

# Exploring what’s emerging from the Transition movement survey

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## Introduction

This document shares information and themes drawn from an early analysis of the survey. It is based on the 250 survey responses from 28 countries received by 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

We have included information about how Transitioners assess the impact of our movement and their ideas about where we put energy and attention in the future. We have highlighted some emerging tensions; knowing that exploring these creatively, listening carefully to the different perspectives, can be a great way to better understand what’s possible and needed.

We invite you to notice what feels familiar or exciting, what feels uncomfortable or confusing and what’s missing that is important to you.

## 1. Impacts

*“it is like planting a seed and more initiatives sprout from it... projects inspired by training or transition movements”*

The survey gives us a detailed picture of how people assess the impact of different types of Transition activity<sup>1</sup>. The summary below is colour coded to show the proportion of respondents who reported ‘some’ or ‘meaningful or significant impact’ against each activity. We have mapped the activities against the broad characteristics of the Transition movement.

| Characteristics                 | Total of ‘some’ and ‘meaningful or significant impact’                        |        |        |      |
|---------------------------------|---|--------|--------|------|
|                                 | <30%  | 30-55% | 55-70% | >70% |
| 1. Raise awareness              | Raising awareness of intersecting crises (ecological, social, economic) (74%) |        |        |      |
|                                 | Addressing social injustice 26%   |        |        |      |
|                                 | Developing anti-racism strategies and practices 14%                           |        |        |      |
| 2. Create positive narratives   | Creating/sharing regenerative narratives & visions (63%)                      |        |        |      |
| 3. Support inner transformation | Supporting emotional health and wellbeing (51%)                               |        |        |      |
|                                 | Supporting shifts in attitudes and mindsets (62%)                             |        |        |      |
| 4. Take practical action        | Reducing carbon emissions (60%)   |        |        |      |
|                                 | Increasing resilience to climate change impacts (58%)                         |        |        |      |
|                                 | Local food (80%)  |        |        |      |
|                                 | Renewable energy (47%)  |        |        |      |
|                                 | Green transport (36%)   |        |        |      |
|                                 | Waste or pollution reduction (61%)  |        |        |      |
|                                 | Protecting and restoring land or water (44%)                                  |        |        |      |

<sup>1</sup> Data on impacts based on survey download on 27 November

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
|                                      | Improving biodiversity, protecting wildlife (44%)                                |
|                                      | Developing social enterprises or cooperatives (41%)                              |
|                                      | Creating green jobs (18%)  |
|                                      | Developing a local currency (21%)  |
|                                      | Supporting local businesses (51%)  |
|                                      | Divesting from the growth economy (33%)  |
| 5. Connect and care for each other   | Offering nature connection activities (59%)                                      |
|                                      | Social cohesion and community spirit (72%)                                       |
|                                      | Developing mutual aid/care systems (53%)   |
| 6. Contribute to a wellbeing economy | Social cohesion and community spirit (72%)                                       |
|                                      | Developing mutual aid/care systems (53%)   |
|                                      | Sharing 'care or wellbeing economies' principles and practices (45%)             |
| 7. Broaden and deepen participation  | Expanded community participation in ecological activities                        |
|                                      | Expanded community participation in economic activities                          |
| 8. Bring people together             | Collaborative decision making (58%)  |
|                                      | Participatory democracy (e.g. citizens assemblies) (38%)                         |
|                                      | Influencing political debates or processes (45%)                                 |
|                                      | Building networks and coalitions (70%)   |
|                                      | Sharing ecological principles and practices (70%)                                |
|                                      | Using ecological design frameworks (e.g. systems thinking or permaculture) (61%) |
| 9. Address injustice                 | Addressing social injustice (26%)  |
|                                      | Developing anti-racism strategies and practices (14%)                            |

## 2. The Transition movement within a wider ecology of change

We use 'ecology of change' to refer to the different strategies and roles needed to support a shift to a regenerative future. Different groups have different parts to play: some excel at rapid mobilization and generating urgency (e.g. Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion), others build the social infrastructure to sustain change-making.

Some impacts of the Transition movement are 'invisible', yet the survey responses demonstrate how Transition has contributed to the wider ecology of change through the dissemination of practices, concepts and collective wisdom from the Transition movement to others such as COVID Mutual Aid groups, XR, community land trusts, community energy groups, local food producers, Fridays for Future, Deep Adaptation. For some respondents, this is what success looks like: the integration of Transition principles into wider movements and organisations.

Many respondents question how Transition – as a movement and individual groups – can collaborate well with other groups and movements at local and international scales.

*“My biggest question is how to link these disparate groups and projects together horizontally so that we can work on projects together or towards mutual goals.”*

*“Why are so many movements pursuing the SAME aims but naming their movements differently ... thus avoiding the benefits of a huge community of like-minded souls working in tandem, or ... together, on the same processes and projects at local and regional scale. ... XR and most environmental groups at odds [are] with each other ... I see SO many commonalities but each is pulling entirely in its own direction ... I would love to see Transition call for cohesion in the movements focused on developing stronger communities prepared for the crises and change ahead. ... to call for UNITY or at least a networked, shared vision for how we ALL ... can work TOGETHER”*

### 3. Systems thinking and supporting grassroots action?

When asked where we should focus in the coming years, many spoke of **the application of systems theory and principles at other levels of scale**, noting that the Transition movement is good at holding a systemic perspective, and enabling action *“supported by a cohesive vision”*. However, cautions were raised about processes which are too complex to communicate or may be off putting to local level participation. For example:

*“Gli attuali e nuovi attivisti potrebbero non essere interessati a trovare risposte sistemiche o mettersi al servizio di altre organizzazioni. // Current and new activists may not be interested in finding systemic answers or serving other organizations.”*

Despite these tensions, some people saw value in both local work and a broader systems approach: *“Transition Town groups might have to shift away from grassroots work if they develop partners that are focused on systems level work; capacity to work across scales; we need both!”*

### 4. To define a narrower focus or hold a holistic picture?

Tensions were apparent between taking a narrower focus with a “clear and uncomplicated agenda”, and a breadth of focus to enable wider engagement. Some people said the movement should focus on a single key issue, but these included net zero, climate mitigation, tackling consumption, food and agriculture, energy reduction, transport, single-use plastics and biodiversity. Many recommended letting go of a framing around ‘peak oil’, or suggested a complete change of focus.

*“Switch over to facilitating a descent as Deep Adaptation has done. It's over.”*

*“Transition has lost its way trying to deal with too many issues. Personally I would prefer a back to basics Climate Change mitigation approach. I am particularly concerned about the Biodiversity messaging taking efforts, volunteers and finances away from Climate Change mitigation efforts”*

Others stressed the importance of a diversity of issues to enable involvement and potential in each context.

*“It is difficult for the transition movement to have a single focus of attention since the contexts of the different countries where we are is different, in the case of Latin America a very large focus of attention is ... the protection of natural resources and communities native or indigenous to our countries, this legacy is the greatest we have not only with ourselves but also with the world, there is a lot of knowledge to share about it.”*

*“Emphasize that collaboration is key. Many local groups have their own individual agenda. An overarching approach where even small groups can visibly present their own initiatives, but are also part of a co-ordinated campaign/event/political 'push' would help to consolidate influence.”*

### 5. Social justice and environmental focus / Justice, climate, decolonisation

Some initiatives have integrated ecological and social justice, for example Transition Town Tooting in London has *“drawn in a mix of people in what is a wonderfully diverse and dynamic part of London. It's opened up space for people who want to get involved, in a creative and positive way.”*

Cooperation Humboldt has incorporated practices and teach-ins to unlearn white supremacy, working with community health and people in recovery and on disaster response.

Most connected diversity to questions of participation and relationship with local communities, but it was also a question asked of the movement: *“There seems to be a reluctance on the part of the Transition movement to address the interconnectedness of white supremacy, capitalism, settler colonialism, and hetero-patriarchy in the ongoing consumption/destruction of our ecosystems.”*

Some called for the Transition movement to take a clearer stance on social justice and equity, highlighting the relationships between transition and food justice, migration, social welfare, and social inclusion. Other responses questioned the inclusion of social justice, alongside broader concerns about whether a dilution of focus could weaken the movement.

## 6. Power and leadership

Themes of power and leadership were apparent throughout. Many reflected that the Transition movement is good at empowering individuals and collectives to take action, harnessing the power of community through convening local action, and wider networking. This was compared to the power of governments and vested interests that maintain business as usual.

Different interpretations of power included **power-with** such as *“not dominating or taking over, simply inspiring”, or “support and engage in open governance systems and structures, distributed governance ... Sociocracy”*; and **power-over** such as *“seizing” or “taking power” and “The rulers / destroyers of the planet must disappear.”* Some mentioned a fear of losing power and autonomy through working with top-down systems of government.

Approaches to leadership differed, but some urged reflection on different types of leadership: *“It is ... necessary to clearly define what a leader is and that we can all also be leaders on defined goals that we wish to see achieved.”*

## 7. Inner transition

Many people highlighted psychological and inner issues that operate as a block to wider engagement, such as denial, increasing polarization, fragmentation, loss of hope, arising fear in response to emergency narratives, and the challenges of *“Un mundo asustado y empobrecido. // A scared and impoverished world”*. Others said that, whilst inner transition was *“essential”*, cultural contexts made it difficult to communicate the relevance of these approaches: *“We would have to find a new way to talk about it”*. Whilst not named as ‘inner transition’, many people expressed despair or overwhelm at the difficulty of achieving the scale of change needed.

Inner transition is the way into active engagement in Transition for some, and for others the inner dimension can feel uncomfortable; *“The approach needs more emphasis on practical engineering, and less on wellbeing, inner transition, and strange stuff that borders on mysticism.”*

There were frequent references to the people skills needed to build and sustain effective groups, to *“create and nurture support networks for activists, provide transition tools and accompany the teams of transition projects at the human level and internal transition”*, and also the tools needed to navigate divisive subjects - both in local communities and wider society *“Creating culture of peace, listening and dialogue to address polarization”*.

## 8. Narratives and vision

How to hold both imagination and inspiring visions and narratives *and* the realities of intersecting crises?

*"I've seen Transition concepts like building community resilience and envisioning positive futures become much more widely understood and embraced throughout the world"*

Many respondents mentioned the dominance of 'business as usual' narratives and the power of vested interests as a challenge to scaling up the work of the Transition movement. People reported creating and sharing regenerative narratives & visions through events, screenings and discussions and the practical application of positive visions in Transition projects.

Particular projects such as Municipalities in Transition enabled a *"systemic and practical vision"*, and positive visions were identified as what is needed: *"Passende Visionen, die viele Menschen erreichen und geteilt werden: von Medien, Kulturschaffenden, Kindern, LehrerInnen, PolitikerInnen, ArbeitgeberInnen bis hin zu visionären Ökonomen. // Appropriate visions that reach and are shared by many people: by the media, cultural workers, children, teachers, politicians, employers and even visionary economists"*.

However, some people suggested a need for change: *"the narrative, the story, of "the Transition" has to evolve in times of emergency, surely leaving aside the most naive character of seeking that positive future"* and *"[Transition] has to adapt its narrative, connecting it to current times and to that of other movements"*.

## 9. Sharing ideas and scaling up

Throughout the survey, challenges preventing scaling up are noted, including the challenges of community organizing (*"dealing with community is like herding cats"*), limits of time, money, resources; relationships with other organisations; and how to support healthy dynamic groups. Many people are looking for ways to share, access, learn from and develop the collective wisdom of the movement, accepting that what works well in one context may not be suitable for others.

*"we need Transition ambassadors, ... who visit the initiatives. Collectives need to feel connected to others... [through] having people who are paid to travel through the different regions, like troubadours, and disseminate messages, experiences, connect the movement."*

*"Transition works well at a local level but . there is ... not enough time, energy or desire to engage with the movement as a whole. So perhaps keep an overall transition body that links groups but spend more time on your local area "*