Transitions: Managing, participating and challenging

Workshop and seminar, University of Leicester, 5th February 2010

Transition as a concept, practice and experience has received increased attention by academics, activists and policy makers. However, **how can we, or should we, manage the variety of transitions we are experiencing in ways which enable them to be more inclusive?** The purpose of this workshop was to bring together a diverse range of approaches to 'transition' and discuss issues of managing, participating and challenging these different forms of transition. This was deliberately broad to include issues of sustainability but not be confined by them.

This document summarises some of the main talks and discussions of the day. These notes have been written by Jamie Heckert, Kelvin Mason and Jenny Pickerill.

Structure of the day

10.30	*Registration and coffee*
10.45	**Welcome and introduction**
11.00	**Speaker** (Chair: Dr Gavin Brown) Dr Helen Jarvis (Newcastle University) - Transitions to collaboration: housing for social reproduction *Questions*
11.45	**Speaker** Dr Tim Foxon (Leeds University) - Transition pathways to a low carbon energy future: Can civil society lead a transition? *Questions*
12.30	*Lunch*
14.00	**Panel discussion** (Chair: Dr Peter Kraftl) Dr Peter North (Liverpool University), Dr Kelvin Mason (Centre for Alternative Technology), Dr Andrew Reeves (Transition Leicester), Dr Jenny Pickerill (University of Leicester), and Dr Gavin Brown (University of Leicester)
15.00	*Tea and coffee*
15.30	**Open discussion** (Chair: Dr Jenny Pickerill) Building a transitions research network?
17.00	*Close*

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Dr Helen Jarvis (Newcastle University) - Transitions to collaboration: housing for social reproduction

Dr Jarvis used 'Transition' to refer to something which is dynamic, fluid, and contested. Keen to see a non-linear transition from individualism to connection/community. We need to explore the soft and hard infrastructures of daily life. Importance of nostalgia – not harking back but contested and could be interactive dialogue between past and future.

Individualism

In talking about individualism Dr Jarvis and focusing on housing Dr Jarvis called into focus the tyranny/arrested development of the English or Western disease: privacy. She referred to feminist economist Charlotte Perkins Gilmore who talked about the enormous expense of separated households and house work and to the unimaginative and antisocial aesthetic of contemporary architecture (Howley et al 2009). Moreover, the economic normalisation of full-time, lifelong wage earner. Dr Jarvis was critical of the consumer demand for individualisation of tool etc ownership and its relationship to economic growth (The Hedge Trimmer Tale: Individual Solutions to Needs/Wants – how many people in your street own a hedge trimmer? Co-housing solves this repetition).

Connection/Community? Co-housing in US/UK

Talked about nine hip alternatives to mortgaged single family home (http://planetgreen.discovery.com/home-garden/hip-housing-alternatives.html) and the concept of progressive nostalgia (like Transition Towns?). Co-housing is pragmatic in terms of sharing time and saving space. It has tended to be a few clusters dotted around rather than a mass movement. It is characterised by: smaller private spaces with larger collective spaces; skill/social/work/resource sharing; and community facilities and gardens.

Examples: 'Hearth' a Housing corporative in Sheffield with two pairs of terraced houses knocked through with an alley in between. Enabled unconventional family structure of the no-longer-partnered parents' co-parenting within the housing cooperative - yet with separate spaces for parents.

'Island' near Seattle, 30 unit housing co-op. Shared meals: 4 people cooking for 60 versus usual pattern of 30 people each cooking for 2 or 3. 'Chat' function is used to communicate among members to lubricate sociality (hey, i'm going to the library or berry picking - want to come or send books back?). Other examples include street parties, 'living streets', 'big lunch' & Reclaim the Streets.

Conclusions

Time/Space are resources. But are these privileged lifestyle (gated?) communities for the middle classes and/or transition to collaborative culture? maybe both?

Q&A

− Notion of houseshare as not just co-dwelling but also sharing for other functions (e.g. childcare or social time).
− This could be one example of a feminist notion of infrastructure.
? Peter Kraftl asked about consensus design -- architect as facilitator?
− Anna Hawkins asked about BME households in England as other sources of inspiration
− Helen Jarvis noted pattern of attraction to sameness inhibiting this process for white folk. Concluded on overlaps of the convivial and the ecological.

Dr Tim Foxon (Leeds University) - 'Transition pathways to a low carbon energy future: Can civil society lead a transition?'

Interested in alternative transition pathways to market or government led initiatives. For example government has developed UK Low Caron Transition Plan (2009). Important that we:

- learn from past, imagine future
- design and evaluate potential pathways
- 'large' and 'small' actors in dynamic co-creation

Drew on model of Action Space for Transition Pathways (Burgess & Hargreave) - interactions of market, government and civil society. Project aim is to learn from past transitions and build pathways and thus understand the role of large and small actors in such transitions. In project have identified three pathways:

1. Market rules – delivery via market and private firms
2. Central – government involvement, large scale technological intervention and centralised generation of changes
3. Thousand Flowers – social movement and people power predominant

Outlined possible civil society led pathway: Let One Thousand Flowers Bloom, 2008 – 2050

Dominance of centralised systems with pressure from landscape and niche levels including both social movements (10:10; TT) (niche?) and government low carbon strategies (landscape?)

2013 - 2032 emergence of decentralised systems

- increase in energy saving technology
- increase in small energy service providers
- increase in microgeneration
- ' virtuous cycles' of support for decentralised options

2032 - 2050 high levels of microgeneration; transformation of socio-technical systems, challenges for social movements

- counter lobby to corporate lobbying
- demonstrate viability of alternative solutions
- creating wider coalitions
- proposing alternative visions for low-carbon future
- stimulating discussion/debate

Q&A

? Could be interesting to compare Germany which has no nuclear policy and increase in microgeneration currently – what impact on understanding transition?
? How do we get to the point where nuclear fails?
- Also possibility of mutual ownership of macro-renewable systems (e.g. large tidal) – Energy 4 all
- Question about environment governance and the agency of the material/technical

Panel Discussion - How to increase inclusion in transitions

Andrew Reeves (Transitions Town Leicester)

- Emphasised energy transition
- Transitions Town is predominantly white/middle class - entitlement, free time and privilege
- Mentioned Radio 4 programme - are environmentalists bad for the planet?
- Emphasised visions of the future can be contested and not everyone is likely to agree with one energy descent plan
- Emphasised importance of meeting immediate needs as well as long term visions

Gavin Brown (Leicester University)

- Transition sometimes used to mean development of others to being like as advanced folk (e.g. white/capitalist/technocratic/statist)
- Is it a transition to a predetermined normative and transitioning identities - thinking of gender transition and also who are our possible low-carbon future selves? (and to combine, will we do gender as we do it now?)
- Importance of history to learn not just about socio-technical transitions, but also socio-political ones

Peter North (Liverpool University)

- How do you niches grow to challenge the mainstream? (worth looking at innovation literature like Tim Foxon is)
- Cites John Holloway on Zapatismo/Piqueteros as inspiration and also not more or less authentic than activists in Europe, even when middle class and white - the power of change from unlikely places
- Inspired by JK Gibson-Graham's work on possibilities, resilience and the other than capitalist economies which already exist
- Benefits of going where the energy for change already exists and letting go of judgement
- Need to recognise the transitions that already exist
- Cites George Marshall's use of framing/marketing
- Importance of capacity to act, resources, allies (social movement literature)
- Has paper in submission to Environmental Politics he's happy to share

Kelvin Mason (Climate Camp Cymru/Centre for Alternative Technology)

- Who is participating in whose transitions?
- Has critique of 'Criticism without Critique' a class-struggle anarchist critique of climate camp's takeover by the liberal middle-class
- Wants to welcome liberal middle-class folk too
- Asks, where is the green in this class Anarchism? (mentioned Bookchin)

Jenny Pickerill (Leicester University)

- How can we ensure that transitions remain collective, rather than simply individual? Increasing acceptance of notion of resilience, but not necessarily that this is not simply about ensuring individual resilience. And how do we deal with the emotional aspects of working together and living together?

- What are often glossed over in discussions of transition are issues of the economy, jobs and livelihoods. We need to pragmatically engage with these. Even on a basic level the space-required for land-based incomes would be huge.
- participation, inclusion, justice -> how to talk about social justice with ecological concerns. Social justice remains lacking in debates about transition. The issue of accessibility has barely begun to be tackled. The issue of diversity of residents, whether it be across race, class, income, educational attainment or many other divisions, remains problematic.

Q&A

? Questions around looking normal (dreadlocks or no dreadlocks); normalisation/governmentality or strategies for connection? (or both at same time?) - > How to have and facilitate diverse transitions?
? In a post-Copenhagen world, how to connect with folk with different values and the relationship between energy use and women's liberation.
? Is taking on social justice on top of climate change too much when climate change is so urgent?

- What spaces help people feel connection?
- We need to acknowledge that people are at different places in life
- The importance of scale and emotion
- Benefits of traditional, homogenous and parochial groups - > Safe spaces for folk; possible spaces of transition
- Listening to where people are at!

Final Group Discussion Session

Questions participants wanted to answer about transition

During the day participants were encouraged to write up questions or themes which they wanted to discuss further. These included:

? Privacy – is it a cultural barrier to transition? Are the British not very good at sharing?
? Trust – how do we create and work with it?
? What is the value of future scenarios in considering transition?
? 'progressive nostalgia'
? What earlier socio-*political* transitions do we need to examine?
? What research could be a resource for transition movements?
? Transcultural issues
? Economic transitions
? What is the different between transition and change?
? What do we mean by transition?
? Diverse transition – historical and their relation to contemporary transitions
? Importance of diet and food in transitions
? Do we need and want to create a transitions research network?

The participants identified 4 themes which required further discussion:

1. **The meaning of transition**
2. **Economic transitions**
3. **Cultural and identity elements of transition**
4. **Research questions**

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

What research exists already?

- 'Urban Transitions: climate change, global cities and the transformation of socio-technical systems' (UTACC) Durham University: http://www.geography.dur.ac.uk/projects/urbantransitions
- Transition Research network: http://totnes.transitionnetwork.org/central/research
- Transition Pathways to a Low Carbon Economy: http://www.lowcarbonpathways.org.uk/
- Ecological Modernisation literature (are we repeating what was said in the 80s?)

What research networking is needed?

1. A repository of work ongoing and publications – perhaps built using a wiki so that contributions can be added by all?
2. Does anyone want to setup a Royal Geographical Society Working Group on Transitions?

What research is needed?

The group identified a number of themes which we felt needed further work:

- What scares people about change?
- What would make such change acceptable?
- How can we better understand the cultural political issues around change?
- More work needed on identity and transition
- Understanding the tension between values and technical change
- Is there a systematic change?

- How can we challenge underlying assumptions?
- What is the difference between transition and transformation? Is Transition teleological & socio-technical, whereas Transformation might be broader social, cultural, political and non-linear?
- How does transition relate to the debates about carbon?
- We need more inspiring ways to see our futures
- We need to make sure that we include others voices
- We need to focus on practical solutions

Concluding comments from participants

- Beware of designs to improve life as they may affect others badly; how fundamental a social change are we talking about? Remember the silence of the dispossessed!
- We need to bring together structure and community
- There is a huge diversity of approaches, appreciation different perspectives and emphasis on material (adapted to nature/material reality)
- Continuing discussions of transitions is productive with interesting resonances of utopian imaginations alongside talking to industrial businesses.
- The wider perspective of transitions, backing up a bit from Transition Towns is a liberating research perspective
- Concerned with potential localism of Transition Towns and glad to see that all connections being made

Useful links to transition projects

Camp for Climate Action 'exploring and experiencing in practice some of the ways in which a truly sustainable society might function' http://www.climatecamp.org.uk/

Diggers and Dreamers: 'The guide to communal living in Britain' http://www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk/index.php?one=lin&two=lin&sel=6

Eco Village Network UK http://www.evnuk.org.uk/

Energy 4 All 'formed in 2002 to expand the number of renewable energy co-operatives in the UK as an integral part of our transition to a low carbon economy.' http://www.energy4all.co.uk/energy_home.asp

Feed-in tariffs 'to incentivise small scale, low carbon electricity generation'. http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/what_we_do/uk_supply/energy_mix/renewable/policy/feedin_tarriff/feedin_tarriff.aspx

Floating Homes: Netherlands … http://www.inhabitat.com/2007/04/02/dutch-floating-homes-by-duravermeer/

Global Ecovilage Network http://gen.ecovillage.org/

Living Streets 'works to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk' http://www.livingstreets.org.uk/

The Cohousing Association of the United States (note the different architectural challenges of bespoke and adaptive cohousing) http://www.cohousing.org/

The Slow Movement: Cities 'Slow cities are characterised by a way of life that supports people to live slow…. These cities stand up against the fast-lane, homogenised world so often seen in other cities throughout the world. Slow cities have less traffic, less noise, fewer crowds.' http://www.slowmovement.com/slow_cities.php

The UK Cohousing Network: 'Cohousing is a way of living which brings individuals and families together in groups to share common aims and activities while also enjoying their own self-contained accommodation and personal space.' http://www.cohousing.org.uk/

The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan 'plots how the UK will meet the 34 percent cut in emissions on 1990 levels by 2020' http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/publications/lc_trans_plan/lc_trans_plan.aspx

Transition Pathways an academic forum sponsored by E.ON UK, the consortium 'undertake socially and scientifically engaged research into innovative technologies, policies and practices leading towards a low carbon energy system.' http://www.lowcarbonpathways.org.uk/

Transition Towns Wiki 'how can our community respond to the challenges, and opportunities, of Peak Oil and Climate Change?' http://www.transitiontowns.org/

If you are interested in transitions and further contacts from this workshop please contact Jenny Pickerill (j.pickerill@le.ac.uk) or Gavin Brown (gpb10@le.ac.uk).