

Transition Towns Summary

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Background

The Transition Town initiative is a model designed to harness collective genius at the local grassroots level to address the most important question of the 21st century: for all life processes that sustain this community, how do we significantly increase our resilience (to provide for our needs with much less fossil fuel) while simultaneously reducing carbon emissions.

The model aims to be flexible and broad enough to allow people from all walks of life to connect to the fundamental vision of a healthy, resilient community. By acknowledging other important initiatives that may already be in place, it allows communities to create a coordinated range of projects leading to a collectively designed Energy Descent Action Plan. Although the term Transition Town has stuck, the movement also embraces Transition Cities, Transition Islands, Transition Suburbs, Transition Neighborhoods and Transition Any Place Else you might find people.

The movement began in 2005 in Kinsale Ireland, which became the First Transition Town. Co-founder Rob Hopkins subsequently moved to the UK and with Ben Brangwyn founded Transition Towns UK. At present the list of official towns in England alone stands at 21.

Hopkins and Brangwyn have laid out 12 key steps for communities to follow in their transition journey. However fundamental precepts of flexibility and inclusion mean the order and manner in which the steps are carried out varies with each Transition Town.

Step 1 Set up a steering group and design its demise from the outset

The ideal is to form a steering group to guide the Transition Town 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.

Step 3 Lay the foundations

This stage is about networking with existing groups and activists and exploring how a Transition Town 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 Town initiative into the larger community. It typically occurs after "awareness building" begins. For example the official unleashing of Transition Town Totness took place in September 2006, after about ten months of talks, film screenings and events. The Unveiling needn't 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 engages in to sustain itself. Examples are Food, Waste, Education, Economics, Transport, Government, etc. Each subgroup will try to identify strategies for increasing the community's resilience and reducing its carbon footprint.

Step 6 Use Open Space

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

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

For example organise high profile tree planting events, community gardens and/or markets or carpooling or car sharing schemes.

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

As the price of oil crashes through \$100 a barrel, local authorities will be more and more receptive to cost effective alternatives. One approach is to lay out an Energy Descent Action Plan in a comparable format (complete with budget and implementation timeline) to the Community Development Plan.

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 town is to act as a catalyst, not to come up with all the answers.

Step 12 Create an Energy Descent Action Plan

Taken together the practical actions each subgroup identifies to increase community resilience and reduce the carbon footprint form the Energy Descent Action Plan.

(A good portion of the content for this page was lifted straight from transitiontowns.org, the UK Transition Towns web site)

The Transition Handbook.

This 240 page book from Rob Hopkins, is surely one of the most clearly written, inspiring, practical and usable books. It is of enormous assistance to people involved in, or interested in starting, a Transition Initiative.

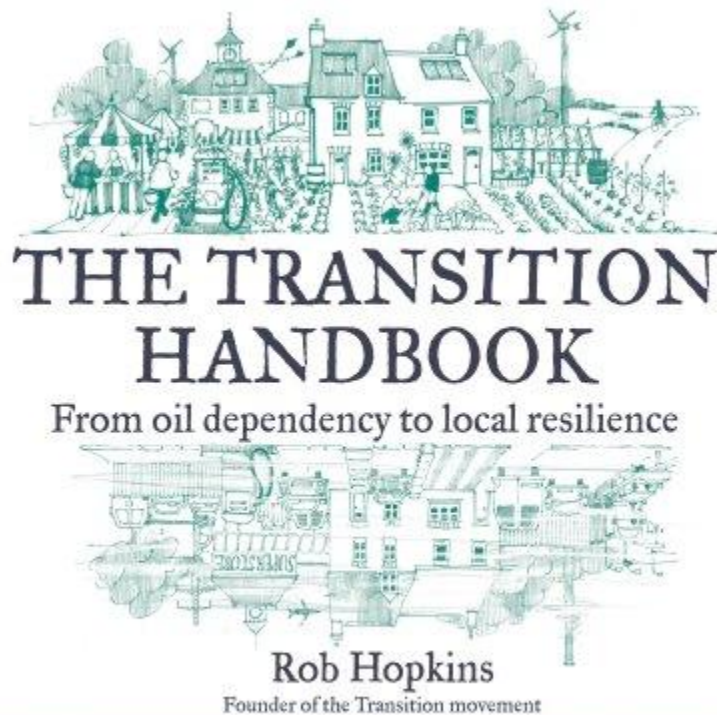
If you want to read some of Rob's posts, or watch a promotional video about this book, [here they are](http://www.transitionculture.org) on www.transitionculture.org

And here are a couple of quotes from the book:

Resilience Central to this book is the concept of resilience. In ecology, the term resilience refers to an

ecosystem's ability to roll with external shocks and attempted enforced changes. Walker et al. define it thus: *"Resilience is the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change, so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks."* In the context of communities and settlements, it refers to their ability to not collapse at first sight of oil or food shortages, and to their ability to respond with adaptability to disturbance. The UK truck drivers' dispute of 2000 offers a valuable lesson here. Within the space of three days, the UK economy was brought to the brink, as it became clear that the country was about a day away from food rationing and civil unrest. Increased resilience and a stronger local economy do not mean that we put a fence up around our towns and cities and refuse to allow anything in or out. It is not a rejection of commerce or somehow a return to a rose-tinted version of some imagined past. What it does mean is being more prepared for a leaner future, more self-reliant, and prioritising the local over the imported.

What are Transition Initiatives? *"Scalable microcosms of hope."* - Jeremy Leggett



"If your town is not yet a Transition Town, here is the guidance for making it one.
We have little time, and much to accomplish." — Richard Heinberg, author of *Peak Everything*

Transition Initiatives are based on four key assumptions:

- That life with dramatically lower energy consumption is inevitable, and that it's better to plan for it than to be taken by surprise.
- That our settlements and communities presently lack the resilience to enable them to weather the severe energy shocks that will accompany peak oil.
- That we have to act collectively, and we have to act now.
- 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.

The future with less oil could, if enough thinking and design is applied sufficiently in advance, be preferable to the present. There is no reason why a lower-energy, more resilient future needs to have a lower quality of life than the present. Indeed, a future with a revitalized local economy would have many advantages over the present, including a happier and less stressed population, an improved environment and increased stability.