

The Transition Town Initiative*

Creating local sustainable and resilient communities beyond oil dependency

The Transition Town Initiative is simply a framework and process methodology that encourages and mobilises local residents to plan and implement strategies and activities that strengthen the resilience of their localities to withstand the shocks and challenges associated with peak oil and climate change. It encourages communities to build upon important grassroots environmental and social capital building initiatives already in place, and create a coordinated range of projects leading to a collectively designed Energy Descent Action Plan. The Transition Initiative movement offers local communities an opportunity to create a positive, sustainable, resilient and socially connected future.

Transition Initiatives are in the words of David Holmgren – *“the wholehearted and positive acceptance of energy descent, as not only inevitable, but a desired reality”*. In the words of Jeremy Leggett, *“Transition Initiatives are scalable microcosms of hope”*.

Transition Town Initiatives are based on four key **assumptions**:

- Inevitably we will experience life with dramatically lower energy consumption, and that it is better to plan for it than to be taken by surprise.
- Our communities presently lack the resilience to enable them to weather the severe energy shocks that will accompany peak oil and climate.
- We have to act collectively, and we have to act now.
- 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 world.

The movement began in Kinsale Ireland in 2005, which became the First Transition Town. Co-founder Rob Hopkins subsequently moved to the UK and with Ben Brangwyn founded Transition Towns UK. Currently there are 150 registered Transition Initiatives communities worldwide. It represents one of the most important and exciting social movements occurring across the globe. It complements the growing trend by communities towards “relocalisation” – increasing more local resident control over, and involvement in their local economy, community and culture in light of the failings and uncertainties of globalisation, consumerism and fossil fuel addition. Relocalisation encourages strategies to build local resilience based on greater local production and usage of food, energy, goods and culture.

Transition Initiatives tend to provide inspirational information, practical training courses, planning and action strategies. They plan and support ideas for opportunities for increasing the resilience and localisation of critical systems like food, transport, social connection and inclusiveness, business/ economics and energy. For example, in terms of local food supply solutions, Transition Initiatives across the globe have promoted and initiated such diverse actions as –

- Promoting buy local campaigns

- Supporting farmer markets and other forms of “Community Assisted Agriculture” that links local producers to local consumers
- Organising organic gardening courses
- Starting local food cooperatives
- Running healthy cooking classes
- Establishing garden kitchens at local schools
- Creating a community worm farm and composting centres
- Encouraging edible plant household gardens through such courses as “*turning lawn into lunch and grow food at home*”
- Coordinating bulk fruit tree sale and planting weekends
- Promoting awareness of the extent, costs and consequences of food importing and transport
- Etc etc etc etc etc etc

Although the term Transition Town has gained currency, the movement also embraces Transition Cities, Transition Islands, Transition Suburbs and Transition Neighbourhoods.

Hopkins and Brangwyn have laid out twelve key steps for communities to follow in their transition journey. However, a fundamental Transition principle encourages each Transition community to follow the path and order that reflects the reality for their situation.

The **twelve steps** are as follows -

Step 1: Set up a Steering Group and design its demise from the outset

Ideally a Steering group guides the Transition Initiative through Steps 2-5, with an understanding that once a minimum of four subgroups form, the original Steering Group will disband in favour of a new Steering Group representing each of the subgroups.

Step 2: Awareness building

This stage identifies key allies, builds networks and raises community awareness. The latter occurs through film screenings, public forums, presentations to existing groups and letters and articles in the local papers and interviews on local radio about peak oil and climate change.

Step 3: Build the foundations

This stage is about networking with existing groups and community builders and exploring how a Transition Initiative process might be a catalyst for getting the wider community to explore grassroots strategies for designing and carrying out an Energy Descent Action Plan.

Step 4: Organise a “Great Unveiling”

This stage creates a memorable milestone to build momentum to propel the Transition Initiative into the wider community. It typically occurs after “awareness building” begins. For example, the official unleashing of Transition Town Totness took place in September 2006 following ten months of talks, film screenings and events. The Unveiling need not be purely educational, but can include music, food, break dancing or whatever best reflects the community’s commitment to this collective adventure.

Step 5: Form subgroups

Developing a successful Energy Descent Action Plan will require tapping into the collective genius of the community. Crucial to this process is creating a number of smaller groups to tackle specific areas. Ideally, subgroups are needed for all activities a community envisages for its sustainable future. Examples are Food, Waste, Education, Economics, Housing, Transport, Social Capital Building etc. Each subgroup try to identify strategies for increasing the community's resilience and reducing its carbon footprint.

Step 6: Use Open Space Technology methodology

Open Space Technology employs a process of running parallel working sessions around related issues. Participants' own questions and interests drives each of the sessions as they create and manage their own agenda. In a typical Transition Initiative meeting, there are separate Open Spaces for particular topics or issues- for example -Food, Energy, Housing, Economics, the Psychology of Change etc.

Step 7: Develop visible practical manifestations of progress towards a carbon neutral future

For example - high profile tree planting events, a community garden, a Farmer Market, carpooling or car sharing scheme, community assisted agriculture initiatives, trading scheme, a slow food festival, etc

Step 8: Facilitate the Great Reskilling

Reverse the great "deskilling" of the last 40 years by connecting with older community members to learn and implement training in skills that were essential in a lower energy society- for example -building, machine and clothing repair, cycle maintenance, practical food growing, home energy efficiency etc.

Step 9: Build a bridge to local government

Gaining interest and support from the local municipality is essential. One approach is to outline a summary Energy Descent Action Plan (complete with budget and implementation timeline) as a proposed community planning initiative.

Step 10: Honour the elders

Community members, who directly experienced the transition to Cheap Oil, especially the period between 1930 and 1960, can provide invaluable knowledge about the invisible connections between the different elements of society and how they supported daily life.

Step 11: Let the project go where it wants to

The role of the Transition Initiative is to act as a catalyst, not to come up with all the answers.

Step 12: Create an Energy Descent Action Plan

The practical actions identified by each subgroup to increase community resilience and reduce the carbon footprint eventually form the Energy Descent Action Plan.

In the words of Rob Hopkins- *"the Transition Initiative process offers a positive solutions-focussed approach that draws together the various elements of a community to address common challenges and sees much of the solution as coming from within, through a process of unlocking what is already there, rather than from experts and consultants from the outside."*

Transition Initiatives remind us that our responses to the global challenges of climate change and peak oil will shape the lives of generations to come.

Key Resources

Websites

- www.transitionculture.org
- www.tansitionculture.org
- www.scac.net.au/main/ website of Transition Sunshine Coast, the first Transition Initiative in Australia
- www.futurescenarios.org

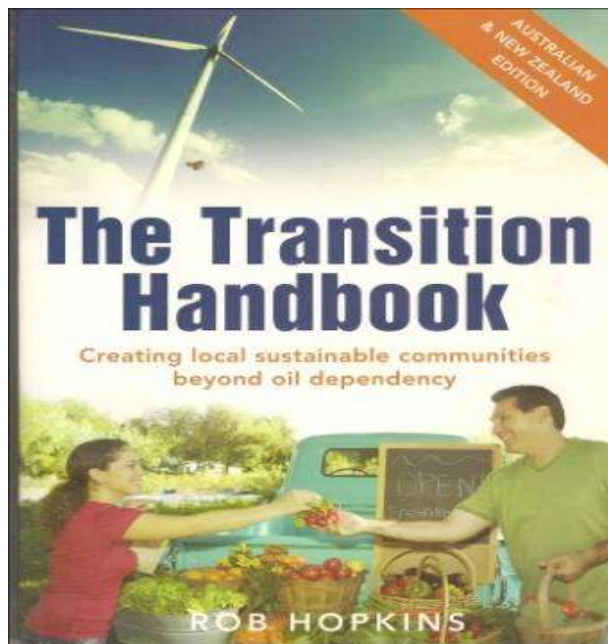
Videos

- "Interview with Rob Hopkins" – www.youtube.com/watch?=rQ09NGOV8
- Summary of the peak oil reality – www.powerswitch.org.uk/portal/images/stories/animoil.swf

Example of Energy Descent Action Plan – see attached document representing the Plan of the first Transition Town – Kinsale, Ireland

Publication

"The Transition Handbook" by Rob Hopkins, available from Bank of I.D.E.A.S. (\$50 including postage and packaging) – pk@bankofideas.com.au



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