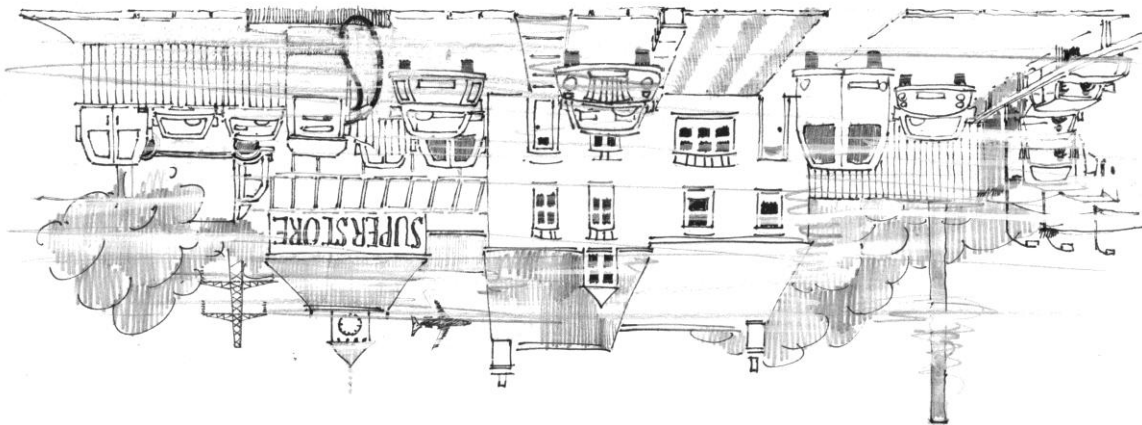




How Resilient Are Our Political Candidates? Embedding Transition in the Political Process

A Hustings Primer from the Transition Network 2010



The purpose of Transition is;

“to support community-led responses to peak oil and climate change, building resilience and happiness”.



Can your Transition initiative help shape politics as we head towards the 2010 elections?

Should Transition Initiatives get involved with formal politics? Some decry existing political structures, preferring to get on with building a positive future; others call for Transitioners to get themselves elected to help make change happen now. As with much of Transition there is no right way, only the way that you choose - but if you do want to get involved in the local and general election campaigns in 2010, then here are a few suggestions– and you could make quite a difference to how electors and elected see the world and their roles in it..



What is a Hustling – and more importantly, what makes a good one?

The dictionary definition is “a platform on which candidates for Parliament formerly stood to address the electors”. In essence, it is an event, attended by the political candidates for a constituency, at which the public are able to ask them questions.

At a good hustling:

- The speakers and the audience have to have clarity about the ground rules and what everyone is aiming to get out of the event
- The chair has to play an active, facilitative role, seeking to make sure no-one dominates, as many people as possible are heard, and people answer questions clearly and concisely
- It will be energising – after all, it should attract engaged people, thinking and communicating about crucial issues

Here are some suggestions for making your event as successful as possible;

- 1) Invite your local parliamentary and council candidates to Transition events as Keynote Listeners. At the end ask them to speak for five minutes about what they have learnt and about how their personal or party platforms relate to the themes of Transition. Then organise a hustling in the run-up to the election, either parliamentary or ward-based, depending on the size of your Transition Initiative and your ambition. The aim is to ask each candidate to explain and debate their approach to developing resilient local communities/economies prepared for climate change and peak oil. This booklet is designed to prepare you for that hustling.
- 2) You might start by showing some or all of the film “In Transition”. If you do, then give the candidates front row armchairs and make them feel at home. After the film ask each candidate to reflect on how their policies relate to the film’s themes.
- 3) Keep a record of the questions and answers at the final candidate hustlings as well as the candidates’ names and political parties.
- 4) Ask someone from your group to be a contact point and feed the results back to Transition Network so we can gather them together to get a sense of what is happening across the country.

It's important to recognise our potential role in shaping the broader debate on issues that transcend normal party politics, and your hustling event will be a key contribution to that.

Resilience to What?

The Transition movement focuses on making communities and economies more resilient – but resilient to what? We think that there are five key challenges which necessitate the careful and intentional design of increased resilience, defined here as the ability to withstand shocks from the outside. For each of the following we also try to sum up the essence of the responses we've seen being developed across Transition.

1. Resource Depletion

Peak oil, the imminent peaking in world conventional oil production, is just one of many such production peaks, for example, natural gas is also near its production peak, as is phosphorus, a critical component of chemical fertiliser. Peak oil is of particular concern because of the degree to which our society is dependent on it. Peak oil will result in increasingly volatile oil prices, which, as the price spike of 2008 showed when oil reached \$147 a barrel, impacts profoundly on our oil-dependent economies. We are moving from a time when our economic success and personal prowess are directly linked to how much oil we consume, to a time when our oil dependency is a key vulnerability.

Resilience in Practice: Transition initiatives see that reducing carbon emissions is necessary but not sufficient, that the building of resilience needs to be afforded an equal priority. We need to be designing and implementing systems that are as independent from fossil fuels as possible and which do not rely on exhaustible resources.

2. Climate Change

Arguably the most useful thing which emerged from the wreckage of the 2009 Copenhagen climate talks was that it is clear that we can't, we mustn't wait for our governments to do what has to be done about climate change. Floods, droughts and extreme weather episodes are on the increase around the world, and glaciers and ice sheets are melting faster than scientists predicted. CO2 concentrations in the atmosphere are currently at 388 parts per million and rising by 2ppm per annum. Many scientists now say we need to return to less than 350ppm if we are to avert runaway climate change.

Resilience in Practice: Transition initiatives address the reduction of carbon in all its aspects, not just focusing on energy, but also on food, building, education, healthcare and so on and engaging people in carbon reduction in an imaginative and positive way.

3. Economic Globalisation

The globalised economy and the huge expansion not just of food miles, but 'virtually-everything-we-consume-today' miles are only possible thanks to cheap fossil fuels. Without them, most of what we take for granted becomes unfeasible. At the same time, we have undermined and devalued the local food systems and manufacturing that would otherwise have supported us. Cheap oil and free trade allows corporations to go wherever the cost of production is cheapest and global investments follow behind.

Resilience in Practice: Transition initiatives treat resilience-building as a community-led design project, focusing on rebuilding local networks, economies, skills and other vital systems. In so doing, they enable communities to self-organise and to harness 'engaged optimism', seeing this process of intentional relocalisation not as one of putting up fences, rather of building surge breakers into our economy, making communities more robust, skilled, adaptable and resilient..

4. The End of Economic Growth

Our current economic and wider malaise is symptomatic of a far more serious systemic failure – the failure of economic growth. You cannot grow within a finite system, the planet, forever. While the concept of endless growth is physically impossible as well as ecologically disastrous, rethinking what we mean by 'prosperity' is essential, and will lead to a rethink of how we design our economies.

Resilience in Practice: Transition initiatives model ways to enable local economies to become stronger by creating less dependence on external resource constraints, and to circulate as many goods and services as possible locally, such as through local energy companies, Time Banks and local currencies.

5. Wellbeing and Flourishing

Extra growth does not automatically translate into human welfare and happiness. If one plots a line on a graph that shows the growth of our economy, that line is echoed by other similarly rising graphs modelling indebtedness, days off work from stress, crime and many other less desirable trends. Having more consumer goods made us happy up to a certain point, but since the 1960s we have not grown happier as a society in spite of our increasing wealth. That is an experience repeated across the industrialised world except in countries like Denmark where the income distribution is much flatter, levels of education are higher, community is stronger and social intervention higher. As Lord Turner, chair of the Climate Change Committee, put it recently, "all the evidence shows that beyond the sort of standard of living which Britain has now achieved, extra growth does not automatically translate into human welfare and happiness."



Resilience in Practice: Transition initiatives argue that a world living within its energy constraints need not be a more miserable, less contented place. Indeed, through working with a process which is fun, creative, playful, more community-based and positive, many find that their experience of daily life is much enhanced. Transitioners use the word 'flourishing' to describe the state where people are realising their potential as human beings and doing so makes them happy. It is not some future target, rather it is already around them.

The Ten Transition Buts

During your events, you might encounter some commonly asked questions about the Transition approach. Below, we have tried to answer those questions as concisely as possible...

BUT surely technology can get us out of this, nuclear power/cold fusion/algae/helium 3 on the Moon providing the energy we need?

UK PLC emerges from the 'Credit Crunch' intact, but only just. In order to stave off the complete collapse of its banking system, we have plunged even further into debt than we already were. Unfortunately, we have also allowed this indebtedness mindset to also infect our thinking about energy. Continued belief in huge, expensive, centralised energy systems such as nuclear power does nothing to build resilience, it borrows money from tomorrow, while leaving them a poisonous legacy of waste which they will have far less energy to maintain than we have today.

“The meltdown in the economy is a harsh metaphor of the meltdown of some of our value systems. Individualism has been raised almost to a religion, appearance made more important than substance. The only hope lies in a fundamental re-examination of the values that we have lived by in the past 30 years.”

Ben Okri

It is a deeper question than just what we power our systems with. We are nudging against our limits, the constraints imposed on us by 6 billion people living on a finite planet. There is no magic new energy source which is cheap, low carbon, sustainable into the future, and able to function in a lower net energy world. The technologies we will need we already have, but what it required is a shift in assumptions around the idea that we can continue to treat energy as wastefully as we do today. The energy sources of the future will by definition be more locally owned, less centralised, low carbon, but also mindful of the need to greatly reduce the amount of energy we use today.

BUT won't the localisation of food in the West lead to starvation in the developing world?

Some interpret the concept of increasing localisation to mean that building resilience in the West – increasing national food security, rebuilding local manufacturing and so on – will by necessity lead to increased impoverishment in the developing world. This would not be the case. Will the developing world be lifted out of poverty by continuing to dismantle its own food resilience and becoming increasingly dependent on global trade, which is itself massively dependent on the cheap oil we can no longer rely on? Is the way out of poverty really an increasing reliance on the utterly unreliable? Rather than communities meeting each other as unskilled, unproductive, dependent and vulnerable settlements, they would meet as skilled, abundantly productive, self-reliant and resilient communities. It is a very different quality of relationship, and one that could be hugely beneficial to both.

Over the last few years we've started to see clear impacts of tying the developing world into global commercial food webs, as food prices rose in step with oil and fertiliser prices. In fact, the Transition Network argues that tying developing-world food producers into the globalised system leads to their exposure to both food and money shortages.

BUT I work hard and want to enjoy life. Don't tell me I can't fly or drive and buy the things I like, or benefit from cheap food at the supermarket. Everyone else is doing it so why should I miss out?

A greater focus on values that build community and family connections as well as being close to nature are known to be far more important to most people's sense of well being and can help society function better in these changing times. The relentless advertising and marketing most of us experience through the modern media does make it difficult to get this message to stick, but the truth is that living simpler, slower lives that use less resources but more physical activity, family and community connections, is a positive message as well as an essential adaptation to a world without fossil fuels.

“What could change the direction of today's civilization? It is my deep conviction that the only option is a change in the sphere of the spirit, in the sphere of human conscience. It's not enough to invent new machines, new regulations, new institutions. We must develop a new understanding of the true purpose of our existence on this Earth. Only by making such a fundamental shift will we be able to create new models of behaviour and a new set of values for the planet’

Vaclav Havel

Whilst there have been many benefits for people living in the developed world since the advent of fossil fuels, the last 50 years has seen growing inequity, increasing drug and alcohol problems and a breakdown in family life. However, no movement for change would last long if people didn't feel their quality of life was increasing as a result of their engagement. It's true some things might feel very difficult to give up, but getting together we can create communities and a society that recognises the impact our way of life has on other people and all of life.

BUT most people are inherently selfish. It's unrealistic to try to change the way they think and behave to help others or the environment.

It may be true that all people can behave selfishly at times, but just as inherent, and far more important to the vast majority of people, are our social co-operative instincts. We have evolved as social creatures, able to live in large co-operating groups that function best through a shared set of values such as fairness, compassion, trust and a sense of belonging. These factors are often played down in popular descriptions of Darwinism or the efficiency of competitive markets, but the reality is, that without shared values and trust in one another, society would not be able to function at all.

In any case, more and more people recognise how the looming energy crisis posed by peak oil will affect many aspects of their everyday life. In such changing times people will be looking for stronger, more connected, supportive family and community relationships. With family members, friends, work colleagues, members of our communities and society at large we already accept, without thinking, a broad set of rules, written and unwritten. These rules not only help govern our lives to ensure we treat each other with decency and fairness, but they also give us a sense of belonging and of common purpose. It is this most human capacity - our shared sense of belonging and purpose - we can call on now to help create the future.

BUT we need the City - after all, we rely on the financial sector to keep going - it employed over 1 million people in 2008 and makes a large contribution to UK gross domestic product, employment and tax revenues.

Relying on the financial sector is a classic example of the risk inherent in non-resilient systems. The recent crisis and near meltdown of the global financial system demonstrated just how easy it is for actions in one part of the system to spill across boundaries and impact on all of us. Can we afford to rely on apparent wealth which is based on financial derivatives which have no relationship to the real world of physical limits – and which can be switched across borders at the tap of a keyboard? Ironically, if you look at the true cost of those City jobs, they come out overwhelmingly negative. According to New Economics Foundation, on a social return on investment basis, “while collecting salaries of between £500,000 and £10 million, leading City bankers destroy £7 of social value for every pound in value they generate”.

“In the 20 years between 1988 and 2008, the trade surplus generated by financial services shot up from just under £5 billion to approximately £38 billion, while the sector contributed roughly 14 % of national taxation”.

New Economics Foundation

BUT Transition is a middle class fantasy

Of course Transition is a fantasy because it’s about creating a positive vision of the future and making it happen. But, in the words of George Bernard Shaw: "Some men see things as they are and say, 'Why?' I dream of things that never were and say, 'Why not?'"

Transition is inclusive - nobody is barred from taking part, you just have to want a better, greener, fairer society and be prepared to get on with building it. Transition is attracting all types of people for all types of different reasons. Some are intellectually persuaded of the case for change. Some want to grow food or learn new skills. Some want to be part of a community. The less well off parts of society often have the most to teach in terms of how to build strong communities and the most to gain from a Great Reskilling as they don’t have the material cushions that other classes tend to have when things get tough.

Relocalising economies means working people, who are creating the wealth we depend on, are part of the same society as the consumers. That way exploitation of working people is far easier to see and prevent. It makes no sense to say poor people 'need' access to the very cheapest of consumer goods or processed food when this means exploiting other working people further away or causing long term damage to their land or water supply, the local culture. In the end it is least well off that are hit hardest when things go wrong and it is the least well off that need resilient economies better prepared for climate change and peak oil.

BUT Economic Globalisation is a good thing

Corporations primarily care about profit and shareholder value. That inevitably leads them to site their production where factors of production are cheapest, regulations are weakest and profit margins are highest. When production and services are outsourced to the other side of the world it is virtually impossible to know if human rights are being respected and workers are being paid an honest wage. Everything is reduced to the minimum – where it is cheapest to make or supply something. And if tomorrow a factor of production becomes more expensive or regulation increases then the modern corporation will move at a moment’s notice. Globalisation has led to corporations more powerful than most nation states. Their over-riding legally defined purpose is to maximise profit and shareholder value. This is a profoundly undemocratic way for society to be run and, as we

can see clearly with climate change, dangerous to the continued health of people everywhere and most other life on earth.

Globalisation increases risk because supply lines extend and are based on cheap oil. When oil increases in price those supply lines will become fragile and may break. Natural disasters caused by climate change are likely to do the same thing to Just-In-Time global production. The more we depend on long supply lines that stretch around the globe the more unlikely we are to be able to cope if they break.

BUT why should we bother when there is a new Chinese coal fired power station built every day?

China and other countries with lots of coal (like India) are far closer to the frontline of climate change than the UK. Almost half of China's landmass is threatened by desertification. If the Himalayan glaciers melt then these problems will soon reach desperate levels. It is true that China has a great deal of coal. But per capita emissions in China are still 30% of the UK's. And that figure ignores the emissions in China which come from producing all the products we now import from China rather than producing ourselves. Yes, if China was to burn all its coal the world would be in real trouble. But we are in no position to lecture because we have left the world with a historical legacy of emissions per capita which far outweigh those of China thus far.

In fact China is now way ahead of the rich world in terms of developing renewable energy. China has more wind power installed than any other country in the world. In one year (2007) they installed 1.5 times the amount of wind power the UK has ever installed. We in the developed world owe it to the developing world to cut our emissions fast so that billions around the world can be brought out of poverty through short term sustainable growth. If we don't act fast and on a large scale why on earth would China follow? We all need to act to avoid runaway climate chaos.

BUT if the price of oil rises, market forces will ensure investment in alternatives like tar sands and coal-derived liquids. We have a hundred years or more of these available and they already make economic sense. That means peak oil is way off.

The notion that there are supplies of fuels like tar sands and oil shale to last "a hundred years or more" is based on the huge deposits that have been discovered, but is very misleading. In fact, the size of these deposits is essentially irrelevant, as other constraints drastically limit possible production rates for these unconventional oils.

Due to limits on the availability of local water, natural gas, pipelines etc, experts predict that all unconventional oils combined will only be able to increase production by around 2m barrels per day over the coming decade, regardless of the oil price. Similarly, it has been estimated that an improbable decade-long worldwide crash programme could boost the production of coal-derived liquids by an extra 3m barrels per day. Combining these two figures would make up for perhaps a quarter of the expected decline in conventional oil production over the coming decade, and would have minimal impact on the date of peak oil.

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