'Transition Towns: Local Networking for Global Sustainability?'

Statement

I declare that the work submitted is my own and that the document does not exceed 10,000 words in length.

Acknowledgement

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Abbreviations, Figures and Tables

Abbreviations:

CCP: Cities for Climate Protection.

EDAP: Energy Decent Action Plan.

ICLEI: International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives.

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Preface

The Transition Model has advanced a pathway towards 'local sustainability' distinct from previous sustainability models in a clear and important way: it is a grassroots, non-governmental model and also a networking movement. Still in its infancy, and with little academic attention so far having specifically focused on it; there is a clear gap in understanding of the Transition Model's role in relation to (local) sustainability, which this research has sought to bridge.

In a conceptualisation of the Transition Model and an empirical investigation into how the model is applied, in a sample of Transition Initiatives; I sought to understand the factors leading to a large number, and diverse range of Initiatives adopting the model. In concluding, this research asks what impact, if any the Transition Model has upon theoretical and practical understanding in the field of (local) sustainability and environmentalism.

Transition Towns in Context

The Transition Movement, promoting an action-based approach to (local) sustainability, has in the last three years grown to incorporate a large network of individual Initiatives. Informed by ideas and values within environmental theory and action, the Transition Model is theoretically comparable to past sustainability models. Yet, in its practical organisation it is distinct from past models of sustainability: incorporating broad grassroots support in a diverse range of places within the framework of a coherent networking model. However, before further addressing the question I want to introduce the context of Transition.

In its theory and practice, Transition is best characterised as an environmental model. While a vast and complex field, at a broad level modern environmentalism questions the relationship between humans and the biophysical world (O'Riordan, 1981:iv). O'Riordan dates the beginning of modern environmentalism to the 1960-70's, with Dobson (2007) identifying its pre-conditions in key areas including: publications addressing environmental crises, such as Rachel Carlson's *Silent Spring* (1962); symbolic events such as the 1968 Apollo 8 Earthrise picture, visualising a vulnerable planet Earth; and numerous high-profile environmental disasters. The last four decades have seen 'the environment' established as a field of inquiry and concern in its own right, and arguably as an ideological framework (Jacobs 1997). A broad range of political, academic and scientific subjects, groups and institutions with diverse interests and goals now focus on 'environmental issues': from the fragility of 'spaceship Earth' (Boulding, 1966) and discussion about finite natural resources to campaigns for the protection of hedgerows in rural Britain.

At a political level, the Stockholm conference (1972), the Brundtland Commission (1986), and multiple international agreements on pollution and waste, crystallised 'the environment' as a political and policy field (O'Riordan, 1981). Following a lull in the 1980's, environmental concerns have multiplied since the 1990's, with the Rio Earth Summit (1992) signalling the institutionalisation of the environment at the political level (Bulkeley and Betsill,

2003). All major UK political parties now rhetorically support the need for environmental protection (Jacobs, 1997).

Environmentalism is a complex, varied and fragmented field, with Sandbach (1980), O'Riordan (1981), Pepper (1984) and Dobson (2007) providing more in-depth analysis. In outlining this brief account, the context and history to the Transition Model is introduced.

Over the last decades sustainable development has become the organising principle for environment politics (Jacobs, 1997), spawning numerous models seeking to improve sustainability; including the Transition Model. A crowded field, housing diverse positions where deep ecologists and economic environmentalist both speak of building sustainability, sustainable development is a slippery concept. Yet its ideas are useful when carefully applied. Specifically, sustainability challenges the dominant ethos of industrial society, questioning on economic, social, environmental and ecological grounds the exploitation of the environment by industrial society (Gregory et al., 2009:738). Sustainability calls for production and consumption within long-term ecological limits.

Following the Brundtland Commission's (1987) arguing that economic growth was compatible with a sustainable society, sustainability as a discourse and a field of action has entered the political mainstream. 'Sustainable growth' has become a key catch phrase among government, businesses and environmental organisations. Commitments and agreements for sustainable development were introduced at the Rio Earth Summit (1992), which included Agenda 21, the Convention of Biological Diversity, and the Convention on Climate Change.

For initiatives and models promoting sustainability, the local and city scale has been a central focal point (Satterthwaite, 1999). Urban initiatives have included the ICLEI Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) program, Energie Cities, and UN-HABITAT Sustainable Cities, as well as Local Agenda 21. All are top-down models, based on governmental action. At a local scale, bottom-up community models for sustainability have also been established, applying environmental principles and often ideologies of localism. Examples include the Findhorn

Community in Scotland, the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) in Wales, and many others.

While local sustainability has become a politically important discursive goal, in practice neither top-down governmental nor grassroots community models have gained widespread uptake or success: the former have failed to connect with or involve a grassroots public; the latter generally have few resources and limited capacity.

It is in this context that the Transition Model is interesting. A non-governmental community-led model: Transition advances an action-based approach, comparable to community sustainability models. Yet, with a fast growing network of Initiatives, Transition is much closer to the top-down governmental models. Transition combines the advantages of an organic support base, with the capacity and resources of a networking organisation.

The 'Transition' concept, co-founded by Rob Hopkins, who has a background in permaculture, builds upon a core thesis: that the modern industrial capitalist economic and social system, based upon cheap oil and resources, is unsustainable, making a major restructuring of economy and society imperative, and inevitable. Transition contends that citizens and communities need to act proactively and positively at the local scale, in a process of 'Transition' and 'powerdown' to build localised and resilient communities in terms of food, energy, work and waste (Hopkins, 2008). The goal is a societal paradigm in which de-carbonised local communities are resilient in their capacity to "hold together and maintain their ability to function in the face of change and shock from outside." (Hopkins, 2008:8). Transition is modelled to be a self-organising community-led model, for people to 'act now and act collectively'.

Following the Transition Model being pioneered in Totnes in 2006, the Transition Network was established: "to inspire, inform, support, network and train communities" in 'Transition' (Hopkins, 2008:220). The network supports Initiatives in places ranging from small villages to urban centres, providing resources, information and training courses. Initiatives can be established in any place when a group of people locally embedded, self-organising around the

principles of Transition, establish an Initiative. From this initial core, subgroups are formed to focus on specific elements of the Transition process, from farming or recycling to renewables or the psychology of change. At the outset, becoming embedded within the local community and establishing awareness and participation is the central goal for each Initiative. In this process, a twelve-stage transition plan (see Appendix A) lays out a model framework for Initiatives to follow, which culminates in the creation of an 'energy decent action plan' (EDAP). For each Initiative, the EDAP lays out a future vision of a localised community in twenty years. It then creates a plan and strategy, involving practical measures and milestones, to reach this vision, covering fields ranging from food and transport to waste and energy (Hopkins, 2008).

Since the establishment of the Transition Network, the movement has mushroomed, with over two hundred participating Initiatives; now including Initiatives around the world (http://www.transitionnetwork.org/initiatives).[1] Looking within the field of environmentalism, I found no precedence for a model of local sustainability that involved the networking of spatially dispersed, local self-organising groups within the framework of a single model. How the Transition Model has achieved this was a question that needed addressing.

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[1] As of 22/3/2010 there are 280 'Official' Transition Towns (http://www.transitionnetwork.org/initiatives). At the point of my research there were 220 Initiatives.

Research Question

The last three years has seen an extraordinary growth in the number of Initiatives joining the Transition Network, with no indication of this expansion slowing. In this sense the Transition Model can be seen as very successful. Initiatives are being formed within a diverse range of places: in terms of geography, scale, culture, and socio-economic variables. In these places, Transition as a pathway to local sustainability is gaining grassroots support. Whilst the Transition Network now spreads internationally, this research focuses on the UK.

I have already noted that the political and social importance attached to sustainability in the last twenty years has not been matched with widespread success in implementing sustainability in practice. In this context, the Transition Model is of academic and practical interest. Still in its infancy, Transition is in many respects distinct from other models of sustainability in its structure and practice. Whilst a community-led action based model, dispersed Initiatives are at the same time linked together by the Transition Network, increasing capacity and networking potential. Very little research has focused specifically on the Transition Model, leaving ambiguity regarding the nature of the model. Therefore, my research asks:

How can the principles, structure and practical working of the Transition Model be understood, analysed and theorised.

By analysing and theorising the Transition Model, I sought to further establish: **Why has the Transition Model been so successful in both the number and the diversity of communities in which Initiatives have been established.**

In addressing these questions, I aimed to deduce and interpret any impact the Transition Model may have upon current theoretical and practical ideas about sustainability; asking whether Transition is locally networking towards global sustainability.

Fundamental to addressing this question have been key areas of theory, which collectively set the framework and foundations for a conceptual analysis of the Transition Model; it is these areas that I turn to next.

Conceptual and Theoretical Review

Introduction:

This research involved a continual critical grounding of my theoretical and empirical work within the relevant literature corpus. In building the framework and foundations for my conceptual analysis, I delved through a wide range of ideas and theories linked to the concepts and practice of Transition. For clarity I have classified these into the following areas:

- Environmentalism, sustainability, localism, social movements and networking, and environmental governance.

Transition: the Concept:

In investigating the theoretical basis of the Transition Model, my research took into consideration the literature produced by people involved in Transition. In particular, *The Transition Handbook* by Rob Hopkins outlines the key principles and theory of Transition, alongside the twelve-stage Transition plan and practical material for Initiatives. Additionally, *The Transition Primer* acts as an introduction guide for new Initiatives, *The Transition Timeline* outlines an example timeline for 'Transition', with further books addressing food, local money and other areas of the Transition process. This literature is useful to the extent that it establishes key principles behind Transition alongside outlining possible structures and pathways of Transition for Initiatives.

A further core of literature outlining radically reformist positions is apparent in Transition theory, as well as work positively framing the societal and economic outcome Transition would entail. What I see as 'push factors' contend that materialistic and capitalist economic and social structures are unsustainable, with the following principle issues outlined: climate change; peak oil - see the World Energy Outlook (2008); environmental degradation; and discourses on the finite planet thesis.

Outlining these 'push factors', Heinberg's (2004) *Powerdown* argues that: "we have already overshot Earth's long-term carrying capacity for humans – to

such an extent that some form of societal collapse is now inevitable." (Heinberg, 2004:10). He concludes with contrasting a catastrophic worst-case projection of 'last one standing' against a slightly less bleak scenario of 'powerdown' and 'building lifeboats', both predicated on radical societal and economic changes. He concludes: "Ultimately, personal survival will depend on community survival." (Heinberg, 2004:140). In many respects this is a classic 'Transition' text, arguing a radical reframing of society and economy is inevitable.

On the 'pull factor' side, Transition theory celebrates the perceived benefits of a paradigm of re-localised and resilient communities. Arguments to this extent include Holmgren's *Permaculture* (2002), calling for permaculture ecology principles to be applied to human settlement and agriculture. Similarly the *Blueprint for Survival* (1972) and Jackson's more recent *Prosperity without Growth* (2009) outline re-localisation paradigms.

Numerous texts cover both 'pull' and 'push' factors, and these establish the theoretical and ideological motivation for the Transition Model. The theoretical behind Transition is further evident within environmentalism.

Environmentalism

A crucial aspect of environmentalism in relation to Transition is the ideological and theoretical critique of modernity, especially in relation to technological industrial society. As O'Riordan (1981) argues, the environmental movement is moralistic and broadly reformist: "about conviction – conviction that a better mode of existence is possible... opening up our minds and our organisations to new ideas about fairness, sharing, permanence and humility." (O'Riordan as cited in Pepper, 1984:14). This succinctly describes Transition.

It is further necessary to identify the Transition Model's position on the divide between technocentric and ecological environmentalism. Dobson outlines this divide, defining the technocentric approach as arguing: "for a managerial approach to environmental problems, secure in the belief that they can be solved without fundamental changes in present values or patterns of production and consumption". (Dobson, 2007:2). In contrast: "Ecologism holds that a sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the

non-human world, and in our mode of social and political life." (Dobson, 2007:3). While both positions are reformist and the binary is somewhat simplistic, their ideological and theoretical stances are divergent in their consideration of environmental policy and practice. Theoretically the Transition Model's position within the ecological field is clear.

The environmental discourse of a finite planet is an additional area that, in relation to Transition, informs ideas about self-reliant and resilient communities. Utopian and even anarchic visions are often closely associated. Classic texts including *Limits to Growth (1974)*, *Blueprint for Survival* (1972), and *Small is Beautiful* (1974) address the finite planet debate. Whilst associated to this field are also Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' and 'lifeboat ethic' theses (O'Riordan, 1981).

Both the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* and its thirty-year update address from a technocratic systems point of view the perceived contradiction of perpetual material economic growth on a planet with finite resources and limited capacity for waste. Arguing the same point from a philosophical perspective, Schumacher (1974) contends that 'natural capital', such as fossil fuels, is being treated as if it were income. "This illusion... is mainly due to our inability to recognize that the modern industrial system... consumes the very basis on which it has been erected...it lives on irreplaceable capital that it cheerfully treats as income." (Schumacher, 1974:16). Schumacher's thesis outlines a steady-state 'economics of permanence'. The *Blueprint for Survival* (1972) goes further with a practical vision, proposing pathways to a radically reformist society involving an economy of stock, where there is minimal disruption to ecological systems. Finally, Callenbach's (1975) *Ecotopia* envisioned in fictional terms a society living within ecological limits.

The core proposition in the limits thesis, of the need for an alternative societal paradigm on a finite planet, clearly informs the Transition Model. In particular, I found Jackson's recent *Prosperity Without Growth* (2009) relevant in laying out an 'up-dated' finite planet account and calling for a credible vision of economic and social organisation within ecological limits. The parallel to

Transition is clear in Jackson's conclusion, saying: "the seeds for such an economy may already exist in local community-based social enterprises" (Jackson, 2009:132-3).

Key elements constituting the theory and ideology of the Transition Model are drawn from environmentalism; including its reformist ideology, from ecologism, and in the limits to growth thesis. To establish what informs the practice of Transition we need to look to sustainability.

Sustainability:

I apply sustainability cautiously, as it is a slippery concept; yet in so far as it challenges the mainstream economic and development paradigm, its ideas are intertwined within Transition. The often-quoted definition of sustainability is at the heart of the vision of Transition: to meet the "needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (Brundtland, 1987:8). This is clearly a vague definition, but as I will argue, such an open definition is central to the Transition Model.

I focused specifically on local sustainability, which Betsill and Bulkeley (2003) argue is a key area for action, as environmental issues such as climate change are profoundly local. Further, Agenda 21, chapter 28, specifically notes the need for local action in sustainability, with community participation and cooperation (Agenda 21, Ch. 28.1). In the UK Local Agenda 21 emerged from Agenda 21. Indeed, local sustainability is now reflected throughout government policy documents such as: the Sustainable Communities (2003) paper, calling for strong, thriving and vibrant sustainable communities. Similarly, sustainability is reflected in local policy, including National Indicator targets for councils, such as NI186 to cut per capita CO_2 emissions within a council area.

I have already looked at how sustainability ideas are manifested in a number of models, where I made the distinction between top-down governmental models and grassroots models of sustainability in individual communities. My later empirical analysis examines these sustainability models. I also reviewed recent academic work focused on the role of community movements in the field of sustainability; such as Szerszynski (1997) who believes community-led

movements are now as important as governmental top-down action in terms of practical sustainability.

Localism:

Theoretical and ideological concepts of 'localism', promoting the decentralization of economic, social and political life are implicit and explicit within Transition theory and practice. A long history of works address localism, such as Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops* envisioning a decentralized society; while Kohr's *The Breakdown of Nations* similarly posits a decentralist and anarchist vision. Localism is closely associated with anarchic ideology, as in Morris' *News From Nowhere*. Like the Transition Model today, localism theory calls for decentralized production, education, agriculture and social organisation.

Further, localisation ideology runs through much ecological and environmental literature. The *Blueprint for Survival* argues for a "decentralization of polity and economy at all levels, and the formation of communities small enough to be reasonably self-regulating and self-supporting" (Goldsmith et al., 1972:8). Similarly in *Small is Beautiful* it is concluded: "Man is small, and therefore, small is beautiful. To go for gigantism is to go for self-destruction." (Schumacher, 1974:133). Finally Heinberg argues: "Ultimately, only a process of re-localisation will permit survival of a functioning social order." (Heinberg, 2004:102).

At a theoretical level, localism informs Transition's goal of a localised paradigm of societal and economic organisation. And with its structure of self-organising Initiatives, Transition is local. The local is furthermore is bound up with social movement theory, which is critical to understanding Transition.

Social Movements and Networking:

Social movement theory helps explain how the Transition Model has built up grassroots support, bringing in new community-based Initiatives at an exponential rate across space and time. Indeed, Rob Hopkins describes Transition as: "one of the most dynamic and important social movements of the 21st century." (Hopkins, 2008:8).

In particular, I have considered Transition in relation to Castells (1996, 1997) work on the 'network society'; described as decentralized, multiform, network-oriented and pervasive. Castells' work can be applied to the way the Transition Network facilitates decentralized networking while the Transition Model retains a unified set of principles and values.

Social movement theory is further important in regards to community models of sustainability, which I have already discussed in relation to environmentalism and sustainability. Pepper (1984) speaks of the period in the late-1970's to early-1980's when a series of 'drop-out' communities formed, seeking to re-establish close and fundamental ties with nature and 'mother-earth'. Transition is in many respects ideologically and theoretically comparable to such models; however it differs in that it has spawned a network, becoming a 'viral social movement'.

Alongside and in conjunction with thinking of Transition as a social movement was the consideration of the role of networking in expanding the Transition Network. Specifically, I referred to Betsill and Bulkeley (2003, 2006) work into the ICLEI CCP program, where networking was important for the success of cities in achieving sustainability milestones. The CCP network seeks through linking cities together to increase local capacity; the sharing of knowledge, information, expertise, and experience being crucial. Further, Castells (1996, 1997) network society was suggestive in regards to the networking of Transition Initiatives, in terms of a 'space of flows' where grassroots movements can network globally.

Through this research, I have come to understand that the internet is crucial for networking. On this issue, the work of Gary Alexander (2000, 2004) was useful. He sees online tools facilitating a 'sustainable collaborative economy'; where the internet is shifting the economy towards collaboration and community, based on trust and with respect for the environment, rather than competition and individualism. Central to this in his view, are "grassroots and civil society initiatives linking together." (Alexander, 2004:2), which through the internet are

"beginning to form a network of networks, a co-operative of co-operatives." (Alexander, 2004:14).

Clay Shirky (2009) also focuses on information technologies enabling new kinds of group formation, where: "The ability of people to share, cooperate, and act together is being improved dramatically by our social tools." (Shirky, 2009:321). He sees new social tools, such as the internet, allowing people to escape the barriers of place and private life for collective social organisation and action; where groups self-assemble, network, organise and act far beyond former limits and at little cost.

Social movement and networking theory has been crucial to explaining the expansion of the Transition Network. However, my theoretical review has so far focused on the Transition Model itself; yet the political and governance context within which Transition is situated is equally crucial.

Global Environmental Governance:

Looking at the external context to Transition, the idea of a new paradigm and 'spatial grammar' (Bulkeley, 2005) of global environmental governance has been useful. In particular, I addressed whether the Transition Model can be characterised within Betsill and Bulkeley's conception of: a new multi-level governance of the environment, which involves a range of actors and is "not conducted at a discreet scale, but is constituted by relations of power and influence between sub-national and national state and non-state actors, and through the creation of new spheres of influence." (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2006:154). They perceive the processes and institutions of governance to be operating at and between a variety of scales, with partnerships between relevant stakeholders in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Rhodes' (1996) thesis on networking and governance in a hollowing-out state and Peck and Tickell's (2002) on the 'hollowed-out state' in a neo-liberal context, where power has been devolved from the national to the local and the supra national are both useful in considering the external context to Transition. Finally, Lipschutz (1996) thesis of a 'global civil society', made possible by transnational networks is interesting to the context of Transition. Theory on

governance helps establish the context in which Transition is operating, raising the question as to whether the Transition Model is made possible by new paradigm of multi-level environmental governance.

Some Concluding Remarks:

I have sought in this review to contextualize the relevant theory body in relation to the structure, principles and practice of the Transition Movement. This goes a long way to laying the foundations and groundwork for the conceptualisation of Transition. Equally important in the foundation of this research is my methodology.

Methodology

Methodological Theory

In ensuring that my research critically reflected and responded to current thinking on empirical research within geography, I considered the following areas:

- My ideological and theoretical position; the validity of a comparative case study approach; methodologies for qualitative research; and my positionality.

I appreciate that in qualitative academic work the way research is conducted and its conclusions are understood commonly reflects the author's philosophical, and even ideological, worldview. Whilst I am sympathetic to the values and goals of many environmental movements, I feel that my commitment to the following methodology, and to continued self-reflexivity in my work avoids my becoming ideologically blinded. In research, I take the view that there is 'a world out there' upon which knowledge can be built; but I also believe theory and knowledge to be fundamentally time and space specific and contingent. I have sought to conceptualise the Transition Model as it stands at present.

Focusing specifically on semi-structured interviewing, which was central to my research, Silverman (1997) contrasts the extreme positions, from a positivist to a radical social constructionist approach. Aspects of both are convincing, and I argue that: while not getting a mirror image of reality in qualitative research, one can gain access to meanings people attribute to their experience of social worlds, and the structures of those social worlds (Silverman, 1997).

Another issue I considered is the disapproval expressed by some social scientists of comparative case study research. Clearly this research does not conform to the repeatable scientific 'case study'; yet, as I am addressing the theory and practice of Transition in very different places, a comparative approach was needed. Furthermore, Betsill and Bulkeley's (2003) work provides a precedence of comparative research in this field.

As this topic has seen little academic attention, my research has been more inductive than deductive. It has also meant that my methodological strategy had no past academic work on Transition to inform it. Yet, Betsill and Bulkeley's (2003) methodology for researching the CCP program was useful, offering a tried-and-tested guide. They conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a sample of cities, and carried out a review of relevant literature and policy documents. I decided that a similar approach, involving a wider literature and website review alongside in-depth interviewing of a sample would work well.

While there are advantages and disadvantages to both qualitative and quantitative approaches; for this research a qualitative approach facilitated the capture of the diversity and conceptual depth of the Transition Model and Initiatives, in theory and practice. In particular, semi-structured in-depth interviews offer a free flowing, rich and detailed form of research, when conducted well (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). Clearly there is a danger of inadvertently omitting topics during interviews as well as the inevitable variation between interviews, making quantitative cross-comparison difficult. However, the interviews were necessarily variable and in-depth, making space for each Initiative's different experiences of Transition. The skill of the interviewer is crucial; and being an undergraduate dissertation this was a steep, but I feel successful, learning curve.

For researching online literature, websites and forums Bryman (2008) covers the important theoretical and practical issues. For interviewing and the social encounter of interviews, both Kitchen and Tate (2000) and Silverman (1997) discuss the various merits of different methods.

In researching Transition Towns, I was entering an environment as an outsider: I first needed to gain access in Transition Totnes through the Transition founders, and secondly with each Initiative. As Mullings (1999) discusses, interviewing involves the creation of dynamic 'positional spaces' between the researcher and subject. As an outsider, while I was neutral to Transition politics, there is a risk of being unable to gain in-depth and full responses. Yet I feel I mitigated this through creating a rapport, trust and a shared space of interest in interviews, as well as taking a sufficiently large sample of over ten percent of

Initiatives. Further, reviewing websites and Transition forums gave me an alternative, possibly insider observer position to groups and networks.

Interviews involve complex social encounters and knowledge cannot be treated as 'pure' (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). Positionality, inter-subjectivity and power relations influence interviews; whilst Ragin and Becker (1992) raise the concern that the researcher brings their existing world, imaginations and stereotypes to research. I was therefore continually self-reflexive of my positionality and that of my subjects, and how that might affect my research. As Sayer (1992) points out, all knowledge is socially constituted and is therefore inherently subjective; arguing this necessitates governing rules, proper conduct and ethics in research. To this extent, I have sought to follow authoritative guidelines for analysis and research.

Finally, my research fulfilled the important ethical considerations involved, especially around interviewing, where I offered anonymity to those who wanted it.

Methodological Practice:

The theoretic grounding of my research was in conjunction with the establishment of an appropriate practical methodological strategy. Aiding my methodological development was the work of Bryman (2008), Kitchen and Tate (2000) and Silverman (1997). My empirical research followed a three pronged-methodology including:

1st.   An initial and ongoing grounding of the Transition Model within its theoretical and contextual framework; most notably in the fields of environmentalism, localism and sustainability, social movements and networking and governance; as well as with other models of sustainability.

2nd.   Secondly, I conducted an analysis of Transition Initiative websites, literature and online forums. This ensured representation across all initiatives at a broad comparative level; covering information on Initiatives progress towards Transition goals, the people involved, and networking.

3rd.   A general broad analysis laid the foundation for the core empirical research. In-depth, semi-structured interviews addressing the structure, practice, ideas and progress of a sample of twenty-two Initiatives

constituted the heart of my conceptualisation of the Transition Model and its practical working.

My interview sample was based upon reaching a mix of Initiatives in terms of population size, urban to rural, and recent to well established; making my sample representative of the breadth of Initiatives. My strategy involved contacting the first ten official Transition Initiatives[2]; every additionally tenth Initiative afterwards; and any Initiatives in between 'bucking the trend' whether geographically or in terms of the socio-economics. My strategy did not use a 'scientifically' random or representative sample, as I needed to capture the diversity and variability of initiatives within my sample as well as having a level of randomness. Four of my interviews were face-to-face, including with Rob Hopkins, co-founder of the Transition Model, and Ben Brangwyn, head of the Transition Network; both lasting one hour. Further interviews were by telephone, lasting between twenty and forty minutes.

For Initiatives that did not respond to initial contact, I sent a second email while also emailing as a contingency, the next official Initiative after them. In all cases I contacted people involved in the core team[3] of Initiatives, who in most cases had been involved from their establishment. Overall I arranged twenty-four interviews with twenty-two Initiatives:

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[2] An official list of Transition Initiatives, ordered chronologically, are recognized by the Transition Network.
[3] Each Initiative has a core team, made up in my research sample of between 4-8 people..

Town	Official Transition No.
Totnes (2 Interviews) Ben Brangwyn & Rob Hopkins	1
Penwith	2
Stroud	8
Ottery St. Mary	10
Portobello, Scotland	21
Llandeilo, Wales	25
Brampton	30
Bath (2 Interviews)	37
Liverpool South	49
Berkhamsted	64
New Forest	72
Cambridge	82
Kingston-Upon Thames	84
Langport	95
High Wycombe	120
Kirkbymoorside	132
Castle Ward, Bedford	140
Diss	164
Finsbury Park	191
Marlow	200
Sherborne	201
Bruton	Not yet Official

Table 1: Interviewed Transition Initiatives.

In constructing my interview (See Appendix B), I drew on the work of Kitchen and Tate (2001), who address the planning and execution of interviews. All my interviews were tape-recorded, allowing me to fully transcribe and note nuances of voice and dispositions; I did not feel this inhibited the interviews. I conducted a pilot interview with Transition Kirkbymoorside; ironing-out, testing, changing, developing and finalizing my questions and interview structure.

Analysis:

Choosing and developing a mode of analysis, I drew on the work of Kitchen and Tate (2000), Strauss (1987), and Strauss and Corbin (2000). I felt that it would be prohibitively restrictive to stick slavishly to the word of a specific mode of analysis, few of which exist. Further, Strauss (1987) argues that there are no clear guidelines or methods, with researchers largely learning through trial and error.

Aspects of several analytical approaches were useful, in particular grounded analysis with coding.

I transcribed fully all twenty-four interviews, and with my website and forum reviews I produced oversight sheets of information to mix with my interview analysis. As my data analysis involved cross-comparison, coding was essential in moving my analysis from a general description to a more abstract conceptualisation and theoretical analysis. Additionally, coding offers a structured framework for analysis and conceptual development (Strauss, 1987); as well as being well regarded by social scientists. Coding was appropriately exhaustive and extensive, catching the detail and complexities of each Initiative while providing a holistic oversight of Transition.

Coding helped me think about my data from fresh perspectives, catching connections and patterns. I agree with Kitchen and Tate (2000) stressing the value of coding in mixing up interviews, for interrogating, making comparisons and associations, facilitating 'splitting' and 'splicing': working to lay the foundations for theory building. For organizing my interviews, coding and making memos, I used the software package ATLAS.

In the process of theory building, as Kitchen and Tate (2000) note, the researcher must continually re-examine the authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning of the data and coding. During analysis, my codes changed, merged, and new ones were added, as I strengthened and re-worked my analysis. This process allowed me to reflect on the consistency of my theory building.

Building my theory to the necessary conceptual density was a long and slow process. However, emerging from my analysis a series of core-coded themes were apparent, firmly and extensively grounded in the data. These core areas form the focus of my following discussion.

Discussing Transition:

Introduction:

Emerging from this research is a Transition Model that is very complex and dynamic, conceptually and in its practice. A series of fundamentally inter-linked core themes are crucial to the model's theory and practices and are key to understanding why the Transition Network has been so successful in fostering the establishment of Initiatives in diverse places.

Transition: Radical Theory and Mainstream Practice:

Looking specifically at the theory and ideology of the Transition Model, it lies at heart within the environmental field of political ecology or 'ecologism'. The Transition Model proposes a radically reformist shift away from industrial society, which it sees as heading towards a 'crunch'; where resource depletion, climate change and environmental degradation threaten some form of societal collapse. Critiquing materialistic and capitalistic modernity, Transition seeks a new paradigm involving re-localisation and 'powerdown'.

Transition's radical agenda has been crucial in attracting people to the movement; especially those with past environmental activity, many of whom believe that radical change is essential. Around half the people I interviewed held strong 'ecologist' positions, critical of the status quo; Transition forums similarly reflecting this position. Eleven of my interviewees foresaw drastic scenarios resulting from climate change, peak oil, power and food shortages. The majority of interviewees believed it inevitable that societies and economies would need to re-localize. Crucial to this point, Transition was seen by all as a viable and workable model and pathway to sustainability.

While Transition theory proclaims a radical message, in practice Initiatives are developing ideas and projects that can be characterised as 'mainstream' environmental work, including: community gardens, pushing funding for renewable energy projects, encouraging recycling and raising awareness. Such projects hardly indicate the radical aspects of Transition theory.

Yet these kinds of projects, and the mainstream 'image' Transition has gained in the process of raising awareness and participation, attracts people with environmental and community concerns who do not want involvement with radical environmental groups. Importantly 'respectable' strategies and projects do not alienate communities either. The belief that the Transition Model was, and needed to be, respectable and mainstream emerged equally as often as radical views in interviews. Mark in High Wycombe said their Initiative was not an "*irrational, woolly, thinking kind of initiative to perhaps go and hug a tree; no, this is cold, rational… this is science, this is the voice of business speaking.*" Similarly, Richard in New Forest argued: "*This is sensible, and it is not full of people who you'd want to cross the street to avoid.*"

Bringing together a grassroots base of support around the principles of Transition, into what I call a 'Transition Coalition' is crucial to the model. The Transition Model has to date successfully merged radical and mainstream views and practice, creating a 'brand' and image that attracts a wide base. This is a key primary element that allows Transition, a community-led and action-based model, to extend itself beyond any one place or core issue, while retaining grassroots support. In contrast, other grassroots community models, whether groups radically isolating themselves from mainstream society or communities seeking to ban plastic bags, struggle to gain participation beyond their issue base and their place of operation; while most governmental initiatives fail to connect to a grassroots base.

Having people with radical reformist agendas working alongside moderate environmentalists and people without past environmental organisation participation of course raises questions over how Transition is able to structurally incorporate this diversity, which I address later. However, the successful bringing together of a wide 'Transition Coalition' has been key to the ability of the Transition network to expand. Evidently Transition is doing something other sustainability models do not.

Transition: Contrasting and Comparing:

Focusing on how this 'Transition Coalition' at the grassroots was made possible; my analysis focused on comparing Transition with other sustainability models. Table 2 compares Transition with the two forms of sustainability models: top-down, governmental and small community grassroots models.

	Top-down Model	Transition Towns	Grassroots models
Structure	Such Initiatives include the CCP, Energie-cities or UN-HABITAT Sustainable Cities. City councils and/or relevant government bodies commit to a model with specific top-down managerial goals. For example, the CCP program adopting CO_2 reduction targets. Usually government supported.	All participating Transition Initiatives are self-organising in their projects, strategies and goals. All Initiatives also retain the core Transition principles of re-localisation, 'powerdown' and building local resilience.	Includes a diversity of initiatives and models. Each model/initiative has their own structure; shaped according to specific values, ideology and goals. These grassroots models tend to be bounded to one community or place. Examples include the Findhorn Community in Scotland, or the CAT institute in Wales.
Networking	Networking is formalized, and usually hierarchical. A central body driving the initiative is providing resources, often financial. Individual participating cities often inter-network, sharing information, expertise and experience.	Networking occurs at a myriad of scales: within and between Initiatives, and between Initiatives and government, businesses or other NGOs or third parties. Networks are self-organising and opportunistic to needs. Not all Initiatives are networking in all these spheres.	Community and grassroots models tend to be weak in networking. Individual initiatives or models have no 'natural' network to join; the majority isolated in their core area. This reduces the collective capacity opportunities of networks.
Grassroots base and participation	Gaining any kind of grassroots or community base for top-down models has been very difficult. Such models are characterised by being governmental led, and top-down.	Transition seeks to be at its core a grassroots model. Through its community-led nature and self-organising structure, Transition has built a wide grassroots 'Transition coalition'. Usually, Initiatives reach a maximum of 10% of their communities participating in an Initiative.	Grassroots models are embedded within their communities; drawing their support from this level; this is in stark contrast to top-down models.

Capacity and Funding	The major advantage most top-down models have is likely access to funding from government or other national/ international organisations, as well as expert input, increasing their capacity for action.	At the individual Initiative level, funding and resources are usually key capacity constraints; only a few Initiatives having ad-hoc funding. At the level of the wider organisation, there is greater capacity, which Initiatives tap into, alongside the respectability and visibility of the Transition brand.	Funding and resources are key constraint. Funding is gained on an ad-hoc basis, increasing capacity. Yet, capacity is also limited by failure to network or be part of a larger organisation.
Ideology and theory	Technocratic environmentalism; working within current framework of society.	Ecologist in ideology and theory. Yet, so far in the practice of Initiatives more mainstream environmental.	Ideology varies hugely between models and Initiatives, according to the goals of those who are participating.

Table 2: Comparison of the Transition Model with other sustainability models

The important points about the two alternative models of sustainability I have characterised are the following:

- Local community models may be successful individually, such as the Findhorn community in Scotland; yet they have not gained the capacity benefits of networking.
- Top-down models are networking and have institutional and resource capacity; but they rarely have grassroots support.

In principle Transition has the network and organisational capacity and the grassroots base. This again raises the question of how Transition has successfully structured a 'Transition Coalition' within a coherent organisation.

Transition: Democratic Success?

My research shows that the democratic and 'umbrella' organisational structure of the Transition Model is crucial to its success in bringing new Initiatives and people within a single organisational framework. Transition's structure performs core functions, including:

- Incorporating and supporting self-organising Initiatives.
- Establishing an identifiable 'brand', defining general principles and goals.
- Providing a networking framework. (I address this last function separately).

Structured as an umbrella framework, and framed as a holistic approach to sustainability: Transition brings under one coherent 'brand' a diversity of people, ideas and groups holding a myriad of positions on environmental and sustainability issues. For new Initiatives, some of which were environmental groups before joining Transition, the model offers an existing foundation, reinforces their core principles, and provides the motivation and security of being part of a wider movement.

"I think a lot of people feel like [Transition is] a thing that pulls a lot of other things together… it's a kind of unifying framework which they have been looking for" (Rob Hopkins).

"[T]he concept of Transition is terribly valuable because it helps people to think about what steps to take first, and yet to have a distant vision" (Mike, Brampton).

Coupled with this is the 'brand' that Transition is building; creating a reputation as a practical, respectable and trusted community model.

"… it really is important that transition be an important brand that people can identify with and is respectable." Mark, High Wycombe.

"I suppose, the Transition Initiative has a profile and we are just latching on" (Ian, Bath).

"Transition gives it a real identifiable brand that people can see and buy into" (Thomas, Portobello).

As a national 'brand' the model has been building momentum, capacity and visibility, which individual Initiatives can latch onto. For example, in Berkhamsted I was told that the Transition group was considered by the Council to be bigger and more influential than it perhaps was. Additionally, Transition's brand is perceived to come without negative 'baggage' or stereotypes associated with many environmental organisations.

The Transition Model aims to have covered much of the groundwork in practical areas of sustainability, so that for Initiatives 'the wheel is not continually re-invented'. To this extent a key function of the model is to provide resources,

information, knowledge, training and support. Included in this is: material and information for recently established Initiatives; the twelve steps of Transition; and ideas, experience and information shared on Transition websites and forums. For example talks, films, discussion topics, and project ideas are shared, especially for awareness raising.

"... they give you stuff on a memory stick to take away, and there is a fantastic wealth of information and data that you can use than to present to local groups; be it churches, schools, youth clubs, you know, chambers of commerce, and business organisations... you can cherry pick the bits that you need" (Willi, Marlow).

Above these core functions is the principle of self-organisation. Beyond their approval by the trustees of the Transition Movement, Initiatives structure and organise their activities independently. The theory and practice is simple: any ideas, strategies or projects a group has, they can just get on with it. Responsibility is passed down, with the principles of Transition adapted to local conditions. This self-organising and fundamentally democratic structure is crucial to bringing in new Initiatives, people, ideas and projects.

"Communities can spontaneously organise and achieve, you know, actually achieve useful measurable outcomes." Mark, Liverpool South.

"[W]hat I liked about the Transition Model [was] that it is very much about empowering local communities and about local communities taking responsibility to make themselves more resilient" Mark, Bath.

The coherence of this structure is maintained through the core principles of localisation, 'powerdown' and building local resilience, which all Initiatives follow. Interestingly, several Initiatives I interviewed had been operating as groups before joining the Transition Network: Transition Sherborne formed out of a peace and justice group, later involved in environmental work. Being allowed to self-organise beyond adhering to the central principles and Transition 'brand' was crucial to these Initiatives joining Transition.

Indeed, most Initiatives follow locally adapted strategies, few follow the twelve steps of Transition closely, and almost none have considered an EDAP to

date. Further, many Initiatives rarely used online materials or resources. A minority were applying these materials closely. Transition more than anything was seen to provide the vision, values and principles that Initiatives could independently work with.

The democratic structure is continued within Initiatives, in which, beyond a core group maintaining and driving the Initiative, sub-groups are formed focusing on particular areas of Transition. For example, within a food group, participating members will develop projects and strategies that suit their abilities, interests and community. Each Initiative is itself an umbrella body.

This was picked up by Jane, who saw Transition Kingston-upon-Thames bringing together isolated groups and people: "*we've always said we are only going to be an umbrella; we are not here to duplicate, we are not here to re-invent the wheel. We're here to help bring everybody together in a bigness so that we can actually achieve something.*" (Jane).

This democratic pattern stretches again to the level of individuals involved in Transition. Whether someone is interested in the funding of renewables or the psychology of change, they can establish or join a sub-group with like-minded people and seek to foster projects. Ben Brangwyn argues this is crucial, as it allow Transition to be a holistic model in which people concentrate where they are interested and skilled, leaving other areas to other people; whilst all coming under the Transition umbrella.

Transition's framework amalgamates a diversity of people and places: within which 'hippies' can work alongside 'NIMBYs', village Initiatives alongside city Initiatives, within the framework of a 'Transition Coalition'.

Transition: a 'Discourse Coalition':

I contend that the Transition Model can be conceptualised as a 'discourse coalition', defined by Hajer (1995) as bringing together people from diverse interest areas around a single symbolic focusing discourse. For Transition the central discursive repertoire is focused on climate change and peak oil, resilience

and localisation. Under the 'discourse coalition' umbrella of Transition, people and Initiatives organise independently, fostering diverse projects and action.

Transition: (Local) Environmental Governance:

So far I have identified the core theoretical, ideological and structural elements behind Transition's ability to build widespread grassroots support and expand its network; factors that are internal to Transition. Yet it is additionally crucial to understand the external context of Transition; in which, I argue, local environmental governance similar to that conceptualised by Betsill and Bulkeley (2004) is apparent. Figure 1 shows how Initiatives have carved a space of governance in areas of local environmental policy and action.
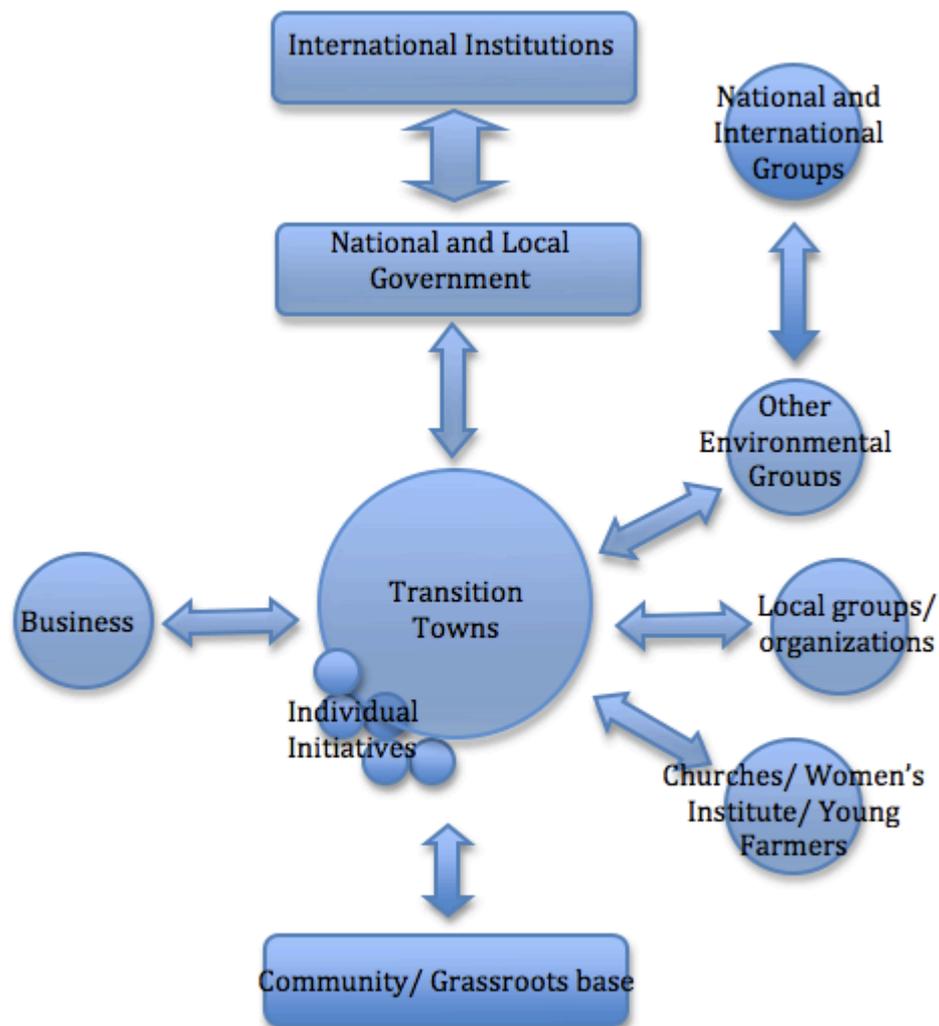

Figure 1: The Transition Model within a system of environmental governance.

What I primarily seek to highlight is the opportunistic nature of networking between different organisations within the field of local environmental

governance. My research showed that Transition Initiatives were partaking in a diversity of forms of networking within this field. This ranged from: correspondence and consultation with local councils around environmental issues and community development plans; recycling and food policy; specific funding projects, such as for renewables; links with community organisations, from farmers groups to Churches and women's institutes; exchanges with local businesses; and links with national organisations.

This characterisation is a generalisation across all Initiatives. Some were involved in multiple fields of networking and governance, a few in none. For those Initiatives involved in governance, Betsill and Bulkeley's (2004) idea of governance working at different scales and across sectors, involving multiple actors, is a good characterisation of the local situation. The most successful Initiatives have carved out authoritative spaces within local environmental governance, legitimized especially through their connection to grassroots community. Within these spaces of governance, there is the opportunity for policy decisions to be taken, and projects to be implemented. For example, Transition Stroud participated in writing Stroud council's food policy.

While multilevel governance in itself does not explain the expansion of the Transition Network; it does create an arena of governance within which well-organised Initiatives have the potential to influence sustainability policy at the local level.

A number of institutional factors influence the reception Initiatives receive when seeking to become involved with local environmental governance. The openness of local councils to establishing links with Initiatives, and the individual people within councils determine whether Initiatives are able to gain access. Many councils consult and network with Transition groups on policy areas while others ignore them: in Bath and Somerset local government are supportive, whilst in Llandeilo and Liverpool South there are few governmental links. Finally, the 'mainstream' and 'respectable' national brand that Transition promotes is paramount to Initiatives being taken seriously in governance.

Transition: People and Place:

Emerging as a core field in my analysis was the central role individual people play in the crucial areas of:

- Establishing and driving Initiatives, in constituting Transition Network(s), and in the creation of links within spheres of governance.

Initiatives that are thriving are those with motivated, energetic and skilled individuals in the core team, driving strategy and projects. Indeed, in several cases, where members of the core group had left, the Initiatives struggled to continue. Further, personal networks were crucial to people becoming involved with Transition and for new Initiatives being formed. People I interviewed had been members of environmental organisations from the Green Party through to Climate Camp, as well as coming from academic, community, social justice and peace group backgrounds. Networks and contacts within these organisations play a central role in bringing new people into the 'Transition Coalition'.

With Initiatives being self-organising and democratic, people involved in Transition essentially determine its meaning, goals, practice and projects. Furthermore, people have a central stake in the future direction of Transition. This once more links back to the structure and theory of the Transition Model, which allows people to take such central determining roles; which in turn encourages people's initial participation in Transition.

The Transition Model's structure allows the network to expand, incorporating Initiatives embedded in very different places. Importantly, the particularities of place from geography and scale to economic and social factors do not prevent a core group of people establishing an Initiative. The self-organising structure of the Transition Model compensates for differences of place.

However, in the longer-term place does matter, with certain communities appearing to be better suited to Transition. Communities with past social activity provide a good base, such as Ottery St. Mary, famous for the protests of 'Swampy' against road-building: "*Ottery is a funny little place in that its got a good community but it has also got a history of green social enterprise... it acted as a sort of base for*

an anti-road protest." (Clive, Ottery). Similarly, pioneering Initiatives such as Totnes, Stroud, Lewes and Glastonbury are all communities with histories of 'alternative' action. It further seems likely that in smaller market towns and to an extent in the city neighbourhoods: community size and cohesion offers the greatest potential for Initiative's to embed locally. This is crucial for longer-term grassroots community participation, momentum and energy.

Transition: A Networking Social Movement:

A bottom-up, grassroots movement with collective goals and principles: Transition can be characterised as a social movement. I have conceptualised Transition as a discourse coalition, enabled by a democratic and self-organising structure. Crucial to Transition being good at building a 'Transition Coalition' is the movement's ability to tap into a latent demand, and in many cases a sense of urgency for reformist action. The idea is that *"something needs to change, something needs to happen"* (Gill, Bruton). Transition's promotion of a paradigm of localised sustainability taps into a groundswell of opinion, mobilising a grassroots base much as a social movement.

It "*was the frustration that at that point nothing was happening at the governmental level that was addressing issues of climate change or peak oil"* (Mark, Bath).

"We're here really because there was a need to… a small group of us really wanted to do something else following on from the inspiration of… Rob Hopkins." (John, Llandeilo).

"You know for me it is the bigger picture, I see this as part of a grassroots movement; eventually to grow big enough so that politicians sit up and take notice." (Willi, Marlow).

"We… bill ourselves as a cultural organisation. We are wanting to change perceptions, educate people" (Mark, High Wycombe).

Indeed, Ben Brangwyn sees Transition as "*creating an environment where currently unelectable policies become electable."* The 'Transition Coalition', structured within the framework of the Transition organisational umbrella is growing its network through acting as a social movement, bringing in new people

at the grassroots level around the holistic idea of sustainability and the discursive principles of Transition.

However, while Transition is attracting people with environmental and community concerns to join and establish Initiatives, this does not mean that whole communities are participating. My research shows that participation of communities is in every case a minority, usually five to ten percent of a population on mailing lists. Whether this is a weakness in the Transition Model is unclear; especially as gaining majority participation for any 'cause' within communities is rare.

Bound together with seeing the Transition Model as a social movement, was the consideration of networking. Tapping into an existing demand for action, the Transition Model's ability to go 'viral' was predicated upon networking, including: within and between Initiatives, with existing organisations, and through personal networks. It is clear that one must speak of 'Transition Network(s)', with Figure 2 representing forms of networking.
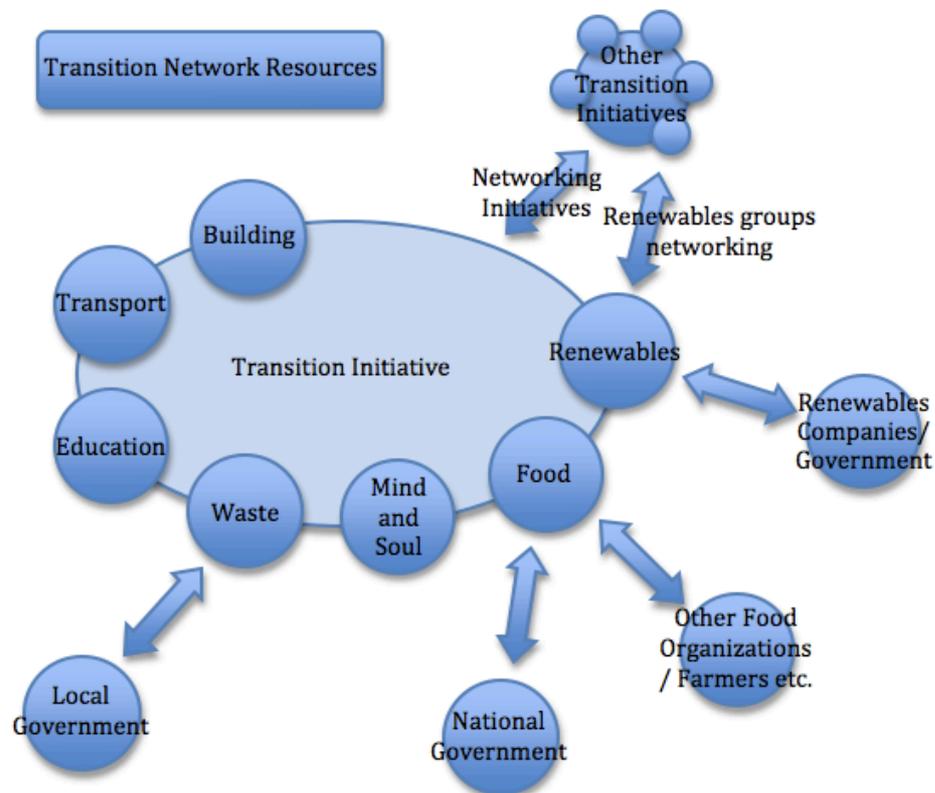

Figure 2: Networking of Initiatives.

Figure 2 simplifies the variety of networks that are being formed by Initiative's. While, networks are multi-form, changing, and locally specific; general manifestations of networking include:

- Initiatives inter-networking, such as between two city Initiatives, or between the renewables sub-groups of two Initiatives.
- Between an Initiative's sub-group and an outside organisation, for example between a food group and local farmers, or a transport group and local government.
- Initiatives networking with their local council, with businesses and other organisations such as Churches or women's groups.

I have already stated the importance of personal and group networking in expanding the Transition Network. Equally important to the expansion of the Transition Network are Initiatives inter-networking, often on a regional or local basis. A crucial function of Transition as an umbrella organisation is facilitating the sharing of knowledge, information, experience and resources. It is therefore not surprising that I have identified networking being practiced by all Initiatives to some extent.

Between Initiatives, this networking takes a variety of forms, including: regional networking fostering new Initiatives neighbouring existing ones; organised regional groups such as Transition Scotland, Transition East, or Transition Somerset; and personal ties between people in spatially disparate Initiatives. In all of these forms, I identified the sharing of information, expertise, ideas, experience, and resources. Parallel to this, the support and encouragement passed through networks is equally important. For example, Mark in Bath spoke about networking at the neighbourhood level: *"We think that they might be able to learn from us... we are putting in some energy and enthusiasm and hoping to strike-off similar little groups; and if they develop their own energy and enthusiasm we can take some of that back off them."* (Mark, Bath).

The value that Initiatives attach to networking varied, with many only networking to a limited extent. For Initiatives that were not networking, long-term momentum and energy was difficult to maintain. Indeed, looking to the longer-

term viability and progress of Initiatives, their effectiveness at networking with government, businesses and other organisations is crucial for funding opportunities to be grasped and capacity strengthened.

Personal contacts, including links through third party organisations facilitate networking. Yet it is the internet that is crucial in growing the Transition Network. The internet allows people to network cheaply; sharing information, expertise and best practice as well as building the capacity of Transition as an organisation. From Initiatives networking to understand the funding options for installing solar panels, to city initiatives sharing their experiences of raising awareness, the Internet provides an indispensible tool. My research showed that the internet is arguably being underutilized, with some Initiatives not using the internet to network.

Whilst an indispensible tool, the internet is still only providing a platform for networking. It is people who lay out Transition's principles and goals, and expand the network. Further, it is the principles of Transition, such as localism, that attract people to Transition.

Transition: Localism and Community:

The ideology and theory of localism lies at the heart of the Transition model, with my research showing it was, and is, a key condition to a majority of people's initial and continued participation. There is a clear ideological support for decentralized, strong, empowered and resilient communities.

The community-led nature of Transition was referred to in a majority of interviews. Jo in Finsbury Park saw community as characterising Transition, while for Transition Berkhamsted the desire for a sense of community built on cooperation and trust was stressed.

Transition: Going Somewhere?

My analysis has addressed key elements of the Transition Model in its theory, structure and practice, but before concluding, I want to briefly note some longer-term questions surrounding the Transition Model.

Firstly, I have argued that clarity around the central principles of Transition, and its holistic approach to sustainability have been key to the building of a grassroots 'Transition Coalition'. How Transition maintains a coherent set of principles and a stable 'brand' as its network grows, a key element of its *raison d'être*, is in the longer-term an unanswered question. This is especially true because of the self-organising nature of the model.

Secondly, while Transition as a social movement has been good at raising awareness and participation within communities, so growing its network; it is unclear whether Initiatives will have the energy, capacity or ability to develop meaningful projects. Preventing self-organising Initiatives losing momentum and dying out through time seems an issue; especially where capacity and funding restraints limits the effectiveness of projects furthering the goals of Transition being implemented. Capacity was raised in all of my interviews as a key limiting factor, in particular: the voluntary nature of Transition; the lack of time and resources; failure to involve communities beyond a minority; or people simply burning-out.

Both the lack of capacity within many Initiatives and their failure to drive forward meaningful projects could challenge Transition's ability to grow its network and grassroots support, and to retain current Initiatives and people. Transition is sold as an action-based model, seeking material and visible projects. Yet while there has been some success in some Initiatives in the areas of local food, local currencies, local shopping and awareness raising; this has been limited, and tied to funding, institutional support and having the right people with the necessary skills.

Transition: Utopia for Local Sustainability?

In drawing to a close, I want to advance a number of conclusions. I set myself the task of conceptualising the principles, structure and practical working of the Transition Model in order to establish the core elements that have enabled Transition to incorporate a diversity of places and people. To this extent, I have identified elements of the theory, structure and context to Transition that are key factors in the growth of the Transition movement.

I contend that seeing Transition as a 'discourse coalition' brings an understanding of how the Transition Model has incorporated people from a broad range of backgrounds, holding a diverse range of positions on environmental and sustainability issues. I argue that the Transition Model's holistic approach to sustainability is crucial to this coalition, coupled with its core principles of re-localisation, 'powerdown' and building resilient communities. These have allowed Transition as a 'brand' and organisation to become a symbolic focal point of a 'Transition Coalition'.

Crucially, The Transition Model's structure has facilitated the incorporation of this 'Transition Coalition'; enabling people from radical ecologist positions to participate alongside people who simply want more recycling in their community. Transition being an umbrella organisation with a brand provides the advantages of large-scale organisational capacity, coherent and ordered principles and a platform for networking. At the same time, beyond these crucial functions, self-organising Initiatives define and develop Transition within a geographical and socio-economic diversity of places.

Transition's framework allows a diversity of people and places to 'get on with it', adapting the principles of Transition to each Initiatives context. Not only does this make the model uniquely able to extend its network, incorporating very different places while maintaining a core; it additionally makes people the greatest assets to the model, driving forward Initiatives, ideas and projects.

Being a self-organising model at the local scale, whilst having the coherence of an umbrella 'brand' and organisational structure: the Transition Model is primarily a discourse coalition, rather than a prescriptive model. The diversity of people and places involved in Transition could not otherwise be held together within one model. The Transition Model's primary role is that of facilitator, acting as a central focal point that unifies the multiple individual Initiatives, people and projects who otherwise have no connection.

Further, the Transition Model's role as a networking social movement is crucial to extending the groundwork, so that the 'Transition Coalition' can grow. It is also essential to the continued success and participation of Initiatives: sharing information, ideas, expertise and experience; as well as networking beyond Transition in the field of local environmental governance.

Finally, the institutional and governance context within which Transition operates is crucial. Initiatives that have been able to establish their authority within the field of local environmental governance and have gained access to, and involvement in, environmental policy making in their local area.

The above factors, converging within the Transition Model, have enabled the extraordinary growth of a community-led 'Transition Coalition', a social movement founded on a reformist set of principles. Looking within the field of sustainability, this research illuminates our understanding on important theoretical and practical issues.

Transition has demonstrated that it is possible for a single model to build grassroots support across a range of spatially dispersed and socio-economically variable places. This should not be surprising, considering how a clear majority of the British population express environmental concerns; however, in the past models have had limited success in tapping into grassroots environmental concerns, to mobilise support for sustainability initiatives. I argue that it is the structure of Transition that is crucial to grassroots support. As a brand and umbrella organisation, Transition is able to facilitate and foster networking potential and collective resources, which encourages participation in the model. Yet equally important, the self-organising nature of the model is a key attraction to

people and places joining Transition. This duel structure enables the establishment of a diverse discourse coalition, incorporated through a holistic approach to sustainability.

Transition has clearly been successful in bringing in new Initiatives, and people, across a diversity of places. My research has shown that people at the grassroots do want to become involved with initiatives promoting sustainability, and it has shown that these must be locally based models.

Further, the Transition Model has demonstrated how capacity can be built into networks, cultivating collective resources across Initiatives, and within the field of local governance; as well as enabling the movement both to take root locally and be responsive to changing circumstances, and to extend into new spaces and work at multiple scales.

Closing Questions:

My research has focused on the present. However, while Transition has been 'successful' in expanding its network; looking to the future it remains to be seen how the 'Transition Coalition' will hold onto 'radical' and 'moderate' members, whilst implementing meaningful reformist action. Further, Transition as a networking social movement has been good at absorbing self-organising groups and people, raising awareness of Transition; how it retains a core brand and set of principles in the long term is again questionable.

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Appendix A: the 12 Steps of Transition (Hopkins, 2008)

The Twelve Steps of Transition:

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

2: Raise awareness: Assume people are not informed on environmental issues, climate change or peak oil. Prepare the ground.

3: Lay the foundations.

4: **Organise a 'Great Unleashing'**: Now you have a groundswell of people ideally: generate a momentum to propel your initiative forward. Celebration of the communities desire to act. Stress it is an historic meeting. Invite local councilors, planners and movers and shakers.

5: Form Groups: Need to tap into the collective genius of the town. Set up a number of smaller groups to focus on specific aspects of the process. Need a core of people to steer each group; yet also open.

6: Use Open Space: Simple way to run productive meetings. Focusing question. Generate numerous ideas.

7: Develop visible practical manifestations of the project: Ideas are easy, practical things happening harder. Need to create practical manifestations early to ensure initiative not a talking shop.

8: Facilitating the Great Re-skilling: We have lost many of our basic skills. Need to look at what is useful. Learning new skills builds networks.

9: Build a Bridge to local government: Need a positive and productive relationship to progress.

10: **Honour the elders**: Learn from those who experienced the transition to cheap oil.

11: Let it go where it wants to go: Open attitude to direction. Follow the direction of people's energy. Your role: act as a catalyst.

12: Create an Energy Descent Action Plan: "An EDAP sets out a vision of a powered-down, resilient, relocalised future, and than backcasts, in a series of practical steps, creating a map for getting from here to there." (Hopkins, 2007:172). Every settlement will be different. Cover all areas of life: energy, food, transport, education, tourism etc. Should be a work in progress.

Appendix B: Interview Question Areas:

Official Points:

I am studying Geography at the University of Cambridge.

Thank you very much for agreeing to an interview.

I have completed an ethical review of my research. Does interviewee wish to have confidentiality?

The 'Town'/ Initiative:

1: Population area covered by initiative:

2: Initiative members:

- Core members/ people coming to events etc/ how has this changed through time: start to now?

3: Length of time participating?

4: How did your 'town' find out about Transition?

5: Who was involved with/ motivated to establish of the Initiative

6: How did you personally become involved? Did you have any previous experience in environmental work?

7: Reasons behind establishing Initiative: What was the benefit of coming under the Transition umbrella, and not doing it alone locally?

- Any personal links?

8: Did this follow on from any previous initiatives, any other environmental participation of the town/ people involved with the establishment of the Initiative?

9: How did you go about establishing an Initiative?

- Was there already a social network in place?
- How did people hear about it, and become involved?

10: What is the organisational structure within your Initiative?

Networking:

1: How important has social networking within the Initiative been to launching your Transition?

2: Are there a group/ circle of key actors. What connections do they/you have?

3: How have links been made/ or do you plan to make links within the community?

- What has been the level of public participation/ awareness/ input through the process?

4: How is networking within your Initiative helping it to operate?

5: Are there other network you are involved with within your town?

With other Initiatives:

1: Top (5) Initiatives that your Transition group is networking with?

2: Is there a regional, county etc. scale hub you are networking with?

- If so, what does this involve?

3: How important have links been to other Initiatives, in terms of sharing knowledge, expertise and experience?

4: Do you make use of central resources?

5: How has this changed through time, and as your Initiative developed?

6: Has the experiences of your Initiative been fed back into the Transition network?

7: Have you initiated new network links?

With government, business, other organisations:

1: At what stage (if any) has there been involvement with businesses?

2: At what stage (if any) has there been involvement with local government?

- Are there institutional barriers/ networks that prevent action/ or that you need to work within to make changes possible?
- Has this changed as your Initiative develops?

3: At what stage (if any) has there been involvement with other organisations?

What has this involved?

4: Links, participation in, other sustainability initiatives, networks or organisations?

Transition Plan:

1: Transition plan? Is this home grown largely or taken from other examples, central model?

2: Successes so far? (Failures)

3: Revision of original plans due to practical working of Initiative?

4: Have you found that the unique factors of your 'town' have affected the way any national network blueprint can be put into practice?

5: Geographical location and development of town. Social/ economic/ political factors.

6: Do you see yourself as a social movement?

7: How well is the Initiative working now?

8: Future plans of proposals.

9: What is your Initiative aiming towards; what are you personally looking for in transition?

10: Has the energy waned through time?

11: Would the Transition town concept have worked if introduced 10 or 20 years ago?