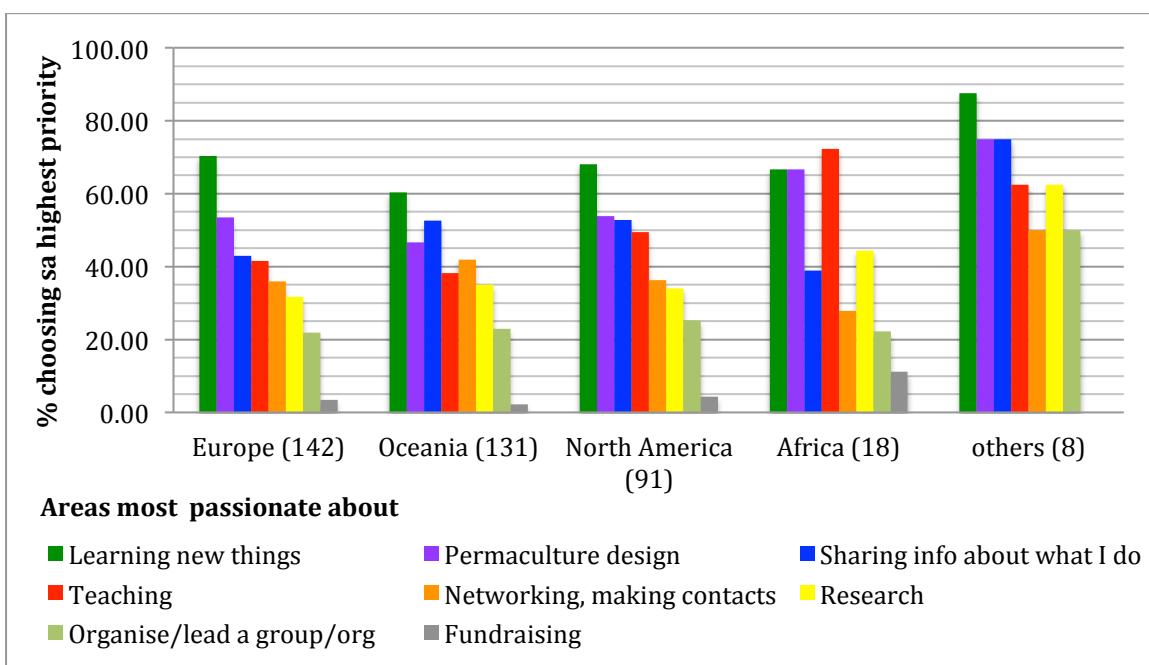
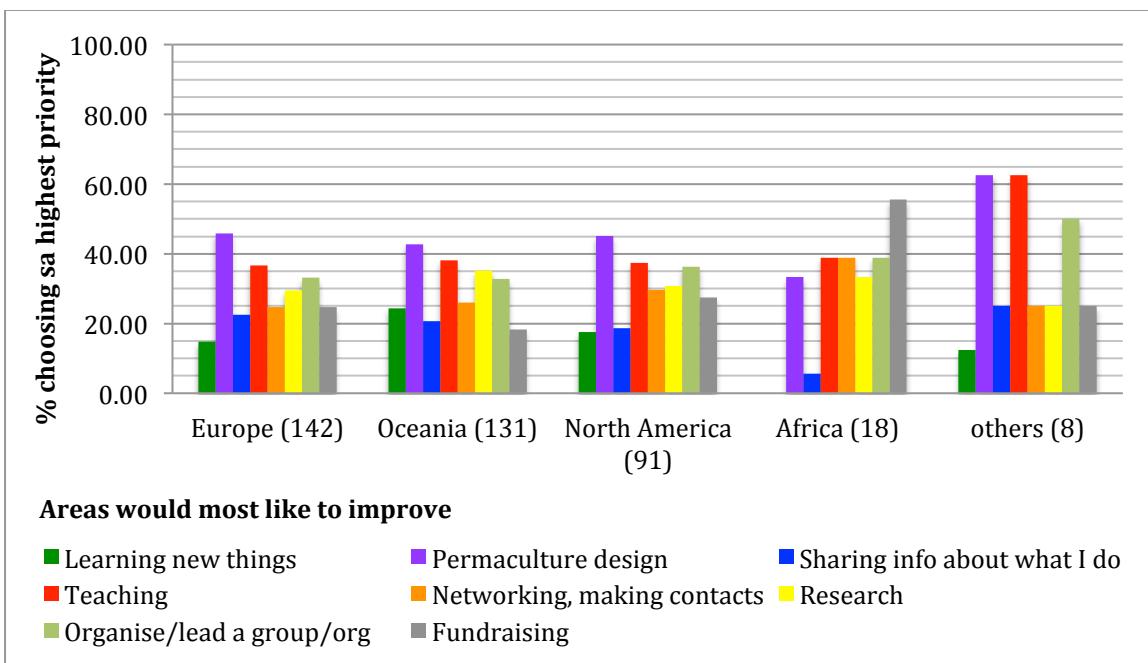


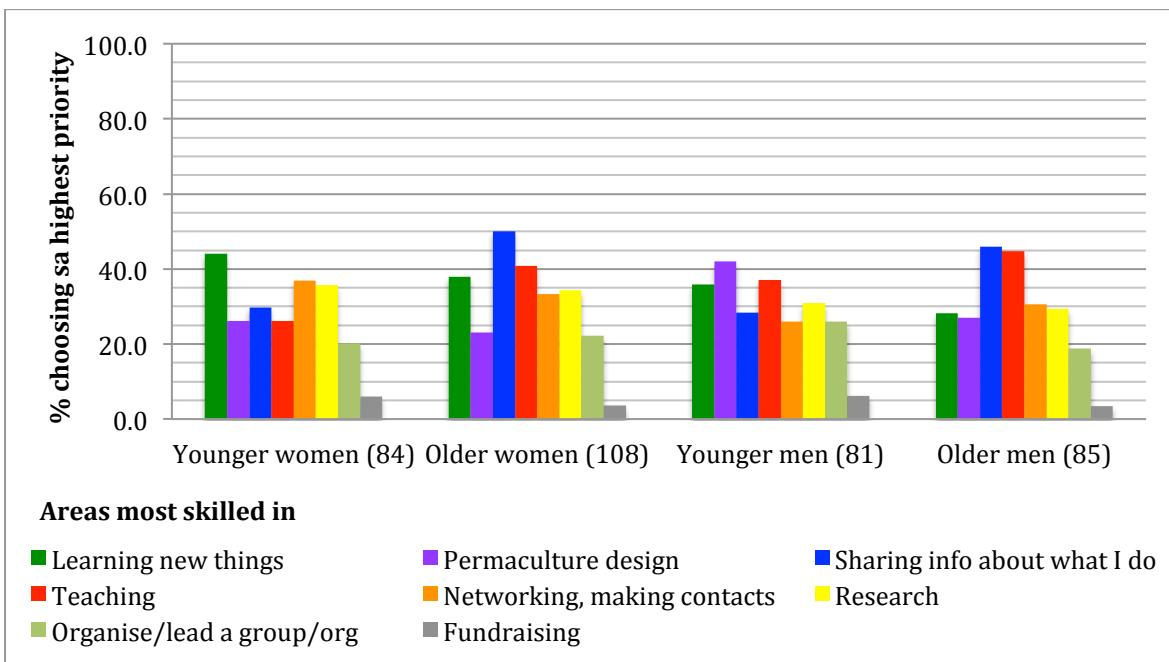
Figure 19 Regional differences in areas most passionate about (number in brackets indicates number of responses from region)



**Figure 20 Regional differences in areas people would most like to improve (number in brackets indicates number of responses from that region)**

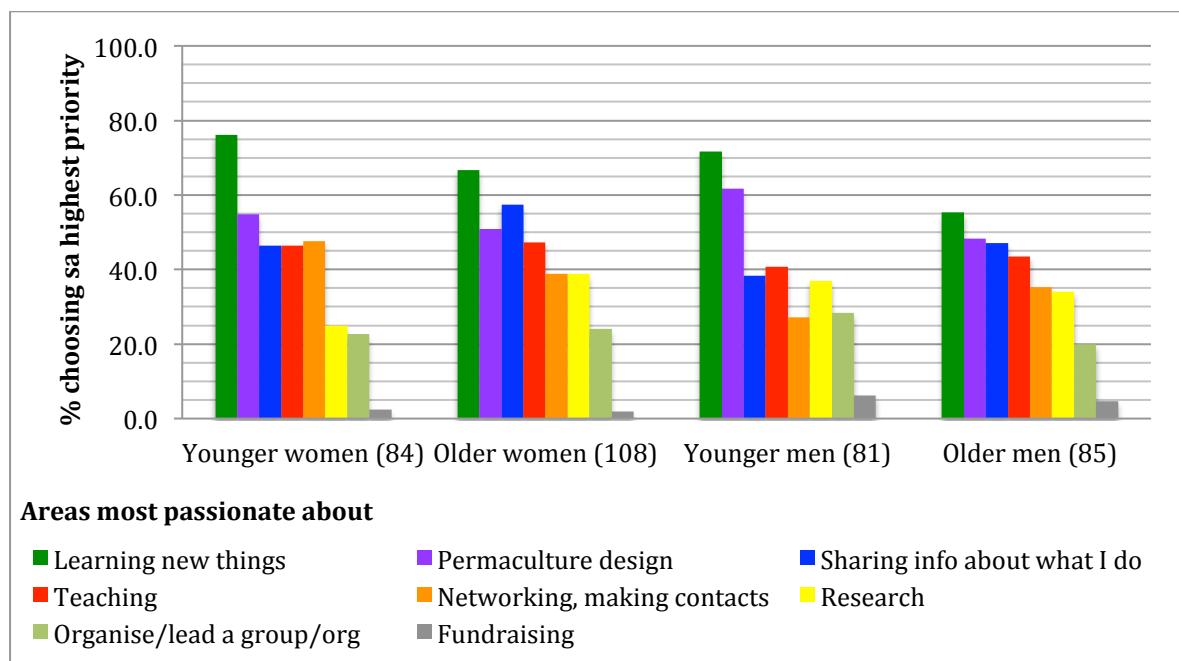
### 5.5.2. Variation by demographic

When considering the responses to these questions in terms of age and gender, it seems that older people feel they are most skilled in sharing their knowledge and teaching (Figure 21). Young women feel themselves skilled in learning, networking and research. Young men, uniquely, feel they excel in permaculture design, closely followed by teaching and learning. Although fundraising remains the skill fewest people feel they are good at, more of the younger people feel they can do this well than do the older people.



**Figure 21 Differences in areas people feel they are most skilled in, by age and gender (numbers in brackets show number of respondents per category)**

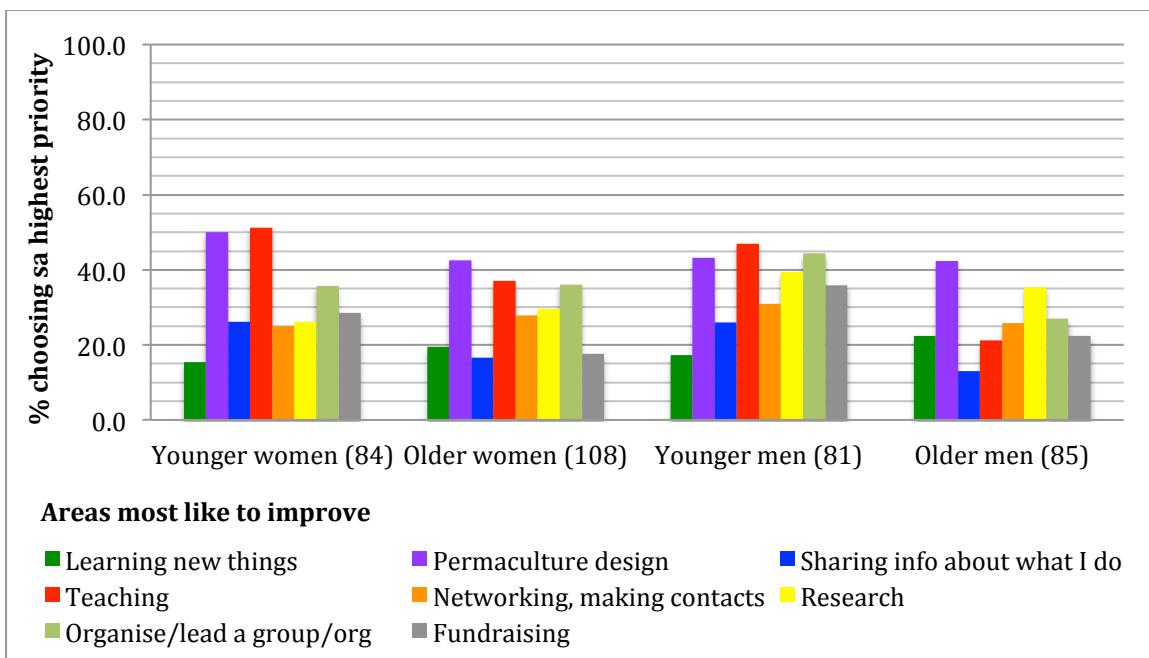
Learning remains a shared area of passion regardless of age or gender (Figure 22). Permaculture design is the second most identified area of passion for all except older women who identify sharing information slightly higher. More women are passionate about networking than are their male counterparts, and, in each age category, prefer sharing information about what they do. Although they feel skilled at it, younger women feel less passionate about research than do the other groups. Overall, more men are passionate about fundraising than are women, although this remains the lowest rated category for any group.



**Figure 22 Differences in areas people feel they are most passionate about, by age and gender**

Improving permaculture design remains a high priority for people in each group, but younger people rate improving teaching slightly above this. For older men, research is the second most stated priority and, although they rate research higher than do the other groups, younger men feel that improving their ability to organise/lead a group or organisation is their second highest priority. Women rate leadership as their third priority area to improve.

Although they already felt slightly more skilled in fundraising than their older counterparts, more younger people felt improving their fundraising was important than did older people.



**Figure 23 Differences in areas people would most like to improve, by age and gender**

## 5.6. Summary

Overall, respondents are highly motivated learners. They feel passionate about permaculture, but many would like to improve their design skills. Given that permaculture is a design system, this is quite interesting. It may reflect the idea that the PDC is very much an introduction and people want more practical experience of design projects. It may also reflect the complexity of systems-level design and the practicalities of gaining real-world experience with time to reflect and learn from interventions and observe cascades, interactions and unexpected outcomes. It is worth exploring this further in future work to better understand this apparent discrepancy.

Although few people feel skilled in or passionate about it, fundraising is seen as important by most people, especially those in Africa and the younger generations (who may be less financially secure). This is the greatest area of difference between being passionate and identifying for improvement. Given the lack of educational qualifications in this area amongst respondents, it may be that the permaculture lifestyle is appealing to those who reject current economic systems and value alternative aspects of life over wealth.

## 6. Research in permaculture

Research complements education; it gives us guidance as to what knowledge is most appropriate to apply in a particular situation, which evidence or practice should be shared more widely, and where caution is needed due to complexity or lack of information. We asked participants the following “Thinking about research, what would it be best to understand or achieve? Please rank, with 1 being most important”.

Overall, most people felt that providing reliable evidence for effective permaculture practice was most important, followed by better understanding the environmental sustainability or regenerative properties (Figure 24). Social science (improving lives, sustainable development) was next most popular. Research to widen the understanding of engagement in permaculture was least popular but still prioritised by many.

Understanding negative outcomes was the penultimate priority area, perhaps reflecting the general tendency of selective publication of research yielding “positive” results.

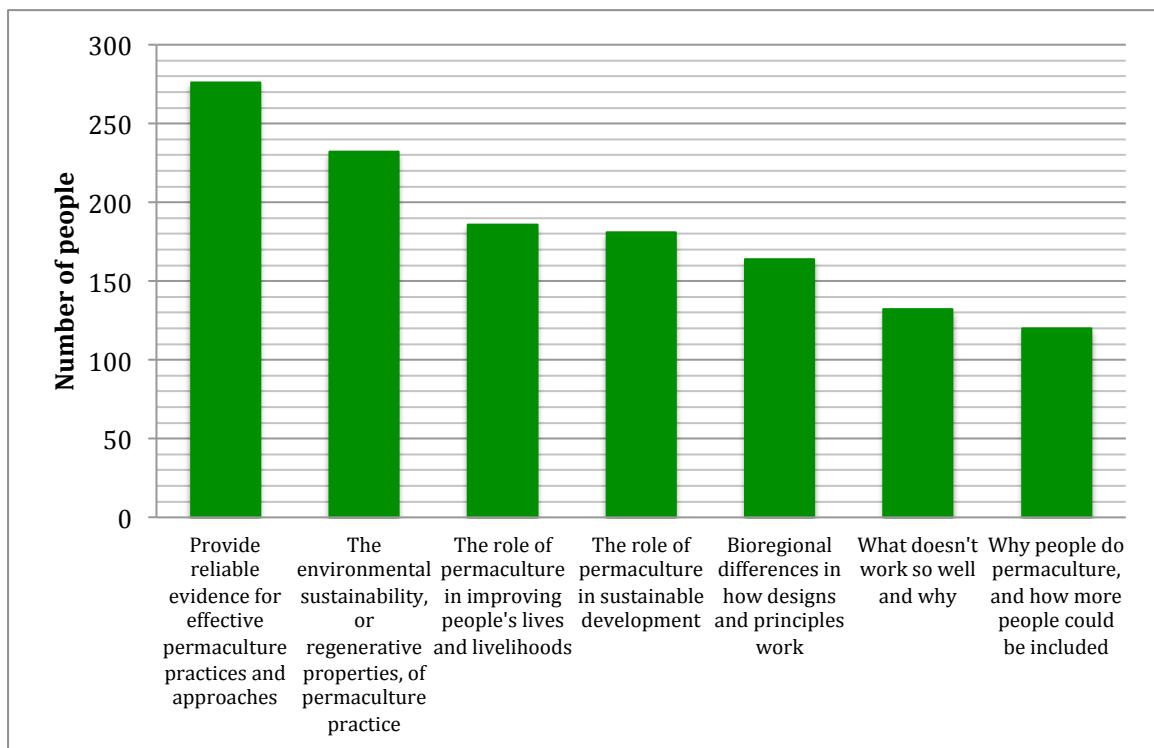


Figure 24 Prioritisation of research topics in permaculture

Overall, people felt that research was important:

*“Permaculture must be Evidence-Based, or we end up been regarded as fringe lunatics by the critical decision-makers we need to influence !”*

*“This is the key "Provide reliable evidence for effective permaculture practices" !”*

*“The scientific validity of permaculture is often questioned and would be nice to have backing in more academia based institutions. “*

Though some words of caution were added:

*"It has to be about people and work out from there,, people can figure the rest for themselves once they are engaged in doing.. by making it quasi academic you are just erecting barriers to entry "*

*"Making it easy for people to feel successful so they take it on and spread it themselves. A lot of permaculture feels too hard and too complicated. I'm OK with people who think permaculture is just sheet mulching, if that works for them!"*

*"Permaculture is not to be researched. It is to be applied."*

*"I would leave it up to researchers where they see application for permaculture in different fields."*

*"best to understand the actual research that is being done everywhere and connect it into a coherent bodies of values, knowledge and action"*

*"As permaculturists, we experiment all the time. We discover on our own what works and what doesn't."*

In addition to recognising the increasing redundancy of terms like "sustainable development", people also commented on other simplifications in the question itself:

*"Permaculture is not a set of practices - it is a way of putting existing practices together in a way that maximises our positive impact in the world. We need research that shows how integrated design meets human and planetary needs better than design for single outputs. We also need research projects themselves to be designed using permaculture principles: not 'research on permaculture' or even 'research for permaculture' but 'permaculture research'. This can best be encouraged by teaching reflexive practice: making every permaculture practitioner a researcher in her own system."*

Several recognised and(/or) wished to better understand nuances in application:

*"I feel some designers lack the data needed from the region to fully understand the ebbs and flows of the community. I feel there should be a data bank that hold regional important information that will allow for the designers to be better equipped to design systems that a community orientated and serve the function required."*

*"The environment specific to the area where permaculture will be applied need to be observed (if this is what is meant by "research")"*

*"Regional variation is so wide it is unlikely that PC will be coherent. It is more an acceptance of less short term abundance and more long term sustainability."*

Alternative areas of research were suggested, especially into economic benefits:

*"It would be good to study how culture (including ancient traditional cultures) impact permaculture practices."*

*"How the Ethic and principles work in the country's traditional/ indigenous cultures to empower the peasants or uneducated persons and put them on equal footing as designers of their own food security."*

*"The ecosystem benefits and economic advantages of permaculture in a commercial growing system"*

*"Most important: showing that it works and represents an economically viable competitor to traditional agriculture in peer reviewed international journals is critical. Without an evidence base*

*that speaks to the empiricist discourse, we will struggle to engage people outside permaculture; making an economic argument will appeal to a lot more people!"*

*"Focus on water food energy housing integrated for various climates and regional security."*

Excitement and gratitude were also evident:

*"Awesome you're considering all these!!! Thanks for your work."*

### **6.1. Summary**

Given the arguments shown in Section 4 about the credibility of permaculture, it is perhaps not surprising that most people prioritised the need for reliable evidence for effective permaculture practice (Figure 24).

There are differences in the interpretation of what research might look like – whether it is something undertaken by qualified academics, or practiced at a personal level of observation and experimentation. In Section 5, we saw that research was an area that many people wanted to improve their own skills in. This suggests a potential area for further training to help people better make and interpret their own observations, and even undertake rigorous experiments to understand best local practice. Sharing and validating such knowledge is perhaps a key to building up a wider understanding of what works where (or not).

There is opportunity to link academics with practitioners (currently being explored through work in the newly-formed Permaculture International Research Network, PIRN) which could be undertaken through citizen-science style projects or even through direct training or mentoring. Indeed, an innovative permaculture research workshop, perhaps the first of its kind, was held in Portugal in 2016 with plans for the same in the UK soon.

## 7. Permaculture organisations

Whilst the previous sections have dealt largely with the views and experiences of individuals, it is also important to consider the role of permaculture organisations in the wider movement. Early pioneers, like Geoff Lawton, have championed the creation of permaculture organisations (often called “Permaculture Research Institutes, PRI” in recognition of the original PRI in Australia<sup>14</sup>) in many countries. There is strong recognition of the role of such organisations as local and regional hubs; training and connecting practitioners, and advocating permaculture. More recently, continental networks, like the European Permaculture Network, have also started to emerge to offer connection and coordination at a large scale.

The organisations survey was completed by 52 strategic organisations in 34 different countries.

There has been an upwards trend in the number of permaculture organisations in existence since the 1970s (Figure 25), with particularly rapid growth over the last 15 years or so. As the number of practitioners and teachers increases so does both the capacity, and demand for, organisations. It has already been recognised that we need networks of local projects and examples to further promote permaculture, and organisations may offer a practical route to both offering accessible demonstration sites and connecting networks of the same.

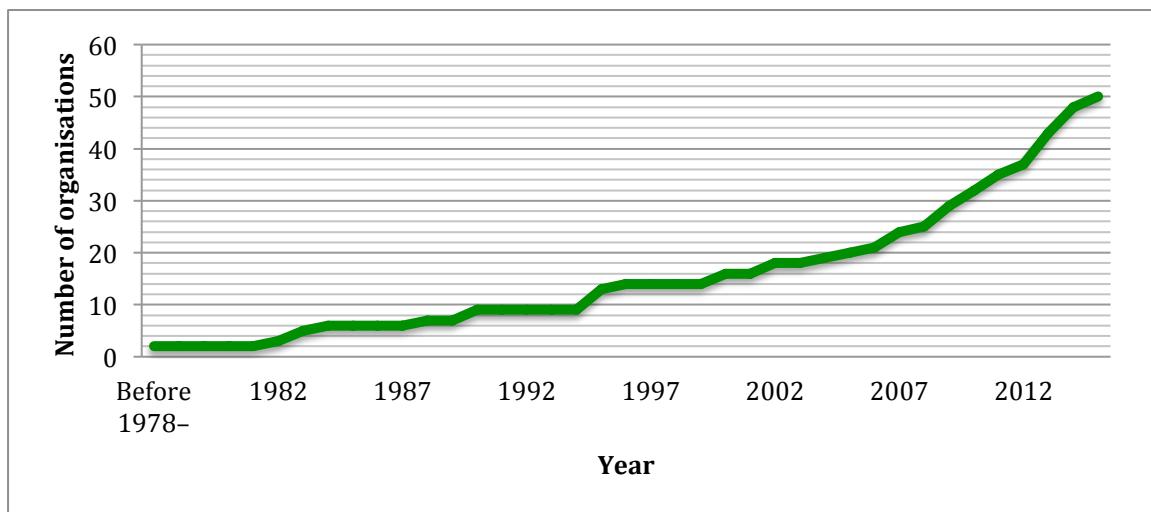


Figure 25 Cumulative growth in the number of permaculture organisations

### 7.1. Organisations who responded to the survey

This survey targeted strategic organisations, rather than inviting all permaculture projects to respond. It looked for those that acted as local hubs and worked to connect practitioners in their country or region, whilst recognising that in some countries the only existing permaculture organisation may be a home-level project. Targeting was through specific invitations to organisations identified from related research, and through explanation on the survey front page of the types of organisations sought for those who accessed it through wider calls.

<sup>14</sup> For more info, see: <http://permaculturenews.org/what-is-the-permaculture-research-institute/>

Most responses were from organisations operating mainly at a national level (53.8%) or local level (26.9%), with some operating regionally (listed between locally and nationally. 15.4%) and just a few (3.9%) working mainly in the international arena.

Many of the organisations that responded were very small; 11 had only one member of full time staff, 20 had five or fewer full time staff. Only three employed more than ten people full time but one of those, uniquely, employed over 100.

Judging from the names of those organisations that responded, not all operate solely as a “permaculture organisation”; several represent allied organisations which may have arisen from permaculture ethics and principles, or have a large permaculture content in their provision. The organisation with over 100 staff (FTEs) falls was described as “broad organisation with many elements” of which permaculture is one part.

Of the 52 organisations who responded to the survey for organisations, 52.9% were European (from 20 different countries), 15.7% from North America, 9.8% from Oceania, 9.8% from Africa, 5.9% from Asia, 3.9% from the Middle East and 2.0 % from Latin America (Figure 26).

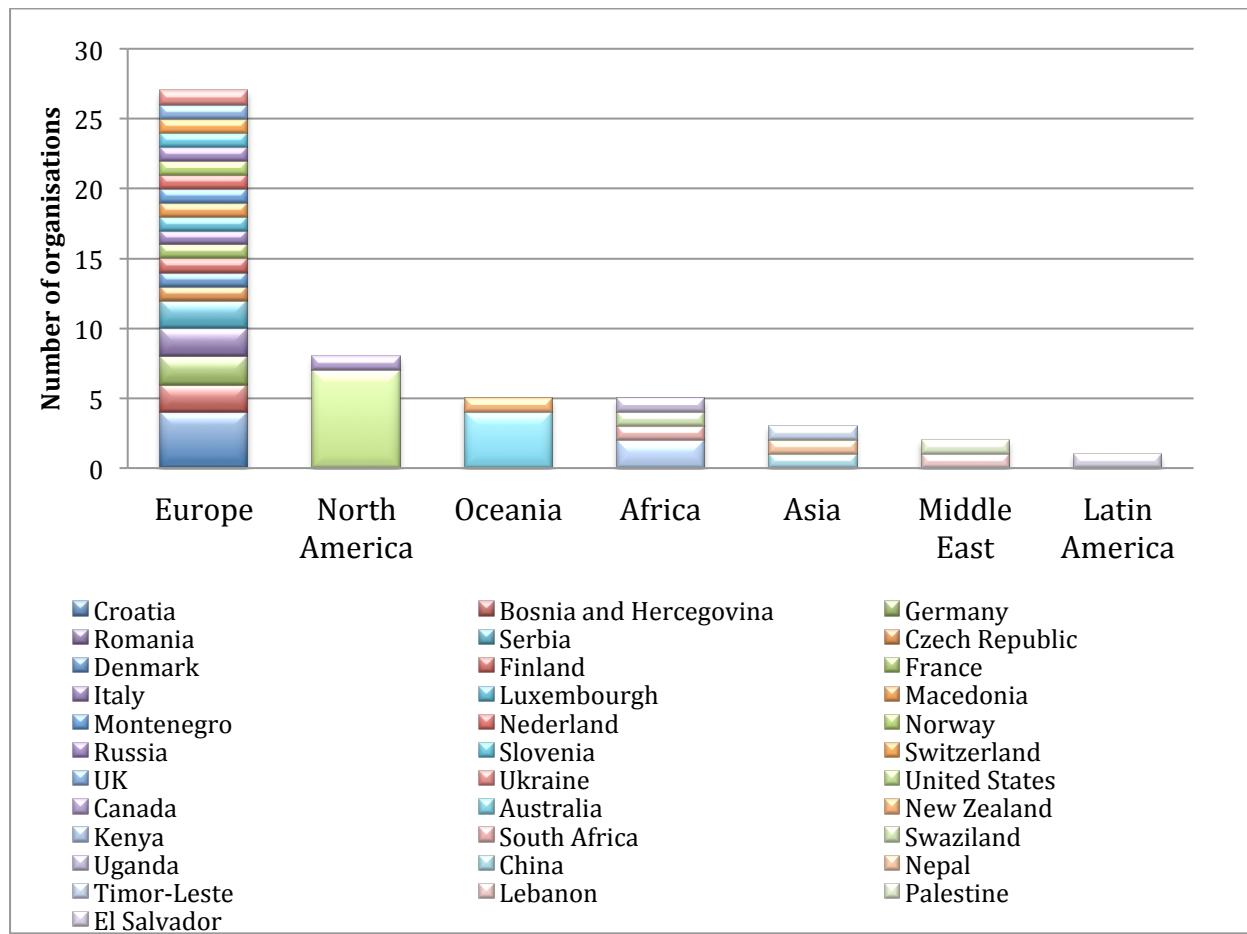
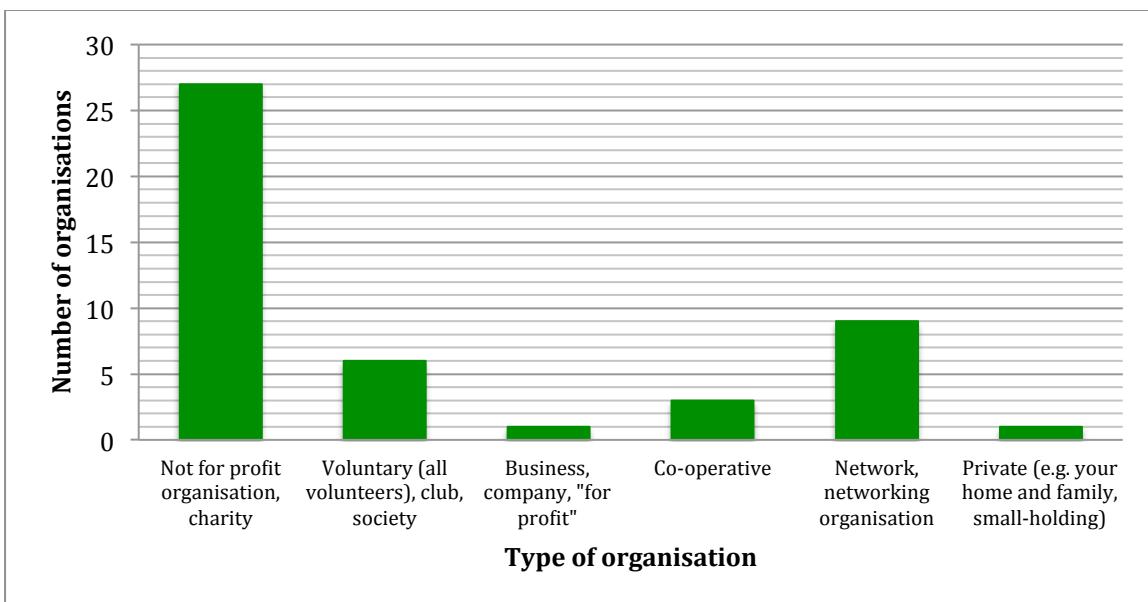


Figure 26 Locations of strategic organisations that responded to the survey

## 7.2. Types of organisations

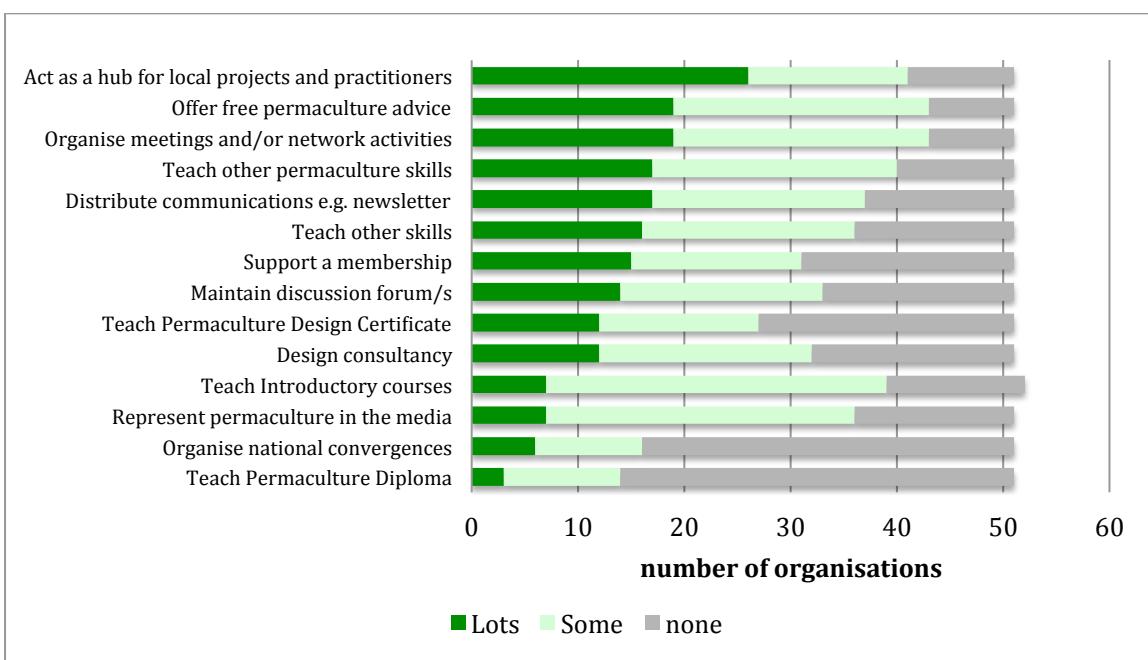
The vast majority of the permaculture organisations who responded are not-for-profits or charities (Figure 27). Next most likely are networks or networking organisations. Very few organisations are run as for-profit businesses.



**Figure 27 Distribution of organisational types in permaculture**

### 7.3. Activities of organisations

The majority of organisations do act as hubs for local projects and practitioners (Figure 28). They offer free permaculture advice, and organise meetings and network activities. Most teach permaculture and other skills. They tend to distribute a regular communication and sometimes represent permaculture in the media. Just over half teach the PDC (53.9%). Almost a third – 31.4% had organised a national convergence. The Permaculture Diploma is offered by just 27.5% and is the least likely activity of those listed.



**Figure 28 Areas and level of activity of permaculture organisations (options were “we do lots of this”, “we do some of this” “this is not part of what we do” [the latter differentiates from “we don’t do this but would like to; shown in Figure 29])**

However, being able to teach the Diploma and organise national convergence are the most frequently selected area where organisations would like to improve (Figure 29), suggesting that the lack of offering is a question of capacity rather than demand.

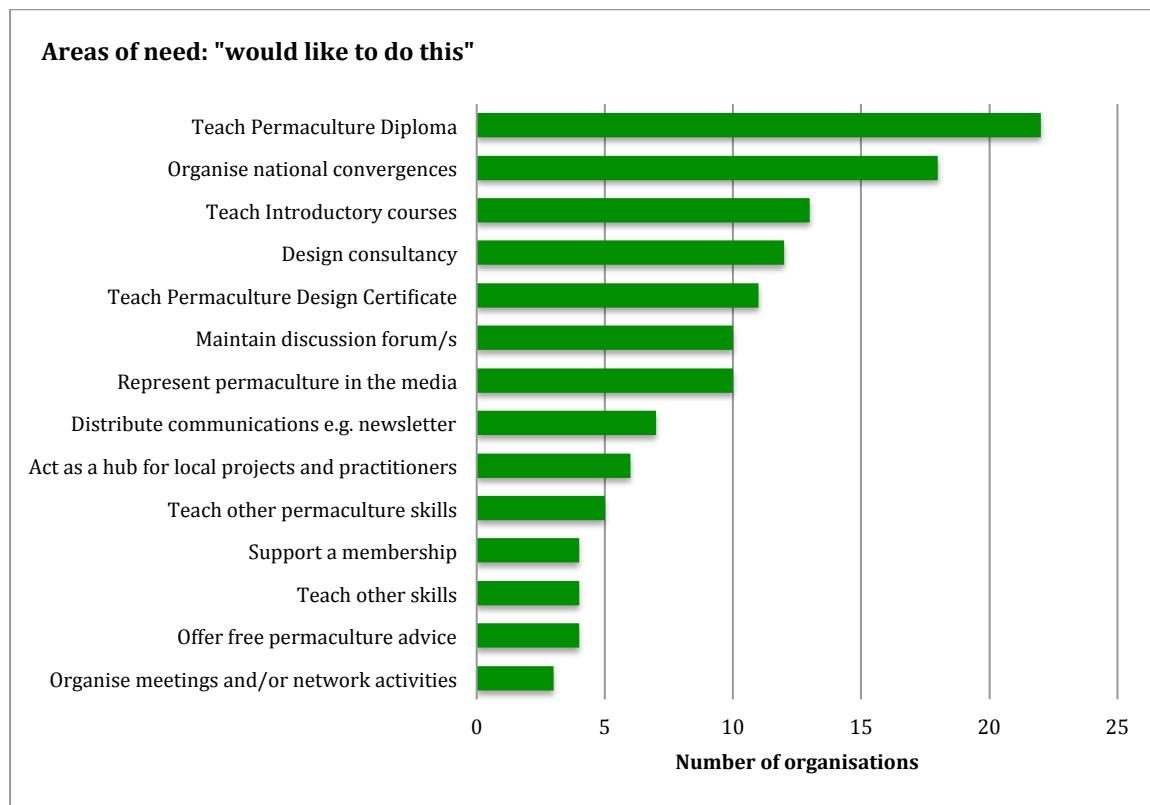
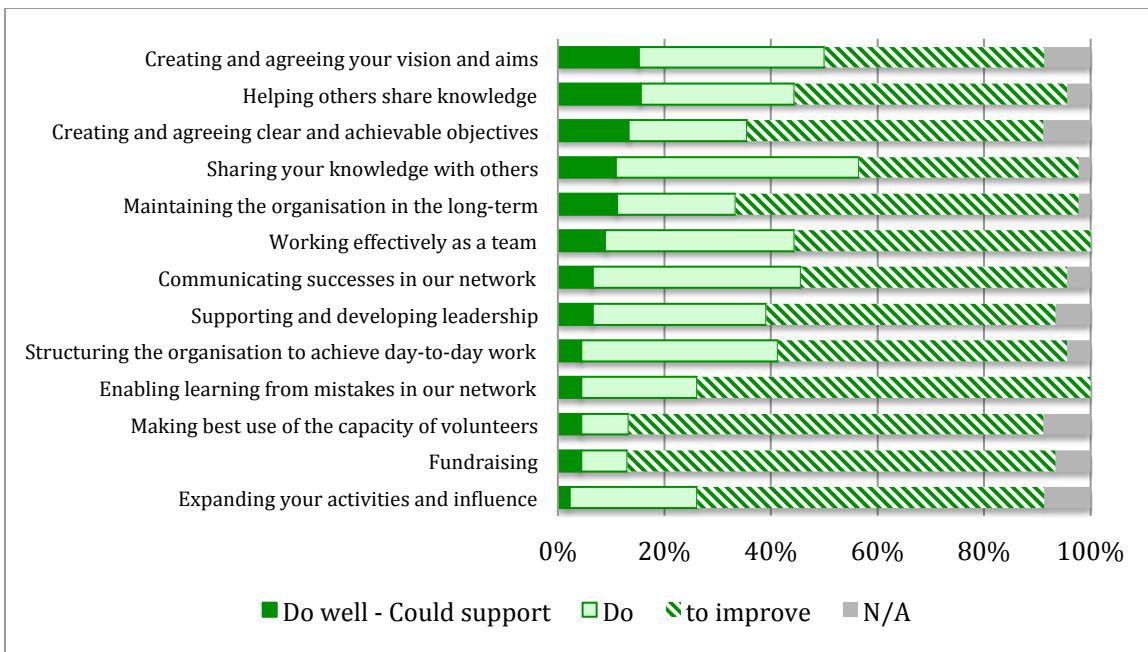


Figure 29 Areas in which organisation would like to improve their capacity or offering (response: "we don't do this but would like to")

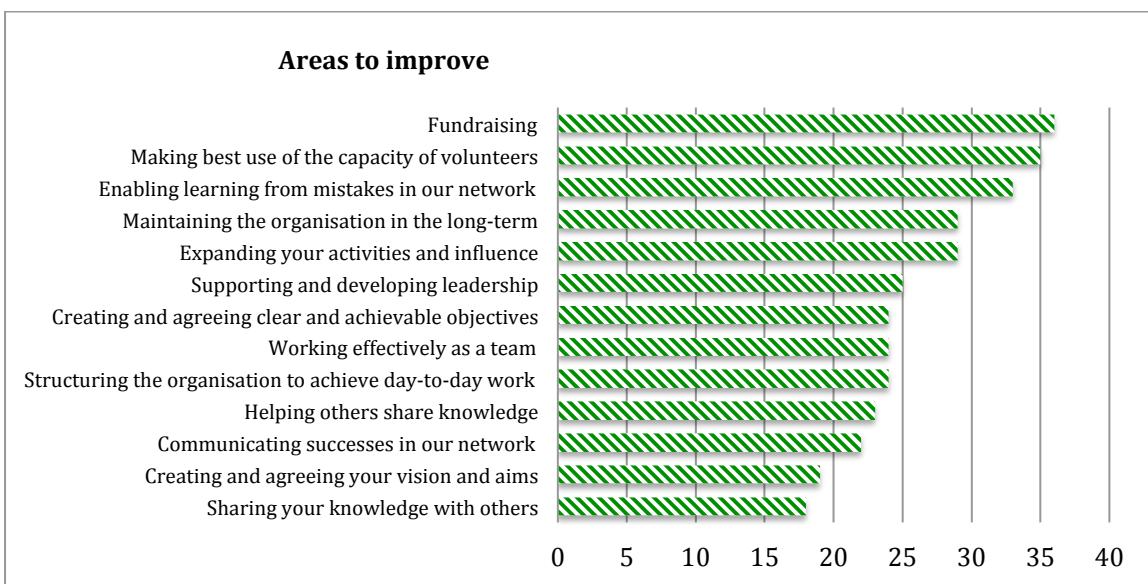
### 7.3.1. Structure, activities, and development

Only a few of the organisations who responded felt that they were really effective at key organisational tasks and activities and could support others with it (Figure 30) suggesting that knowledge and/or capacity in basic business areas is limited. Sharing your knowledge with others was the only category where over 50% of organisations felt they did it effectively or better. Expanding activities and influence, fundraising, and making the best use of the capacity of volunteers were the areas fewest organisations felt able to achieve.



**Figure 30 Organisational capacity and leadership (responses: "We do this really well and could support others with it", "Can do this effectively/have achieved this", "Would like to improve this", "Not applicable/we don't need to do this")**

Of the areas where organisations felt they needed to improve (Figure 31), fundraising was most prioritised (72.3% wanted to improve this). Making the best use of volunteers was the next highest need, followed by learning from mistakes in our network. The long term view – maintaining the organisation in the longer term and expanding activities and influence - was prioritised by over half of the organisations. Many also wished to support and develop leadership.



**Figure 31 Areas where organisations feel they need to improve (clarified from data shown in Figure 30, values are number of organisations)**

#### 7.4. Leadership and morale

Most organisations felt that their staff morale was high (58.7%) or very high (39.1%) with only one organisation feeling that morale was very low (none selected "low")

Comments suggested that staff and volunteer enthusiasm was high but not always matched by capacity to achieve the work:

*"That [very high morale] is both great (most of the time: boundless energy and dedication) and terrible (sometimes: close to burnout)."*

*"Board are very enthusiastic but have their own projects and commitments therefore, not able to commit much time for the organization."*

*"With volunteers the level of enthusiasm doesn't necessarily meet the level of commitment."*

*"I work with a team of people with great enthusiasm who love the work they do the volunteers fluctuate from very high to low."*

When asked "how do you nurture leadership?" a variety of answers were given. Some suggest that leadership was not directly supported, but may emerge through the motivation of individuals or training in related skills:

*"We don't. Leadership is self-motivated."*

*"The highest energy shows the next step."*

*"Trial by fire."*

*"Nicht so gut" [Not so well]*

*"We have no agreement about how to nurture leadership. There is a tendency that we are not many who wish to step into leader roles, and so leader roles are often overloaded. We have dealt with this by sharing out tasks between people on the board."*

*"Workshops on communication, people and permaculture, sociocracy."*

Whereas others offer training and support:

*"Through permaculture leadership apprenticeships and trainings; through monthly leadership training within each local member association."*

*"Ongoing leadership development programming, on-the-job training, inviting shared leadership, established leaders practice modelling and stepping back."*

*"Thru encouragement and intergenerational support always on hand for the newcomers and younger practitioners who are stepping up."*

*"We choose young leaders and let them learn on practical examples, but they have support from all members"*

In many organisations, the team structures were non-hierarchical and mutual support was given:

*"We run a very flat organisation, whereby team members are invited to work & develop areas of interest to them as long as this reflects our organisational goals & the needs identified by community members."*

*"We encourage joint working and support for each other."*

*"By encouraging open communication, group participation and decision making in open and transparent way. Sharing together Success and Failure as a Team."*

*"We use sociocratic circle model and decision making by consent. Weekly meetings, daily scrums; individual coaching."*

*"Führung ist jeweils Projektbezogen, es gibt keine Person, die die Führung des Vereins inne hat. Es gibt lediglich aus rechtlichen Gründen eine Person, die auf dem Papier die Geschäftsführung macht."*

*[Leadership is project-related, there is no person who holds the leadership of the association. For legal reasons, there is only one person who is responsible for the management of the paperwork.]*

Many organisations are using non-hierarchical models of organising and working (like sociocratic circles) in which leadership roles are shared according to need, skill or on a simple rotation. Whilst some do offer specific leadership training, it is clear that others have not considered this, perhaps because they are at an early stage in development *"This is too high a theme for us at this point of the project :)"*, or have relatively few people involved.

## 7.5. Summary

Many permaculture organisations are very small and are staffed by a small number of highly motivated staff and enthusiastic volunteers. People are passionate about what they can achieve and are looking for ways to work together in an equitable or non-hierarchical manner, often using approaches like sociocracy, consensus-oriented, and holacracy (self-organising teams). Leadership is variable and may be undertaken by those most willing to do so and put the work in, shared amongst all circle members, or actively supported and encouraged.

Most organisations tend to be not for profits, supporting wider collaboration and offering free advice. We might, therefore, suggest that respondents are motivated by outcomes and the changes that their work might achieve more than by profit margins. However, it is clear that fundraising is an important area to develop for the majority of organisations. Whether this reflects a lack of training or experience in this area, an increasingly competitive funding market, or a challenging financial situation has not been investigated here.

This concern over fund-raising and longer-term maintenance of organisations does highlight a key vulnerability across the permaculture movement; if our organisations are reliant on charitable funding sourced through grants and donations do we have secure foundation on which to achieve our wider goals and ambitions? Do we need to be more enterprising?

## 8. Network development

One of the key aims of the Next Big Step is to enhance global coherence in permaculture. There are many ways that this could happen; from helping local practitioners to connect and work together, to coordinating global-scale action on important issues. We asked people their opinion on the most important actions we can take to improve permaculture practice (Figure 32). Most people prioritised the local sharing of knowledge and practice, supporting a local focus to any actions. Connecting like-minded people, and sharing inspiring examples was also important. Fewer people prioritised a global knowledge share, and providing space to ask questions was seen by fewest people as important.

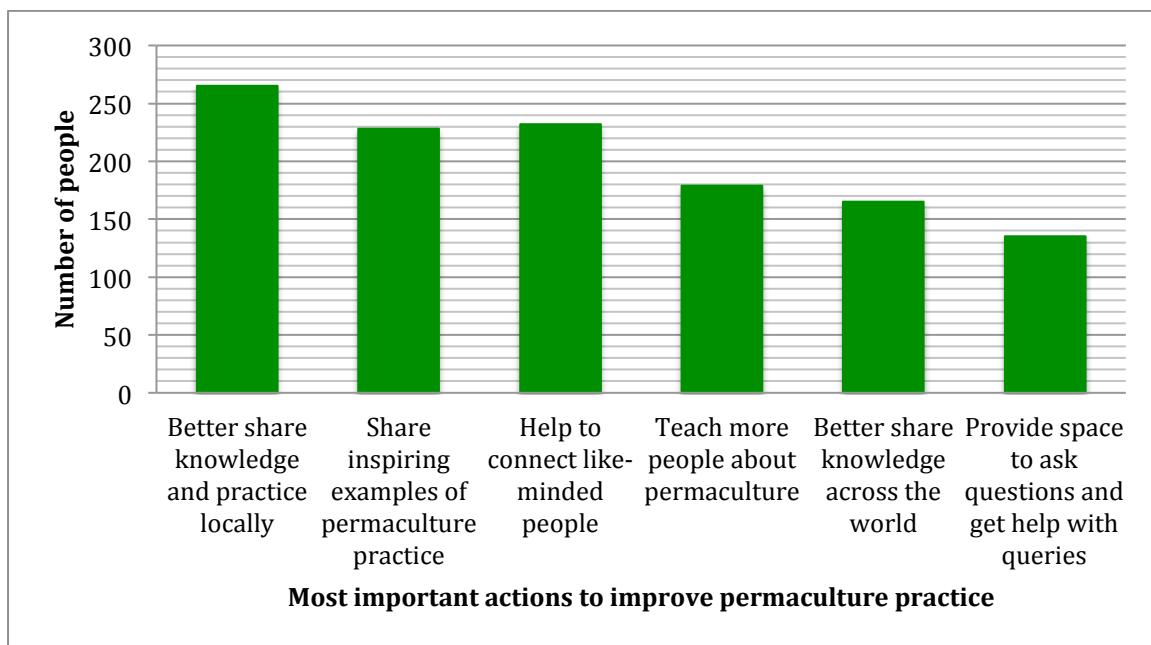
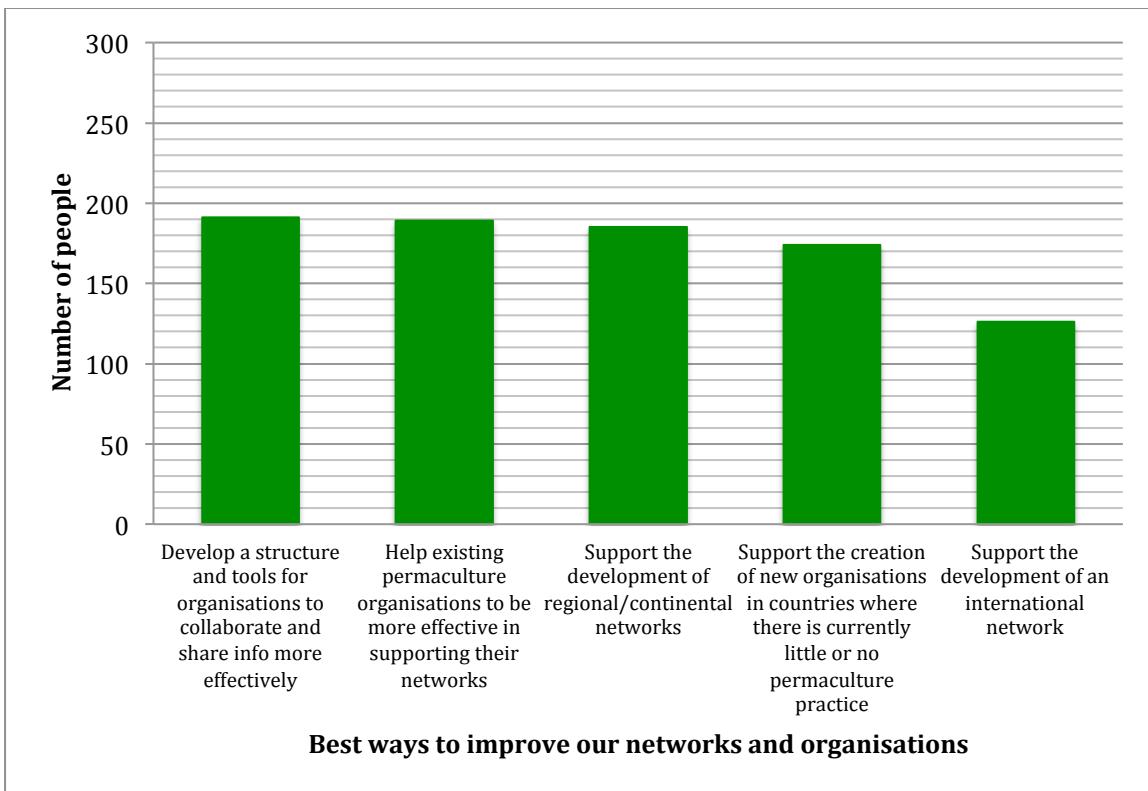


Figure 32 What are the most important things we should do to improve permaculture practice?

Asking directly about improving networks and organisations gave important insights. Developing a structure and tools to help organisations collaborate and share information was prioritised by most people, closely followed by helping existing organisations to be more effective in supporting their networks. Developing an international network was prioritised by fewest people. This suggests a preference for developing ways for existing organisations to work well together, and working at a local level rather than creating new organisations or working at very large scales.



**Figure 33 how should we improve our networks and organisations?**

Comments provided further illumination and ideas.

#### Attention to self-financing/supporting systems:

*"with a must proviso on generating our own income, as we learn by doing a recognised PDC. Otherwise we support the antithesis of Permaculture."*

#### Prioritising existing emergence, and caution on top-down or power-led systems:

*"Networks emerge organically, so before investing in any new structures identify those that already exist & engage"*

*"Don't whatever you do take permaculture into a UN or McDonalds type infrastructure - we don't need a posh global network with a head and 10 bishops or lords or VP's. We need feet on the ground with access to all the information. Spend your time and money and energy collating all the knowledge out there and making it incredibly easy to access and search."*

*"Bottom up network, rather than a top down."*

*"And help local permaculture guilds develop as grass roots change agents"*

*"develop structure and tools = support dev. of an international network: should not be (yet another) 'new' organization, just build on connecting existing ones"*

#### Looking for cooperation and support:

*"Cease competition between permaculture centres and work more together"*

*"Do not spread ourselves too thin.... There are so many individuals working tirelessly - united with others they may be more effective."*

*"Cooperate with all the existing organisations who are not permaculture but likeminded and do a lot of good"*

Making good use of online space, without becoming too reliant on it:

*"Intl. network is important and it'd be great to achieve this through low impact means (more online, less flying to IPCs...); hence more regional & continental networks where overland travel to convergences is more practical."*

*"A Center on Line to share & connect freely among all."*

*"High tech communication will go down. Create resilient backups."*

*"Sow the seeds widely while we have the tools (internet, global travel, etc.) to spread the knowledge (and to learn from others also since permaculture is NOT the only way!)"*

*"I feel an International network that can house the local hubs would be a good way of connecting the local and international under one umbrella that services each other. The web portal needs to be reasonably well advanced and allow the use of latest tech to be used."*

Finally, an important reminder:

*"Remember its not about the number of species in the system its about the number and quality of effective relationships."*

## **9. Recommendations and conclusions**

This report provides a basic overview of a vast amount of information that has been collected by the Next Big Step team in various ways over the last few years. It contributes to the existing permaculture knowledge and practitioner and academic research and publications on the nature and state of permaculture. There is much scope to more widely integrate the findings of this report with other high quality work and to delve even deeper into the analysis and understanding of the data collected.

Based on the work presented here, however, some initial conclusions and cautions can be made:

- There is recognition of the benefits that greater coherence in permaculture could bring, particularly to organisations, but concern that a top-down approach would not be sympathetic to the ethos of the permaculture movement.
- There is a strong desire to participate in meaningful activity that empowers and inspires individuals, changes local environments and communities for the better, and contributes to solving global level issues.
- Current permaculture practitioners are highly motivated by learning new things, and are likely to be innovators and pioneers.
- Some changes to how permaculture is presented more widely are likely to be needed to make it more accessible to a greater variety of people.
- Permaculture organisations tend to most desire support with fundraising, and have some concerns over their longer-term security.

Work towards greater global coherence should be sensitive to the ethos of permaculture and would be most effective if it could:

1. Facilitate connections between organisations in permaculture, developing mutually beneficial support structures for teaching, leadership, and organisational development.
2. Develop a credible evidence base for permaculture, and support the wider dissemination of such findings to expedite real change at local to global levels.
3. Recognise the strength of the diversity in the movement and enable organisations and individuals to connect and collaborate more effectively on areas of mutual passion.
4. Facilitate connections between permaculture organisations and allied organisations to enable more effective action on shared issues.
5. Enable social eco-entrepreneurial activity to help more individuals and organisations to find rewarding occupations in permaculture.

In addition, the following approaches merit further consideration:

1. Develop locally-relevant sets of exemplars of successful permaculture practice and share this widely through both electronic and on the ground access.
2. Make effective use of online space to facilitate connections, conversations, and collaboration in existing areas of shared passion.
3. Recognise the great diversity of interests and ideas already in the network and support people to share and develop these.
4. Support practitioner and academic research to develop individual and collective understanding of effective practice.
5. Support greater access to, and uptake of, permaculture training especially (but not exclusively) in mainstream education including schools and universities.
6. Support existing organisations and networks to connect and improve their ability to work together
7. Help organisations to share, access and understand useful ways to structure and organise effectively, including sharing a range of effective leadership and collaboration styles.
8. Help organisations to share, access and understand approaches to becoming financially self-sufficient.
9. Where guidance is required offer recommendations, not regulations, and allow people and organisations to make their own choice about these. Consider transparency in who has chosen to implement or practice them.
10. Seek to further engage with communities of practitioners under-represented by this research and allow for reflecting on, modifying, and adding to, the above to account for further needs and ideas.