LOCALISM: THEORY AND PRACTICE INCLUDING A CASE STUDY OF THE TRANSITION TOWN MOVEMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study considers the role of localism in sustainable development. The value of localism in terms of community development and civil society is followed by a description of frameworks for localisation such as local economies and food supply. A critique of localism is included. The report then describes the Transition Town Movement and assesses its effectiveness using survey data from the United Kingdom (UK) and Belgium. The Transition Town Movement is found to be successful in rapidly spreading a new grassroots response to oil dependency and climate change. Obstacles to the movement’s success include, increasing the breadth and depth of engagement, a value-action gap and the possible irreversibility of systems. The report closes with policy recommendations.
Held (2005) among other cosmopolitan theorists, describes the interconnectedness of modernity, how actions and policy now have far reaching consequences on a global-level across economic, social and environmental fields. This might encapsulate: the export of water scarcity through trade liberalisation, international agreements under the United Nations, or the effects of one country’s environmental policy on the crops of a village several thousand miles away. This interconnectedness forms the foundation of sustainable development theory. Theorists and practitioners as well as citizens must balance economic development with fair and equitable social progress as well as neutral environmental practices for development to remain sustainable.

This challenge is most pressing in the case of climate change and its affects. Trade and industry in one country may affect another country’s population for years to come. Evidence already exists to show that climate change is affecting the health of citizens living in countries that are likely to be the least responsible for increased carbon emissions (Stern, 2006). At the same time, Bodansky (1999) highlights a lack of legitimacy in environmental legislation and agreements. Legitimacy of global environmental action is restricted by both agreements that threaten sovereignty due to unelected officials specifying environmental restrictions, and a lack of citizen participation and deliberation in climate talks. In addition, climate change also threatens peace. The Stern (2006) report on *How Climate Change Will Effect People Around The World* points to changes in rainfall distribution as well as melting of glaciers and sea water flooding of freshwater supplies as potential threats to water supply worldwide. The Afro-Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO) (2009) report points to water-related conflict as a new phenomenon that will only continue and increase
as the world stops fighting over oil and instead begins war over water. As such, the environmental impact of immediate economic growth can be seen to threaten economic growth and social development in the future.

**ADDRESSING THESE CHALLENGES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

Failure to manage these challenges at a global or national level has led to calls for greater local-level participation and democracy. Rogers et al. (2008) describe the importance of participation in ensuring development is sustainable. Hopkins (2010) argues that re-localisation of energy production, food production, services and so on increase the ability of communities to live in a ‘post-oil’ environment in a way that other forms of initiative do not, because when citizens are engaged at the local level they become a motivated ‘subject’ of change.

Gorg and Hirsch (1998) write that capitalist dominance and resultant state and class-based relations prevent international organisations from introducing any reforms that do not have a capitalist grounding. As such, the authors write that a recognition of the current situation as well as a reframing of state relations outside of capitalist discourse is necessary. This reframing, the authors write, must occur through a decentralisation of social, political and economic power as well as a properly functioning local civil society. Rogers et al. (2008) agree with this premise in arguments for the empowerment of the ‘local’ and greater local-level citizen participation. The theory of decentralisation and subsidiarity is an important principle in enabling democracy to spread through all layers of governance, and this non-federalist subsidiarity theory also forms a large part of European Union policy objectives.

However, the only truly democratic process of achieving the Gorg and Hirsch’s particular reforms would be a grassroots uprising resulting in the dissolution of the over-arching
capitalist regulatory powers of states and international organisations without interference from external actors, in short a Marxist revolution on a global scale. Perhaps this will occur. Apart from theoretical and ideological reasons for why it should not, there is also a logistical reason. How might such an uprising occur across time, space and so many billions of citizens? A step toward this uprising could be greater local-level democracy, participation and perhaps autonomy. Many authors with less revolutionary fervour advocate localisation for varying reasons in the achievement of sustainable development, these ideas will be discussed.

WHAT IS LOCAL?

“The essence of localisation is to enable communities around the world to diversify their economies so as to provide for as many of their needs as possible from relatively close to home... this does not mean eliminating trade altogether, as some critics like to suggest. It is about finding a more secure and sustainable balance between trade and local production”. (Norberg-Hodge, 2003: 24)

Uphoff (2013) writes that the notion of ‘local’ implies the following; ‘localities’ such as a network of communities, ‘communities’ and ‘groups’, emphasis is placed on the spatial. Local should not be confused with simply, what is not international or national, Uphoff writes that the local should display a sense of collectivity. It is argued that when people are connected through a locality then they feel a greater responsibility toward each other and a mutual understanding as well as the ability to mobilise and manage resources. Uphoff suggests that these levels of solidarity and local self-reliance do not happen without leadership and in some cases institutional backing.
ACHIEVING LOCALISATION: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

This section will begin with a definition of community development and a summary of its core values because many of its key features are contested. At the Budapest convention (Craig et al., 2004:) on community development, delegates from over thirty countries attempted to provide a definitive definition of community development-

“Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organisations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies . . . To work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.” (Craig et al., 2004: 1)

Ledwith (2005: 1-2) describes the main premise of most community development theory, the idea of ‘empowerment’.

“Empowerment involves a form of critical education that encourages people to question their reality: this is the basis of collective action and is built on principles of participatory democracy.” (Ledwith, 2005: 1)

Ledwith (2005) explains that community development is most effective when the community is empowered to take action and engage in reflection, on issues on a local, as well as global, level. When such issues as oppression, injustice and ecological damage are challenged on a community level- individuals are empowered through projects and activism to make a difference and this in turn empowers others. Ledwith also explains that when
those involved feel empowered, theory and practice meet (praxis), theory is generated in action and so theory informs action.

Confidence, critical consciousness and collectively are also cited by Ledwith as well as Putnam (2000) as crucial values underpinning the process of community development. Those involved in community action feel an increasing sense of confidence as the movement grows, and as they question their reality through critical consciousness, this leads to a greater sense of collectivity- even those who are not directly involved, can feel a sense that the world is not atomised and that cohesion works.

Community development is often referred to in government policy and the ideas of community development outlined above are advocated as solutions to sustainable development challenges resulting in stronger and more effective localisation. For example, the Budapest declaration (2004: 2) suggested that all European Union states should appoint a minister for community development and that governments should reflect on research which has demonstrated the effectiveness of community development. Theorists such as Putnam write of ‘social capital’- that a strong, empowered and involved civil society is a valuable asset- effectively increasing social well-being, increasing democracy, reducing inequality and strengthening the state as a whole. Policy-makers are interested in community development, the ideas it promotes and research showing its effectiveness have led to various policy including funding and grants as well as regeneration projects and social partnership models

Action taken at the community level is thought to benefit from the positive aspects of democracy, social capital and empowerment described previously. This development is necessary for the enactment of further community orientated initiatives discussed below.
Therefore community development, in whichever guise, is a necessary foundation for any of the visions described in this paper. A critique of community development will be included later in the essay.

**LOCALISING THE ECONOMY**

Localising economic activity is thought be some theorists (Berry (2001), Morris (1996), Shuman (2000)) to be the most effective solution to some of the problems created by a more globalised world. By localising production and consumption, it is argued that, on a local level, communities are able to make more informed and sustainable choices, preserve their environment and improve quality of life. On a global-scale, it is argued that localising economies reduces the use of carbon-based energy and other scarce resources usually in poorer regions, reduces exploitation of cheap labour and ensures fairer wages and prices for the producer. On a moral level, the community is able to make decisions on what practices are acceptable without placing trust in unaccountable corporations and a reduction in consumption results in less waste, for example tool libraries and swap-shops reduce the amount of goods sat gathering dust in garages. On an individual level, localising consumption is thought to solve problems of time-poverty, an ‘addiction’ to fast consumption and results in better quality, longer-lasting goods. As global food and energy prices rise, a local economy may in the long-term prove the best value.

Curtis (2003) describes the theory of eco-localism as an economic theory compatible with sustainable ecological economics that focuses on localising economic activity. The theory encompasses local currencies and regional food economies and all other local-level economic projects, sometimes described as the legitimisation of the informal economy. What Curtis describes as eco-localism is also known as cosmopolitan localism and the living
economy. Curtis describes the main goal of eco-localism as preservation, the economic activity should both preserve an economy that operates at community level as well as the eco-system on which it depends. The theory also places greater emphasis on the importance of geographical community and a healthy society in which to live than neo-liberal or classical economic theory. Whereas classical economics places great importance on economies of scale, eco-localism emphasises the negative externalities of trade removed from the locality, such as ‘food-miles’. In addition, eco-localism also strives to foster self-reliance, independence and stewardship of the natural environment.

The main features of eco-localism are a decreased importance on production for profit and an increased importance on the geographical restrictions of nature and human capability. This results in a social economy that is more likely to feature buying clubs and skill exchanges as well as a restriction on the distance of trade. The five forms of ‘capital’ according to the theory are ‘Natural, Social, Physical, Financial and Human’ (Curtis, 87: 2003). In order for the economic system to be sustainable, each form of capital must be appreciated and preserved. Therefore, in terms of consumption, eco-localism does not follow classical economic theory in the prioritising of preference and utility maximisation but rather prioritises needs. Consumption is reduced
and limited to goods produced within a certain geographical region. Because the pollution resulting from consumption remains within the region, the community is less likely to support an environmentally damaging producer who for instance, dumps waste into the river.

In terms of sustainable development, Sonntag (2006) writes that localising economies presents an opportunity to transform a global economy that is unjust and removes autonomy from the locality into a network of autonomous resource conscious and democratic local economies. However, Sonntag points to the infrastructural restrictions on simply turning economies local. Most communities would need investment into renewable energy sources and a system for linking small factories with local businesses, although technology is improving to the point where small-scale production is increasingly possible, it remains unattainably priced. The main localisation projects to see a dramatic increase in uptake are the ‘local food’ movements such as the resurgence in farmer’s markets and local business associations, set-up to encourage local business and consumer activity.

North (2010) includes a disclaimer in terms of localisation suggesting that eco-localism does not refer to complete self-sufficiency as practiced in Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia, it does not mean that everything must be produced at local level, but rather that there is the
correct balance between local, regional, national and international markets. The vision of localisers, it is written, are societies that are diverse, interdependent and resilient.

LOCALISATION AS A RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE AND PEAK OIL

Arguably, the most pressing argument for localisation, more than democratic and social advantages is climate change and its affects as well as the contended issue of peak oil. North (2010), argues that these two environmental problems are important reasons for localisation because they signify the end of a forty year domination of neo-liberal capitalist agendas that externalise emissions and take advantage of low cost fuel, locations and communications technology to increase profitability. It is argued by North that the increase in price and instability of fuel as well as the imminent threat of climate change disaster will force the economy to re-expand notions of space and time, compressed in previous years by elements outlined above. It is argued by North that eco-localisation is increasingly important under these conditions and may lead to the end of the assumption that more growth means more wealth and that restrictions on trade liberalisation lead to poverty. Although many argue that technological transitions to non-carbon based economies as well as the increase in carbon-capture will mean that localisation is not necessary, at present there is no single solution to the decreasing levels of petro-fuels and the increasing need to cut carbon emissions. Imports currently account for 21% of the UK’s carbon emissions (North 2010: 588), the theory of eco-localisation argues that societies should not exchange goods across the globe that can be produced locally, for example apples flown to Ireland from South Africa when apples can be grown and stored in Ireland. In terms of climate justice, most goods produced in the global South are transported to the global North for consumption, this externalises the environmental damage from North to South whilst removing goods
from the economy of the South and increasing emissions that affect poorer regions more substantially. Localisation may also reduce emissions due to a closer proximity of services and reduction in consumption due to co-operative schemes. However, North warns that localisation must avoid injustices in resource rich and poor regions, mass movement of people due to climate change and better endowed regions and informal settlements created around prosperous regions.

Hopkins (2010) uses the work of Meinshausen to describe the need for dramatic action to cut carbon emissions.

“Meinshausen estimated that there is about a 70% chance of staying under 2°C if global emissions are cut by 50% from 1990 levels by 2050, and that emissions would need to have peaked by 2020, and that they would need to continue being cut beyond 2050, and to have reached zero before 2100. Meinshausen suggested that a programme of reductions capable of producing cuts in emissions necessary to avoid a 2°C rise would mean that by 2050, the annual UK personal carbon allowance would be between 1.96 and 1.10 tonnes of CO2 per year, a cut of between 86% and 92% on 1990 levels, a level of emissions similar to that of Mozambique today (wri 2005).” (Hopkins, 2010: 34)

This scenario is in order to keep temperature rise under 2°C, the Stern report, however, highlights that even at this increase, the effects of climate change will be noticeable in an increase in crop failures, dramatic weather events, malarial deaths and effected water supply amongst other effects. A reduction of the UK citizens’ carbon emissions by between 86% and 92% represents a dramatic life-style change. Many theorists see localism as the only model capable of ensuring adaptation to this cultural and personal change.
A CRITIQUE OF LOCALISATION

Despite the many positives of localisation outlined above, there are also many reasons why localisation may not provide all of the answers to sustainable development challenges. Localisation may be seen by some as restricting freedom and choice, corporate powers might argue that globalisation and global trade keeps supermarkets stocked with diverse and interesting produce, that consumers demand cheap disposable fashions and home ware. It is also argued that global corporate activity provides employment and revenue for countries, although the recent Tax evasion cases of Amazon, Google and Starbucks amongst others, calls the revenue argument into question. As outlined above, localisation may depend on significant investment into infrastructure and this is unlikely forthcoming in those poorer regions that are seen by corporations as emerging markets. The immediate cash injection of corporate activity in an area is seen by many as a necessary step in the path of development and progress (Wolf, 2004). The following discussion will provide a critique of localisation from a sustainable development perspective. The omission of neo-liberal or global corporation arguments allows the debate to move beyond the ideological and toward a refinement of a particular vision of sustainable development.

Blake (1999) finds that government policy initiatives for sustainable development tend to push responsibility for environmental and social behavioural change on to the individual without proper consideration of the political and socio-economic circumstances. In this way there is found to be a gap between policy and action in which government calls for greater consciousness and information concerning the ‘best’ choices to make are spread around the population in a generalised manner highlighting broad concerns without considering individual barriers to change as well as socio-economic barriers. In addition, governments rarely link individual action to wider institutional or policy change, so calls for individuals to
take more responsibility for how they shop are not matched by calls for supermarkets to take more responsibility for how they source produce. Blake is concerned that local level initiatives may follow the same trend, for example; calls for localised consumerism not matched by policy on supermarket encroachment into communities in the guise of ‘local’ or ‘express’ stores. Blake is also concerned that local schemes might not reflect the individual and diverse nature of different communities as well as diversity within communities, that a one-size-fits-all approach may be taken by governments in order to shift responsibility to the individual or community without making the effort to ensure that the solution is appropriate and therefore sustainable. Similarly, Blake suggests that schemes to increase local participation must be matched by local powers rather than participation only to a certain level and confined by unmoving and out of bounds policy objectives at the national level. If localities are to take responsibility for sustainable development then the amount of adjustment that participants are able to enact must be enough for genuine change to take place.

Dupuis and Goodman (2005) also present a critical analysis of theories of localisation. It is stated that the theories of localism tend toward the utopian; portraying the global as the tyranny of capitalism and the local as a conscious and ethical site in which local identity and norms are embedded in the community. The authors suggest that in reality, local sites are often unequal and a hegemonic discourse exists both resulting in exclusive and conflicting values. It is also suggested by the authors that romantic visions of localism are vulnerable to co-optation by corporations. The authors describe how localism has become a counter-discourse to the ideas of globalisation and capitalism in which the local is seen as romantic and utopian however, the formation of the discourse is itself value-laden and undemocratic.
The emergence of these values as a hegemonic discourse of localism may be as harmful as alternative discourses because spatial relations are linked with social relations to the exclusion of some, the local food movement according to the authors, therefore, has become homogenously white and middle-class. Curtis outlines similar concerns when it is suggested that usually only those who have earned money through non-environmentally friendly activity feel socio-economically able to make consciously environmental consumer decisions and the process of reaching that point is usually more destructive to the environment than the positive effect of decisions made after. In terms of the domination of local food movements by a homogenous social group as described by Dupuis and Goodman, the solution suggested by the authors is a better understanding of the diversity in attitudes and opinions on the ‘right’ food choices and the meaning of ‘local’. This would result in a more diverse definition of both the problem and solution. The authors also warn that fostering localist sentiment treads a thin line between geographical sectional politics and xenophobia. Local movements might form alliances with xenophobic factions due to similar ‘means’ without proper consideration for differing ‘ends’. Self-reliance and independence as buzzwords in the sustainable development movements might lead to conflict within other contexts. Finally, the authors argue that a process of ‘glocalisation’ in which power moves below and above the national level reducing the importance of the nation state, may facilitate a neo-liberal agenda of decreased state-power and more globalisation. To frame localisation as the antithesis of globalisation may be misguided because in weakening the influence of the nation state, local movements may be increasing the power of corporations and supranational entities such as the World Trade Organisation. Localisation has formed a part of neo-liberal agendas in dismantling state regulation and protection. It is especially problematic to prescribe localisation ideals in the case of developing countries because it
could result in the further weakening of state-level regulation and influence opening communities up to exploitation and the detrimental effects of free-markets on the environment.

In order to avoid the pitfalls described, authors such as Guthman (2004) and Young (2001) argue for a more process-based and open ended understanding of localisation. It is also suggested that a change is needed in the hegemonic discourse of the local as a site of anti-capitalism and geographical locality as the most important site of strength and autonomy. In short the localisation movement would need to move from the utopian to the open ended and organic.

In terms of regulation on a local-level which is the most formal example of localisation, Bushnell et al. (2007) write that it may result in conflict. Local regulation of markets has resulted in part due to local pressure from environmental concerns and partly due to impatience with national governments’ inactivity in terms of capping market activity in order to reach environmental targets. The paper argues that local level initiatives are unlikely to greatly impact upon environmental targets such as carbon emission reduction and may result in leakages and a movement of trade to non-regulated localities. The failure of localities to implement affective regulation may negatively affect the likelihood of an adoption of policy at national level and so a failed local attempt might stop a national policy that could make a substantial difference environmentally.

Uphoff (2013) also draws attention to the mistake of presuming that local institutions are necessarily more sustainably minded. By simply increasing the power of local institutions without other provisions to avoid domination, local institutions may choose to exploit
resources for short-term gain. In addition, institutions with regulatory powers must be democratically accountable.

In terms of community development, authors such as Craig (2007) and Ledwith find conflict between community development when theorised as a social movement and conducted as a policy intervention. Community development as a policy intervention, is claimed by Craig to conflict with the theoretical basis of social movements in that when capacity building is expressed as policy it is stripped of the ideas of community development in order to facilitate government policy. Craig uses as an example, a scheme in Victoria, Australia in which only those communities with structures in place to support a community project were chosen to participate and that any activities seen as political were disallowed from the framework. When this is compared with the values of community development described in the beginning of this report, it is clear that the policy has strayed from the ideas of the grassroots almost beyond recognition. Craig also points to the lack of skill development within these initiatives. Skills which would equip members of communities to run their own projects are often replaced by ‘developing self-esteem’. Freire (1972) describes this as the - theory/ practice dichotomy. (“Thoughtless action, action less thought”) (Johnston cited in Ledwith 2005: 2). This premise is that without the proper application of theory into practice, the state is able to dominate community development progress and so more often community development projects become what is fashionable in state policy as that is where funding is. This is as opposed to the result of a social movement intended to reflect upon, question and change those structures which lead to inequality and a lack of voice in political affairs (Craig cited in Ledwith 2005: 3)
North writes that criticism of localisation can come from the left and the right, whereas the right are likely to argue that trade liberalisation is the ultimate aim of market forces and restrictions will stifle growth, equally the left might argue that localisation goes against notions of openness and cosmopolitan ideas of a global society. However, as described above, cosmopolitan authors also argue for a vision of global society that is both regionalised and globalised as civil societies within a global civil society. North writes that although the local can be closed and oppressive, most theories of localisation concentrate on interdependence and networks, a balance of production and legislation at varying levels of entity rather than an isolationist view of the local, in this way the global may be incorporated in to the local. In addition, others (Kovel, 2007) argue that localisation would not stop businesses being exploitative because the capitalist system means that firms must grow in competition or fail, this claims that localist ideals of trade are a utopian view bound to fail. In answer, there are systems of economic activity presented by localism theorists that do not fall into this conundrum for example Solidarity economies (De Sousa Santos, 2006). Concerns regarding isolationism and xenophobia are also a constant reminder of the tendency of ideology to flow full circle and meet at the extremes.

Those authors writing from a peak oil perspective might argue that localisation is inevitable due to necessity and that communities should work to improve conditions under localisation now before the choice is pressed upon them. The following case study of the Transition Town Movement highlights this argument. Advocates of the Transition Town Movement might reply to those criticisms outlined above that the realities of peak oil and climate change mean that communities need to build resilience and self-sufficiency regardless of ideological underpinnings in order to survive and retain a reasonable quality of
life. In addition, the Transition Town Movement is seen by some as a representation of community capacity building that does not fall into the criticism of community development described by Craig and Ledwith. The movement is a bottom-up model that hopes to build resilience and confidence in local communities to take action on environmental issues rather than a policy intervention lacking critical consciousness.

CASE STUDY: THE TRANSITION TOWN MOVEMENT

The associated key figure for the Transition Towns movement is Rob Hopkins. Hopkins initiated the ideas of creating a plan for building the resilience of communities (communities’ ability to withstand outside shocks) in Kinsale, Ireland where he taught permaculture. Permaculture is a system of horticultural and social design that relies on principles of sustainability, diversity, closed systems and networks to create ecological and human well-being (Holmgren, 2003). Permaculture principles informed Hopkins subsequent
The establishment of Transition Town Totnes (TTT) in Devon, UK in 2006. This was the first example of a Transition Town (Hopkins, 2010). Since the establishment of the first Transition model, the concept has spread through the UK. In 2009 there were 94 Transition Towns in the UK and a further 40 internationally (Haxeltine and Seyfang, 2009). The Transition Handbook (Hopkins, 2008) suggests that the network has spread to 450 communities around the world. Although there is a formal Transition Network, the model is a non-institutional, informal example of community initiative based on the following principles:

“1. That life with dramatically lower energy consumption is inevitable, and that it’s better to plan for it than to be taken by surprise

2. That settlements and communities presently lack the resilience to enable them to weather the severe energy shocks that will accompany peak oil.

3. That we have to act collectively, and we have to act now.

4. That by unleashing the collective genius of those around us to creatively and proactively design our energy descent, we can build ways of living that are more connected, more enriching and that recognise the biological limits of our planet” (Hopkins 2008:134).
As seen from these four principles, the Transition Town model is unique in that it focuses on the inevitability of change to a ‘post peak oil’ situation. The model takes this inevitability as the driver for change. Hopkins (2008) writes that the aim of the Transition Movement is to demonstrate how communities can take practical, positive steps to adjust to the ‘post-oil’ model and in doing so make a transition to a low carbon lifestyle. Because the movement is grassroots rather than imposed, each Transition Town develops its own action-plan within the basic model. The Haxeltine and Seyfang report, however, finds common themes:

“Local energy generation; local food production; farmers markets; community gardening and composting; designing and building eco-housing; local currencies; personal development work; skill-sharing and education; recycling and repair schemes; car-sharing, and promoting cycling; supporting energy demand-reduction through self-help clubs.” (Haxeltine and Seyfang, 2009: 6)
Each of the themes focus on the relocalisation of many processes that taken individually seem inconsequential and unlikely to create a resilient community. However, when taken as a holistic philosophy the movement is able to provide a model of an alternative future for communities that take a radically different approach to the dominant discourse of consumption and economic growth, commodification and atomised individualism.

The Transition model provides a framework for establishing a Transition Town and these are summarised as the ’12 steps of Transition’:

“1. Set up a steering group and design its demise from the outset
2. Raise awareness
3. Lay the foundations
4. Organise the great unleashing
5. Form groups
6. Use open space
7. Develop visible manifestations of the project
8. Facilitate the great reskilling
9. Build a bridge to local government
10. Honour the elders
11. Let it go where it wants to go
12. Create an energy descent plan” (source: Hopkins 2008:148-175)

Following these steps, the Transition model rests on the initiative of local ‘steering groups’ and knowledge garnered from elders, group discussions and open spaces. The step to ‘let it go where it wants to go’ shows a resistance to a hierarchical structure within the movement and this is reflected in the process of dividing the ‘energy descent plans’ into smaller sections to be worked on by groups in areas such as health, food and energy. In addition,
the steps taken are steps toward creating community-specific solutions under the umbrella philosophy of the movement and the general vision of a ‘positive’ rather than ‘lean’ or ‘frugal’ post-oil future. This is reflected in the findings of research into the movement, Haxeltine and Seyfang finds that the majority (89%) of Transition groups are set-up by individual citizens (either singularly or more commonly existing groups), none of the Transition groups were set up by local councils and only one group was set up with the involvement of a local business.

The Transition movement originally flourished in small towns in the UK, following the lead of Totnes (a small market town). The Haxeltine and Seyfang report finds that 52% of Transition Towns are small towns, 28% cover large towns and cities. In some cities such as Bristol, the movement has been divided into villages or neighbourhoods within the city in order to translate the model to a larger scale.
HOW DOES THE TRANSITION TOWN MODEL DIFFER FROM OTHER GREEN-LIVING APPROACHES?

Kenis and Mathijs (2009) write that the movement differs from other approaches through its holistic emphasis that does not rely on guilt or fear but rather hope and optimism within a collective rather than individual behavioural change model. It is argued that the movement creates citizens that are subjects rather than objects of change. In addition, the Transition movement is seen as a model of ecological citizenship rather than a model for pro-environmental behaviour. The models differ in the following ways. Ecological citizenship stresses the ‘public’ as well as the ‘private’ so a broader spectrum of environmentalism may be achieved including in economics and education rather than only within individual choice. Ecological citizenship contains a greater moral/political emphasis that instigates positive action rather than behavioural ‘steering’, so citizens’ convictions form a greater part of the overall model. The Transition model is seen as a model of ecological citizenship because of high-levels of awareness and consciousness building, lack of superficial incentives and action is built on the foundations of emancipatory knowledge, personal and communal motivation, vision and a recognition of both the private and public.

HOW SUCCESSFUL HAS THE TRANSITION TOWNS MOVEMENT BEEN SO FAR?


This survey found that the area of the Transition model that saw most engagement was the food and gardening projects and this represented the best practical start to bringing people into the Transition Town activities. The report highlighted a lack of funding and resources as major obstacles to transition initiatives. Awareness raising strategies as a starting point for
community engagement were seen as more limited than the practical projects such as the food and gardening projects. It is also suggested by the report that training in group management and conflict resolution would be useful. Overall Seyfang sees a greater role for local councils in the support of the Transition initiatives, not in the role of directing or initiating, but in the role of supporting, funding and providing more land for use by the food and gardening projects.


The Hopkins study found that the organisation was well-known and significant in the town. Levels of engagement were quite high and that obstacles were not found in a lack of skills or cohesion. Hopkins found, however, that a value-action gap existed between the intentions of Totnes citizens and action taken. Although the Totnes model has succeeded in motivating many other communities to begin to address oil-dependency and resilience, the Transition movement has not translated to significant behavioural change yet. Hopkins found that a lack of time, affordable housing and other financial pressures rather than a lack of skills was the main obstacle to developing personal and community resilience. It is also found that the model was effective in engaging citizens in town-wide initiatives such as the Energy Descent Plan. In terms of the local authority engagement with the Transition movement, Hopkins suggests that the movement focuses more on practice than politics and so a valuation of its effects are not possible until a later date. Initial observations however, show that the Transition movement is changing the nature of discussions in the community and the association of the community with the Transition ideas. Hopkins identifies a necessity to broaden and deepen engagement rather than ‘preach to the converted’ within Totnes, at
the same time the movement needs to grow outwardly in order to have a meaningful regional and national impact.


This report states that the Transition movement has successfully used the concept of community resilience to engage citizens in a new type of civil society movement that addresses the lack of action on critical environmental and sustainability issues. The movement has spread across the UK and the world very quickly and is a good example of communities addressing issues of environmental concern at the local level. However, the report finds issue with the linking of resilience and re-localisation. The report suggests that the movements framing of a specific type of resilience may lead to vulnerability to ‘surprise shocks’ that are outside of the resilience remit, for instance disease spread due to climate change or migration changes. The report highlights some alternative resilience models that do not rely on localism such as distributed network economies and product to services switches. In addition, the report finds obstacles to the development of the Transition Town model such as, ‘irreversibility of systems’; that some of the aims of the movement are unachievable due to irreversible change in, for instance, land use. Also time-restrictions, it is suggested that the amount of cultural change and skill building required will take too long.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper considers the following, useful recommendations for policy and initiative formation going forward:
LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL TAX

This report suggests that business operating in the locality including non-local business interests should be taxed in local currency for unsustainable business practices. The money collected should then be used to finance democratically agreed projects using local materials or could be used to provide support to citizens who give financial reasons as a lack of engagement in the Hopkins report. The businesses would need to recoup the local currency from their customers so would need to request a certain amount of payment as local currency.

An example of this in practice: A coffee shop sells only non-locally sourced produce in its drinks and food. The coffee shop is taxed ten local pounds per day unless it begins to source its produce locally. The local pounds from all of the businesses are collected in a fund. At the end of each month, requests are submitted to the fund. This month the money is used to buy local sheep wool, local contractors are paid to install it as insulation in several households. In the coffee shop, customers are asked to pay at least a tenth of the bill in local currency in order to cover the tax.

FLEXIBILITY IN WORKING HOURS AND PRACTICES

This report suggests that the issues raised by survey respondents concerning lack of time as well as the diminishing time available for changes to be made require a dramatic response in terms of work practices. It is suggested that working hours in the locality should be flexible (for instance seasonal variation) to allow employee involvement in transition activities, local businesses should also become more involved with the activities.
FIND NEW PLATFORMS FOR DISCUSSION TO AVOID HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE

The movement needs to avoid becoming undemocratic through a homogenised engagement and exclusory discourse. The movement should consider new platforms for debate, perhaps online through a well-publicised discussion and decision making network that operates in conjunction with social media platforms and takes advantage of the information spreading ability of the internet. Equally, the movement could attract figureheads from across the diverse spectrum of the community. Without damaging the bottom-up nature of the model, engagement needs to move beyond the physical and discursive spaces in which only a certain section of the community feel comfortable. It is suggested that the network seek out disengaged voices and listen to them, in the hope that through deliberation and democracy the most rational solutions will be found.

LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT

This report recommends local authority support in the form of land and resource allocation, funding and publicity and infrastructure so that the locality may achieve its aims in the local generation of power. Public sector practices are also ideal for the trial of new sustainably minded work practices.

CAMPAIGN ON THE VALUE-ACTION GAP

This report suggests a light-hearted marketing campaign that highlights the value-action gap in order to increase engagement. This could be based on the literature on the psychological barriers that prevent dramatic action on climate change.
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this report has considered the strengths of localism in addressing the major concerns of sustainable development, most crucially climate change. These strengths include lower carbon emissions, greater resilience, stronger and more confident civil society and greater democratic participation. However, weaknesses have also been considered, including the tendency toward exclusory discourse, isolationism and that localism might contribute to a neo-liberal agenda of globalised trade and environmental damage by weakening the nation state, especially in poorer regions. The Transition Town case study found that a lack of deep and broad engagement due to financial and time constraints as well as the possible irreversibility of systems were among obstacles noted for hindering progress in a movement that is spreading rapidly across the UK and further afield. Despite these obstacles, the movement is seen as a new bottom-up construction of ecologically minded civil society that aims to achieve the aspects of localism that address global environmental, social and economic concerns. This paper also suggests that the recent UK localism bill is an example of ineffectual top-down policy intervention without the necessary funding or movement of powers to be useful in encouraging the form of localism outlined here.


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