

The Links Between Resilience, Diversity and Inequality:
The View from Transition Durham

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Abstract

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The Transition Movement is a grassroots response to the challenges posed by peak oil, climate change and economic contraction. Transition initiatives aim to build local resilience to these threats through community responses culminating in economic relocalisation. Despite a rapid growth in support for the movement, it has failed to attract a wide diversity of people.

A review of the relevant literature examines and assesses the extent to which diversity is an important element in cultivating community resilience. It concludes that whilst diversity is essential, without simultaneously addressing inequality, its presence will be insufficient.

Using participatory methodologies, I worked alongside and within Transition Durham undertaking action research aimed at exploring the opportunities for increasing diversity and addressing inequality in the local community.

Several key issues were raised, and their implications are discussed at length. Principally, the research found that Transition Durham shares many areas of common interest with the wider population of Durham. However, engaging people with differing frames of cultural reference helps to shed light on the contrasting and distinct aspects of concern; it is this diversity of needs and perspectives that forms a central component of resilience. As such, inclusion of a broad range of views and interests is both an ethical and a practical imperative for any Transition initiative. Participatory methods are useful tools both to engage people in dialogue and help to address entrenched power structures which reinforce inequality, but practical issues will need to be overcome to achieve this.

If the Transition movement is to become a truly inclusive movement it must include and value the diversity of perspectives which exist within its

community. This will invariably include the views of those with a radically different or contradictory standpoint. Transition needs to consider how it will approach such dissenting viewpoints. As a problem which remains unresolved within the scope of this paper, it offers a valuable and worthwhile avenue for future research.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	4
Chapter 1: Introduction	7
Chapter 2: Research Goals	9
2.1 Aims	9
2.2 Research Questions	9
Chapter 3: Setting the Scene	10
3.1 Crisis Point	10
3.2 The Transition Movement – An Effective Response?	10
3.3 Ah, yes, but...The Transition Movement’s Critics	12
Chapter 4: Resilience, Diversity and Inequality	15
4.1 Resilience	15
4.2 Diverse Frames of Reference	16
4.3 Inequality	17
Chapter 5: Conditions in the Field	20
5.1 A Picture of Durham	20
5.2 Transition Durham	21
Chapter 6: Methodology	24
6.1 Framework	24
6.2 Ethical Considerations	27
6.3 Getting Started	27
6.4 Research Design	28
6.5 Recording Results	30
Chapter 7: Discussion of Results	32
7.1 Common Ground	33
7.2 Inspiring Collective Action	35
7.3 Frames of Reference	37
7.4 Participatory Methods	39
7.5 Practicalities	41
7.6 Incorporating Dissenting Opinions – A Moral Quandary	43
7.7 Limitations of the Research	44
Chapter 8: Conclusions	46

8.1 Key Findings	46
8.2 Future Research	46
Bibliography	48
Appendix 1: What? No Oil? - Abridged Guide to Practice and Summary of Results	57

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research aims to examine the importance of diversity and equality within the international Transition movement and explore what opportunities are available to Transition Durham to seek inclusion with a more diverse range of people.

Commencing with a brief overview of the issues of climate change and peak oil, we move on to see how the Transition movement has gained popular appeal in addressing these concerns and attempting to create communities which are more resilient against such problems. Critics argue, however, that the movement has failed to engage with a wide spectrum of people, thus restricting its potential efficacy. Commentators within Transition¹ tend to agree with these analyses and many core members of Transition Durham consider that their initiative fails to engage the working class families which form a large and intrinsic part of Durham's community.

A review of relevant literature reveals that diversity appears to be an integral feature of resilient communities: when also combined with a commitment to equality it can lead to more informed and effective decisions, more widespread support and increased trust and cooperation through reduced inequality and alienation.

Working in partnership with Transition Durham, I undertook participatory action research to explore the opportunities for incorporating diversity and addressing inequality locally. During a week-long community mapping event, we discovered that Transition Durham and the broader populace share many common interests in restoring Durham to a thriving and resilient city. Despite some minor practical issues which Transition Durham is working to remedy, it is well placed to apply participatory methodologies to enable collective community action to achieve this shared goal.

¹ I use the term Transition (capitalised) throughout the paper as shorthand to refer specifically to the Transition movement. This is distinct from the broader concept of transition.

However, an active movement which values diverse perspectives and seeks maximum inclusion creates a quandary for itself: how are ideas and opinions which are fundamentally at odds with Transition's ethos to be approached? This issue remains unresolved and provides fertile ground for future research.

Chapter 2: Research Goals

2.1 Aims

This study has two key aims. First, to develop a detailed understanding of whether and why an organisation such as the Transition movement, which seeks to propagate community resilience, needs to build upon the full range of views and capacities available to it – or in other words, embed diversity and equality within its core framework, both nationally and at the local initiative level. Second, to establish how Transition Durham may effectively initiate and cultivate connections and partnerships with under-represented people in their locality.

2.2 Research Questions

Through review of relevant literature combined with action research, the study addresses the following questions:

- Why is diversity important in environmental and sustainable development discourse, and particularly in Transition narratives?
- What are the links between resilience, diversity and equality?
- What are the opportunities for Transition Durham to develop greater involvement of and collaboration with under-represented and marginalised people?

Chapter 3: Setting the Scene

3.1 Crisis Point

The twin threats of anthropogenic climate change (climatic transformations which threaten the conditions of human survival stemming in large part from our dependency on burning fossil fuels) and peak oil (the point when global rates of oil production start to decline leading to reduced availability and higher prices) appear to be widely acknowledged, not only by academics and scientists, but also by politicians and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the general public (Hopkins, 2008a; Zalasiewicz et al, 2008; DTI, 2003; DTI, 2007; Lorenzoni et al, 2007; Holmgren, 2009; IPCC, 2007; UKERC, 2009). Despite the UK governments' commitment to achieving a 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 (Climate Change Act, 2008) little effective action has been taken to avert or minimise the impending crises precipitated by Westernised carbon-dependant lifestyles (Whitmarsh et al, 2010; Lorenzoni et al, 2007).

3.2 The Transition Movement – An Effective Response?

The Transition movement is a grassroots response to peak oil and climate change which is experiencing remarkable success in mobilising communities to generate their own area-specific solutions to the accumulating pressures of climate change and peak oil (Bailey et al, 2010; Seyfang, 2009; Davis, 2010).

This intentional relocalisation movement was conceived by Rob Hopkins and participants in a permaculture course that he taught in Kinsale, Ireland, during 2005. This evolved into a single Transition Town founded in Totnes in 2006 by Hopkins, who developed a flexible, twelve step framework based on permaculture principles for communities to work within to develop innovative and localised grassroots responses to increase resilience against the intricately entwined challenges of peak oil and climate change, with economic contraction emerging as a third interrelated issue in 2009/2010 (Hopkins, 2008a; Transition Network, 2011a). Hopkins suggests that resilience can be usefully defined as “the capacity of an individual, community or system to adapt in order to sustain an acceptable level of function, structure and identity [following a disturbance or perturbation]” (Edwards, 2009, cited in Hopkins,

2010a, p.54), but argues that it needn't simply be a safeguard against disaster or collapse: rather, it can be reconceptualised as a desirable state with the potential to enrich current lifestyles. The positive vision of future resilience is one of the most fundamental and unique aspects of Transition. By creating a vision towards which a community can aspire to move, in other words a positive outcome, rather than focusing mental energies on avoiding undesirable outcomes, motivation to achieve the positive future state can inspire action in the present.

In practice, people interested in initiating a Transition group begin with a period of awareness-raising in their locale to build alliances and partnerships that can help propel them forward into delivering practical solutions for reducing fossil fuel dependency. Task groups are formed on topics ranging from food and transport to health and government. The over-arching goal of local initiatives is to engage the wider community in developing an 'Energy Descent Action Plan', or EDAP, which will chart "the creation of shadow economic, social and technological infrastructures in readiness for the failure of existing systems" (Bailey et al, 2010, p.599). An EDAP starts with developing a community's vision of a "powered-down, resilient, relocalised future" (Hopkins, 2008a, p.175), and moves on to 'backcast', or identify in detail the specific action that will be required to make the vision a reality, thus creating a series of practical steps mapping the route from their current state to their future vision and energising the community to achieve the plan's realisation.

The network has grown to 375 official initiatives and 422 'mulling' initiatives across thirty-four countries worldwide (Transition Network, 2011b, online), supported by a coordinating body, the Transition Network. This rapid growth appears to demonstrate a widespread acceptance or desire for locally relevant solutions and opportunities for action to counteract the global crises that humanity is currently facing.

3.3 Ah, yes, but... The Transition Movement's Critics

Critics of Transition argue that its focus on localisation as an ethical priority may eclipse any obligation to care for distant others (Mason and Whitehead, 2011). Furthermore, its deliberately non-confrontational stance which advocates for a kind of revolution from within, even in partnership with local authorities and government, has been criticised as a naïve failure to address the root systemic causes of climate change and peak oil, namely capitalism (Chatterton and Cutler, 2008; Andrews, 2008; Connors and McDonald, 2010). This failure to take a position, sceptics argue, means that the movement is in real danger of becoming irrelevant or meaningless, or, worse still, being co-opted by the system which it seeks to undermine.

However, as Hopkins points out, the rapid growth of Transition suggests that it offers a more accessible and meaningful way to catalyse people's everyday re-engagement in their local community than more confrontational activist approaches have done, arguing that Transition and radical environmentalism are distinctly different, yet complementary avenues with shared goals and motivations, but contrasting methodologies (Hopkins, 2008b).

Greene (2010) agrees, asserting that unlike more antagonistic environmental movements, Transition recognises that hegemonic power is disseminated in subtle and diffuse ways, not simply a hierarchically organised tool for subordination. This understanding of power is similar to Li (1999) and Ferguson's (1994) analyses, who describe power and rule as complex arenas of compromise, dissension and transformation. Transition, by emphasising change through 'doing', weakens the cultural norms which underpin the maintenance of unsustainable regimes, creating the potential for them to be radically transformed from within. Ostensibly unassuming projects such as community allotments, alternative currency schemes, social enterprises and seed swaps implicitly challenge the status quo, in an echo, perhaps, of anarchist revolutionary tactics (cf. An Anarchist FAQ, 2010), thus, "behind [Transition's] veil of practicality transpires a latent strategy of resistance" (Greene, 2010, p.47).

Sceptics also suggest that Transition “doesn’t connect with people beyond its narrow social base” (Davis, 2010, online) and is unable to attract a real diversity of people to participate, thus failing to gain any credence beyond ‘the usual suspects’ (Chatterton and Cutler, 2008; Andrews, 2008; Steffen, 2009). In particular, Chatterton and Cutler (2008) question the validity of a model that has been devised and driven forward predominantly by well-educated, white males for communities comprised of hugely diverse populations, whose perspectives will consequently have been excluded.

This failure to engage with a diversity of people is a criticism common to many environmental and other social movements and projects (Capacity Global, 2009a, 2009b). Forsyth states that environmentalism in particular contains “important social divisions” (2007, p.2110) and questions whether or not different social classes have the ability, or social currency, to participate equally in social movements, explicitly citing the fact that activists have typically tended to be middle class and highly educated. Middlemiss and Parrish (2010) and North (2011) agree with this analysis, stating that activism of this nature tends to emerge from groups with some level of empowerment and ability to mobilise resources, rather than from the poorer segments of society who, due to structural inequalities, may struggle to access the time, money, and social connections necessary to instigate or influence such movements.

Such condemnation has amplified significance for Transition: the interrelated issues of diversity and inclusion are central to its ethos, forming as they do one of six principles which underpin the core model:

“Inclusion: The scale of the challenge of peak oil and climate change cannot be addressed if we choose to stay within our comfort zones, if ‘green’ people only talk to other ‘green’ people... The Transition approach seeks to facilitate a degree of dialogue and inclusion that has rarely been achieved before... This is seen as one of the key principles simply because without it we have no chance of success.”

Hopkins, 2008, p.141

(See also Hopkins, 2010b; Transition Network, 2011c)

However, in practice many Transition practitioners agree with the critics and have been voicing concern about this issue for some time, with a particularly strong sense of dismay being expressed following the 2009 Transition Conference due to the lack of diversity represented by attendees (Tom Henfrey, personal communications, 2011). Along with examples of anecdotal evidence, such as Walker's claim that, "we're all the same – the Guardian-reading middle class", (cited in Davis, 2010, online), this suggests that the movement is rightly criticised for failing to extend its appeal to diverse audiences representative of local communities (Transition Network, 2011d; Davis, 2010; various personal communications).

This is substantiated by the emergence of more formal research which supports such claims (Cohen, 2010; Hopkins, 2010a; Blewett, 2010; Bailey et al, 2010; Seyfang, 2009; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2010; Connors and McDonald, 2010; Mason and Whitehead, 2011). In response to the situation, Transition has launched a diversity plan and appointed a diversity coordinator, suggesting that the movement is listening to and acting upon feedback.

The following literature review explores the importance of diversity in social movements more closely. The lessons learned from the case study of Transition Durham presented in this research may further inform this debate and prove useful to initiatives striving for increased diversity in other localities.

Chapter 4: Resilience, Diversity and Inequality

It is constructive to examine why the notion of internal diversity is given such substantial emphasis in Transition discourse and what diversity's ethical and practical relevance is for accomplishing ongoing success within Transition.

4.1 Resilience

Transition's roots in permaculture denote an intrinsic acknowledgment of the importance of diversity in resilient ecological systems. Permaculture is a design methodology that can be applied to systems ranging from houses and gardens to lifestyles, businesses and communities. It promotes self-sustaining and adaptive resource management to minimise waste and maximise productive potential (Holmgren, 2010; Bell, 2004). Permaculture observes that systems which include a wide diversity of elements, with many interrelationships among them are generally more productive and resilient because diversity allows functional redundancy among elements, which increases flexibility and adaptability: if one element or relationship among elements fails, there will be others which can deliver the same function, thus the system has more capacity to maintain continuity of function in the face of such shocks.

In Berkes and Folkes' accounts of resilience (1998; 2002), they stipulate that "the delineation between social and natural systems is artificial and arbitrary" (2002, p.122), an interpretation that resonates in the work of numerous resilience theorists (Pretty et al, 2009; Maffi, 2001; Toledo, 2001), who argue that due to the close interconnections between nature and culture, "a feedback system exists, whereby a shift in one system often leads to a change in the other" (Pretty et al, 2009, p.102). Human social practices and the environment can be best understood as a single, unified system, where conserving diversity of **all** elements (human and otherwise) provides insurance against disturbances, maintaining opportunities for innovation when encountering challenges.

The intimacy of this symbiotic relationship is apparent in our current predicament, whereby an over-reliance on burning fossil fuels to produce our energy supplies has led to a brittle and inflexible system unable to adapt efficiently to the resource crisis, compromising the conditions necessary for human survival (Zalasiewicz et al, 2008; Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000; Chakrabarty, 2009). This is symptomised by peak oil, climate change and economic instability.

Enabling resilience against these challenges will involve not only diversifying our energy systems to include renewable sources, but also seeking a diversity of solutions, applicable to a diversity of people and contexts, to reduce our dependence on energy use altogether. For a Transition initiative, promoting diversity in the membership will be essential for seeking such solutions and for enabling and maintaining long-term community resilience.

4.2 Diverse Frames of Reference

Crane (2010) discusses the place of cultural diversity within ecosystems, with reference to Marka and Fulani knowledge systems in Africa. He describes how differences in cultural norms between the groups can translate into divergent approaches to negotiating adaptation strategies to manage the challenges of existing in a changing landscape. Such cultural variations arise from the experiences, beliefs and knowledge that are shared within a group, which lead different groups to form socially constructed frameworks through which resolutions to problems are assessed and prioritised, guiding each to identify and select substantially different adjustment pathways. If inherent tensions exist between the aspirations of each group, particularly if these relate to competition for scarce resources or territory, this may have the potential to result in turbulence and conflict which can affect the resilience of the wider society.

Little elucidation is required to illustrate the relevance of Crane's work to the cosmopolitan cities and towns of Western society, with their 'melting pot' of different ethnicities, religions, classes, ages, genders, sexualities, professions and abilities, all with their own social framework for viewing the world and

informing their behaviour and decision making processes. Smith and Stirling (2008) agree that questions about whose framing of resilience and whose sustainability is prioritised are essential for forecasting the outcomes of a particular course of action. For Transition initiatives to be able to create solutions to the already highly contested challenges of climate change and peak oil that do not appear to favour some groups over others, thus risking antagonism and the overall resilience of the locale, fully collaborative and transparent decision-making processes which accommodate perspectives from across the community are required.

4.3 Inequality

Such critical reflection on “the kinds of resilience that are helpful or unhelpful, and for whom, and with what social purposes in mind” (Smith and Stirling, 2008, p.6) lead us to examine more deeply the issues of equality and justice in creating resilient societies. Actual vulnerability to the scarcity of resources anticipated as a result of shrinking energy supplies and climate change is not likely to be uniform across a diverse community. Research demonstrates that environmental problems have a disproportionate impact on poorer people, which links in with the politics of race, gender, disability, class and age because a disproportionate number of people from marginalised or excluded groups live in low-income households (Capacity Global, 2009b). Whilst addressing such social and environmental injustices may have important moral and ethical imperatives simply because we believe that people’s quality of life is worth caring about, a practical motivation also manifests itself: minimising such inequality should be a critical component in the Transition model as theorists argue that unequal communities are likely to lack resilience due to their susceptibility to increased internal perturbations caused by unfair competition for resources.

Durkheim’s concept of ‘anomie’ is a useful way of describing the feelings of apathy and alienation that can arise in an individual due to the discrepancy between common social goals (such as the material wealth favoured in capitalist societies) and the legitimate means to attain those goals (using the same example, well-paid employment). When structural limitations such as

institutionalised or socially-sanctioned inequality to the procurement of vital or desirable resources prevent achievement of these goals for some, but safeguard it for others, the frustration caused by this inequality is likely to result in violence (against the self, others or society) affecting the overall stability and resilience of the wider community. The riots plaguing cities throughout Britain as this paper is being composed (early August 2011), characterised by widespread looting, violence, arson and death, may provide a timely, if extreme, example of the violent social upheaval that can happen when people do not have fair and equal access to resources and struggle to achieve culturally-determined criteria of status and recognition. Although it is too early for rigorous critique of the current occurrences, interpretations of historic events inform us that the causes of rioting are often deeply embedded in fundamental inequalities in social and economic conditions (Scarman, 1981) with Jan-Khan describing a riot as “an act of desperation by those denied any sense of legitimate participation” (2003, p.34).

Additionally, the more subtle expressions of anomie have a highly insidious effect in undermining a community’s resilience. Presenting a detailed empirical underpinning, Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) suggest that a host of social problems, including mental illness, substance misuse, poor life expectancy, obesity, educational performance, teenage parenthood, homicides and imprisonment rates, are more common in more unequal societies such as the UK (measured according to the income gap between the richest and poorest twenty per cent of the population). They argue that whilst such ills are more likely to afflict the poorer members of the population, the entire society bears the associated burdens of coping with the collateral damage caused by the presence of the problems, leading to a lack of trust amongst citizens; feelings of resentment, isolation and malcontent; a more competitive and less cooperative populace; short-sighted use of tax to pay for expensive (and often ineffective) preventative and treatment services; and a rise in narcissism and anxiety. Such factors serve to deepen existing divisions and entrench inequality further, resulting in a vicious cycle whereby the social currency necessary to improve one’s situation is consciously or unconsciously

denied by those more privileged who seek to maintain their own comparative position of wealth.

Amin suggests that the key to tackling the scale of inequality which leads to such profound instability and destructiveness is to create a society that is “capable of supporting plural and conflicting rights claims and that is ready to negotiate diversity through a vigorous but democratic clash among equals” (2003, p.463). Simply including a diversity of people in Transition will prove tokenistic if the community fails to attend to the inequality which denies certain groups the social, cultural or symbolic capital necessary to address their unfavourable positions in society and participate in decision-making processes which affect their lives as equals. By ignoring the circumstances of oppression, current hegemony and power discrepancies will prevail, with the dominant groups already active in Transition imposing their own ideals and values into the hearts and minds of subordinate classes, unwittingly or otherwise, a phenomena which Bourdieu describes as ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

The research I conducted with Transition Durham, however, suggests that with serious commitment, the movement is ideally situated to undermine the regime which perpetuates such tenacious systems of reproducing inequality.

Chapter 5: Conditions in the Field

5.1 A Picture of Durham

Durham is a picturesque city based in the North East of England, described by Proud as “a living chronicle, in microcosm, of the history of England” (2003, p.1). The UNESCO World Heritage Site castle and cathedral overlook the city’s historic market place, shops and bustling cobbled streets, whilst the River Wear meanders through. The university maintains an important presence in the city, and the modern Millennium Square provides a focal point for cultural activities, featuring a theatre, library, a variety of restaurants and pubs and the Tourist Information Centre. There are two out-of-town retail centres, a prison, courts, museums and various places of worship. The area has good road (A1/M) and rail (London-Edinburgh line) links with the rest of the country.

Of Durham’s total population, which is around 55,000 (DCC, 2010, p.6), the majority (approximately 75%) live within the urban centre (*ibid*, p.3). Ethnic diversity is low, with only three per cent of the population being from minority backgrounds (*ibid*, p.8).

Surrounding villages which fall within the vicinity of Durham City (as categorised by the Area Action Partnership, or AAP), many of which are ex-mining settlements, have a rural feel, composed of housing estates set amongst farms and woodland. The demise of the mining industry - the last mine in the region, at Bearpark, closed in 1984 - has resulted in economic decline and deprivation in many areas (DCC, 2008, 2010). Bulmer (1978) explores how these changing patterns of employment have also affected family practices and social cohesion in the area.

Historically, the large working class population based in Durham, employed in the mines and, later on, the carpet manufacturing industry, have made the area important to the Labour Movement. At its height, the Durham Miner’s Gala, or ‘The Big Meeting’ as it is known locally, established in 1871, attracted crowds in excess of 100,000 giving it the title of the “largest demonstration by

the working classes anywhere in the country” (Proud, 2003, p.127). It continues to provide a focal point in the city’s annual calendar, despite the dissolution of the mining industry. On the strength of its working class population, Durham became the first council Labour-controlled council in the country in 1909 (Proud, 2003). Although the County Council has maintained a Labour majority since 1935, and Durham City still has a Labour MP, the Liberal Democrats have gained ground in recent local elections (DCC, 2010, p.5).

5.2 Transition Durham

Transition Durham (TD) loosely covers Durham City and the surrounding areas (Transition Durham, 2010), a region with much overlap with that covered by the AAP (see above), thus allowing some measure of comparison between the two profiles; although the TD boundaries are far more vaguely defined to allow for flexible interchange and linkages between areas as appropriate². TD remains vaguely loyal to the twelve-step model that Hopkins (2008a) proposes. It began in 2007 with a long period of awareness raising, including film showings, talks and presentations. As momentum increased, a coordinating hub group was established in 2009, which is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the initiative and overseeing the work of the various task groups. The initiative gained ‘official’ Transition status in December 2010 with an email membership of approximately 250 people, and with themed working groups undertaking specific projects on fruit – mapping public fruit trees, creating a fruit tree nursery, selling products made from free fruit harvests; food – such as developing a local food network and creating an online directory of local food suppliers; and energy – currently exploring the possibility of a community-owned microhydro site on the River Wear. A village-based Bearpark Transition group is also in its early stages. Through its activities so far, TD has established a wealth of connections and relationships with other people, groups and organisations operating in Durham.

² For example, TD’s work on local food suppliers spans the county, whereas the investigation into the possibility of a community-owned microhydro site on the River Wear is specific to the city centre.

in partnership the common interests that would form the basis of my research. These ideas of collaboration and participation, and their importance to Transition, are explored more fully in the following sections.

Chapter 6: Methodology

I collected and analysed a variety of qualitative data, including ethnographic observations and semi-structured interviews, before embarking on a course of participatory action research in collaboration with TD. This account of the methods employed notes various methodological constraints and ethical issues, including my own biases and influence on the research process.

6.1 Framework

An inquiry paradigm is a set of basic beliefs about the nature of reality and the way in which that reality may be known. I approached my enquiry from a participative worldview which allows that conceptual knowledge is grounded in experiential participation and that the primary value of inquiry is located in its practical, rather than intellectual or theoretical, use (Heron and Reason, 1997; Savan, 2004; Susman and Evered, 1978; Lewin, 1946; Chein et al, 1948). Such an approach allowed me to concentrate on producing information that is of practical use to TD whilst also being compatible with generating theory, rather than focussing solely on academically rigorous research that may fail to translate into constructive outcomes for TD. Such a paradigm is indicative of collaborative, applied research methodologies which produce context-specific knowledge for the solution of real-world problems, and that involves, as equal partners, the people whose practice may be affected by the research in the design, execution and dissemination of the enquiry.

My selection of action research as an orientation reflects my commitment to the participative paradigm and is strikingly germane to this enquiry as it “aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework”, (Rapoport, 1970, p.499). Fundamentally, action research is the process of generating critical knowledge by acting or intervening within a system to change it and reflecting on and documenting the outcomes (Susman and Evered, 1978; Lewin, 1946; Chein et al, 1948; Heron and Reason, 1997).

More precisely, action research necessitates a cyclical process of action followed by reflection, similar to the process of responding to feedback described in permaculture narratives. This sequence allows researchers to interpret meaning from the data acquired during action and use this generated knowledge to inform the subsequent period of action (Heron and Reason, 1997; Susman and Evered, 1978; Lewin, 1946). By undertaking such research collaboratively, it seeks to break down researcher/informant power discrepancies and allows the knowledge produced to be 'owned' by all parties. Heron and Reason (1997) propose an extended epistemology which suggests a four step approach, whereby all or some of the steps must be taken collaboratively (Susman and Evered, 1978): *propositional knowing* is the definition of the research question or diagnosing the problem and the methodology to be used to explore this; *practical knowing* is the application of the methodology, or taking action; this leads to *experiential knowing* by creating new interactions with the world; *presentational knowing* is specifying learning through the representation of the new experiential knowledge, which leads to a revised understanding or conceptualisation of propositional knowledge, whereby the entire learning spiral begins again.

The participative paradigm not only informs the choice of research methods, but confers particular rights and obligations on the researcher as it places each of us firmly within the world we are investigating. The Cartesian separation of mind and matter is rejected in favour of a belief that, "to experience anything is to participate in it, and to participate is both to mold and to encounter", (Heron and Reason, 1997, p.278), thus implying a measure of responsibility for the outcome of actions taken in the world. The lack of accountability assumed by researchers and scientists viewing the world from modernist perspectives has led to, "a legacy of human alienation and ecological devastation", (Heron and Reason, 1997, p.291) of exactly the kind to which Transition is attempting to find solutions, so a dismissal of such approaches in favour of pragmatic and engaged inquiry is apropos.

Participatory methodologies are subject to criticisms. Collaborative working practices are vulnerable to all the deficiencies and dysfunctions that any other

form of group process may entail, including conflict, misinterpretation and poor communication. Cooke and Kothari (2001) distinguish this as one of the fundamental errors within the participatory paradigm as it can effect the, “illegitimate and/or unjust exercise of power”, (p.4). Typical group dynamic scenarios can lead to supposedly ‘collaborative’ decisions that simply serve to reinforce the interests of those who hold power. Such, “tyranny of the group”, (*ibid.*, p.7) can manifest itself in a phenomenon known as ‘groupthink’ (Cooke, 2001), whereby group norms and practices create an illusion of unanimity within the group, which members are conditioned to accept and adhere to. This serves to deter dissenting opinions being voiced or controversial information being given serious consideration, potentially resulting in irrational decisions which ignore the reality of a situation but consistently maintain the power, status and reputation of the group.

This indicates two potential pitfalls. First is the prospect of me being co-opted into TD’s ‘groupthink’ narrative, which, due to a certain lack of neutrality and a desire to maintain a comfortable position within the group, could lead to research which fails adequately to challenge or address problematic issues. This danger is exacerbated as my dissertation supervisor is part of TD, potentially compromising my impartiality. Secondly, as ‘lead’ researcher, I could inadvertently initiate a particular climate within the action research task group which favours my own ideas and opinions, thus negating an important benefit of collaborative research, expressly, the, “creative and corrective feedback of other views and possibilities” (Heron and Reason, 1997, p.287).

The aforesaid outcomes, however, are not inevitable and countermeasures can be taken to protect against such consequences. Cooke (2001) suggests that critical self-reflection and scrutinising decisions with non-group members can be effective antidotes. Not only were these recommendations taken into account when designing the research strategy, but regular peer supervision sessions were arranged with fellow M.Sc. students who were able to provide objective perspectives on my research.

6.2 Ethical Considerations

Prior to commencing with my research plans, ethical deliberations were undertaken to ensure the integrity of my work. A primary consideration in deciding on my research strategy was the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) warning that, "the development of knowledge can lead to change which may be positive or negative for the people...worked with or studied", (2009, p.2). Action research, by its definition, involves change in order to generate new ways of knowing, so this inevitability had to be taken into account. Reflection on the spirit of the AAA Code of Ethics, which is to do no harm to the people studied, reassured me that the democratic essence of my research and its solution-focused nature minimised the likelihood of any serious conflict of interest or unintended harm to participants. Negative implications for individuals are unlikely and adequately covered by respecting requests for anonymity and confidentiality.

Nevertheless, critical scrutiny of this type can be damaging to community organisations, but TD's hub members were aware of this and had not only welcomed the opportunity for reflection on its work, but had actively invited it. Care was taken throughout the process to consult with the hub group before making publicly available any information that might prejudice its work. Further, as Rapoport points out, "action research clients are not like remote and illiterate Trobrianders, or diffuse and anonymous survey samples. They are immediate, intelligent and often highly critical", (1970, p.509), therefore use of a collaborative methodology which involves participants in generating data and invites feedback at all stages of the research process helps to guard against the likelihood of defensive reactions which could undermine the value of the learning.

6.3 Getting Started

Preliminary investigations to acquaint myself with both the Transition concept and with TD as an individual organisation within the Transition Network were extensive. Ethnographic data was gleaned from participant observation – the "quintessential" anthropological method (DeWalt et al, 1998, p.287) – during monthly TD hub meetings, attendance at TD events and workshops, email

conversations and personal interactions, and an in-depth Transition training weekend, which is the 'official' training that Transition offers to members.

I substantiated the interpretations that I applied to my observations by recourse to semi-structured interviews with TD practitioners and a simple community mapping exercise with the TD hub members to determine the initiative's relative position within the local community⁴. I further supplemented this work through scrutiny of secondary data such as literature, blogs and articles from both the Transition movement and its detractors.

This exploratory work allowed me the opportunity to apprise myself of the potential scope for undertaking collaborative action research, although ultimately, the ideal opportunity arose as a matter of serendipity. During my initial months of exploratory research with TD, several hub members were contemplating the germ of an idea to carry out a creative mapping exercise to engage people in discussion about sustainable futures for Durham, and thereby lay the foundations for the city's EDAP⁵. Hub members considered that this project held much promise as a basis for collaborative research and we agreed that I should focus my efforts on this venture.

6.4 Research Design

A task group formed to commence preparing for, designing, publicising and undertaking the event, and agreed to meet on a roughly fortnightly basis. Due to the busy lives and prior commitments of TD hub members, membership of the task group was fluid and changeable, although the core members, including myself, were conscientious in inviting collaboration from the entire TD hub group at all possible opportunities, including at monthly hub meetings and via email, to ensure democratic ownership of the exercise. Two members of Empty Shop CIC, a Durham-based arts organisation with a strong focus on community regeneration, were also involved in a number of these meetings due to their local expertise in creative community engagement projects.

⁴ See chapter 5, section 5.2

⁵ See chapter 3, section 3.2, for an explanation of an EDAP.

From the propositional knowledge that TD is lacking diversity and wishes to explore and address this, combined with the plan to use a creative mapping exercise to establish dialogue with a wider cross-section of Durham's residents, the task group established the following aims for practical action:

- To create a place for community engagement that is enjoyable, accessible and relevant to Durham's residents
- To foster an environment where people from a diversity of backgrounds can participate in dialogue and offer solutions and inspiration to help to shape a sustainable and prosperous future for Durham
- To increase awareness of the challenges of peak oil, climate change and economic instability
- To inspire individual and collective action towards a more resilient community
- To raise the profile of TD within the city
- To lay the foundations for the Durham City EDAP

These aims developed into a plan constituting a week-long community mapping event to be held from 11th - 18th June 2011, transforming an empty shop in the Gates Shopping Centre in central Durham into a welcoming place to relax and chat about Durham's potential futures.



***Before and After:
Pictures illustrating the 'empty shop'***

The event, entitled 'What? No Oil?', (abbreviated to WNO henceforth), used an interactive mapping activity as a focal point to encourage shop visitors to

participate in a debate exploring how community action can turn economic instability caused by rising oil prices into an opportunity for positive, sustainable change. A large scale map of Durham was commissioned from a local artist, and, alongside other methods, shop visitors were asked to contribute their own ideas for ensuring a sustainable future for Durham by writing, drawing or modelling them and adding them to the map. Extensive outreach work was undertaken prior to the event to ensure widespread awareness of the project, and shop visitors were provided with a variety of means to participate, thus ensuring an inclusive approach⁶.

Executing these elaborate plans allowed TD to gain new experiential knowledge. Alongside daily debriefs between TD members staffing the event and discussion during TD hub meeting, a formal reflective session was scheduled following completion of WNO for task group members, where knowledge gained during the practical activity could be shared through description and contemplation. These presentational windows allowed task group members to develop a novel understanding of the 'diversity issue' and identify new points of practical action to continue expanding and modifying that knowledge. For people who were unable to attend the reflective session, but wanted to share their experiential knowledge, contributions were invited via email, thus ensuring that everyone had the opportunity for their voice to be heard and their experience to be acknowledged as part of the learning process.

6.5 Recording Results

Due to the informal nature of several parts of my methodology, it has not always been possible to record all data as spoken. Where written responses from informants were not requested or recording devices have not been suitable due to the context, I have made scratch notes following my conversations and observations, with more detailed field notes being recorded as soon as possible after the event to maintain as much accuracy as possible.

⁶ An abridged version of the resulting 'Guide to Practice' written by the task group to provide guidance to future practitioners and featuring details of the strategies used at the event to engage with a far wider diversity of people than 'the usual suspects' and to encourage an inclusive atmosphere can be seen in appendix 1.

Quotes from participants and all other sources of primary data appearing in the following section are coded according to their origin, allowing the reader to ascertain whether the excerpts are precise citations or faithful representations of actual conversations.

Code	Source of data	Method of recording
TD-I	TD member interviews	Recording device used
WNO-M	'What? No Oil?' – map ideas and poster comments	Data written/drawn/modelled by informants
WNO-C	'What? No Oil?' – conversations	Scratch notes made following conversation; field notes written up same day

Chapter 7: Discussion of Results

WNO proved successful at attracting a far more diverse range of people than a typical TD event. Over 350 people visited the shop and talked to us about their ideas for a sustainable future for Durham. Some simply dropped in for ten minutes; others stayed for hours; yet more returned on several occasions to see how the map of Durham had evolved and to talk to TD about new ideas they had developed since their initial visit. Although formal records regarding shop visitors' socio-economic background were not collected for fear that this would have undermined the relaxed, inclusive and informal atmosphere that the event attempted to create, TD hub members who staffed the event were confident that the attendees more closely represented the diversity of the city's inhabitants. As such, by using the medium of the map as a starting point for conversations about Durham's future and people's own role within it, the event proved a fertile ground for TD members to talk to an array of people in order to establish common ground, identify barriers to involvement and explore motivations to participate. New experiential knowledge was gleaned throughout the week and this was transformed into presentational knowing during informal reflections and debriefs between TD members throughout each day as well as during the hub meeting and the more formalised reflective session which followed the event. The key findings are discussed below⁷.



The Map: Picture illustrating the map of Durham which has been almost buried below the wealth of ideas that shop visitors have contributed

⁷ TD hub's overview of the suggestions proposed at WNO can be found within the report in appendix 1.

7.1 Common Ground

Shop visitors overwhelmingly communicated a common interest in the future of Durham and expressed pride in its history and heritage, but also revealed apprehension that the traditional fibres of community were disintegrating. Many of the issues that shop visitors were concerned about reflect closely the concerns of Transition (see figure 1 and appendix 1 for an overview of the suggestions offered by shop visitors to ensure the sustainable future of Durham).

Although a number of shop visitors told us that they simply weren't interested in climate change or peak oil, we found that by approaching the issue from a different angle we could often find a sphere of common interest:

"All this climate change stuff, it's just not part of my life. I'll die before it starts becoming a problem here." (WNO-C)

This gentleman went on to reminisce at length about the community spirit which used to exist throughout Durham when the mines were active, businesses were local and people had more social ties to each other. He agreed that Transition's focus on economic relocalisation would greatly improve an area.

"I don't believe in climate change, I think it's all a load of rubbish." (WNO-C)

This lady explained how she believed that climate change was a lie invented by governments, but when we explored this idea further, we discovered that she conceived of the 'real' problem in far more personal terms, such as a decline of bees in her garden and a change in the seasons since her childhood. These were issues that she felt strongly about, but she did not see them in terms of 'climate change'.

This resonates with numerous research findings which suggest that attempts to approach climate change directly, rather than through issues with more direct relevance to people's lives, will be futile (Lorenzoni et al, 2007;

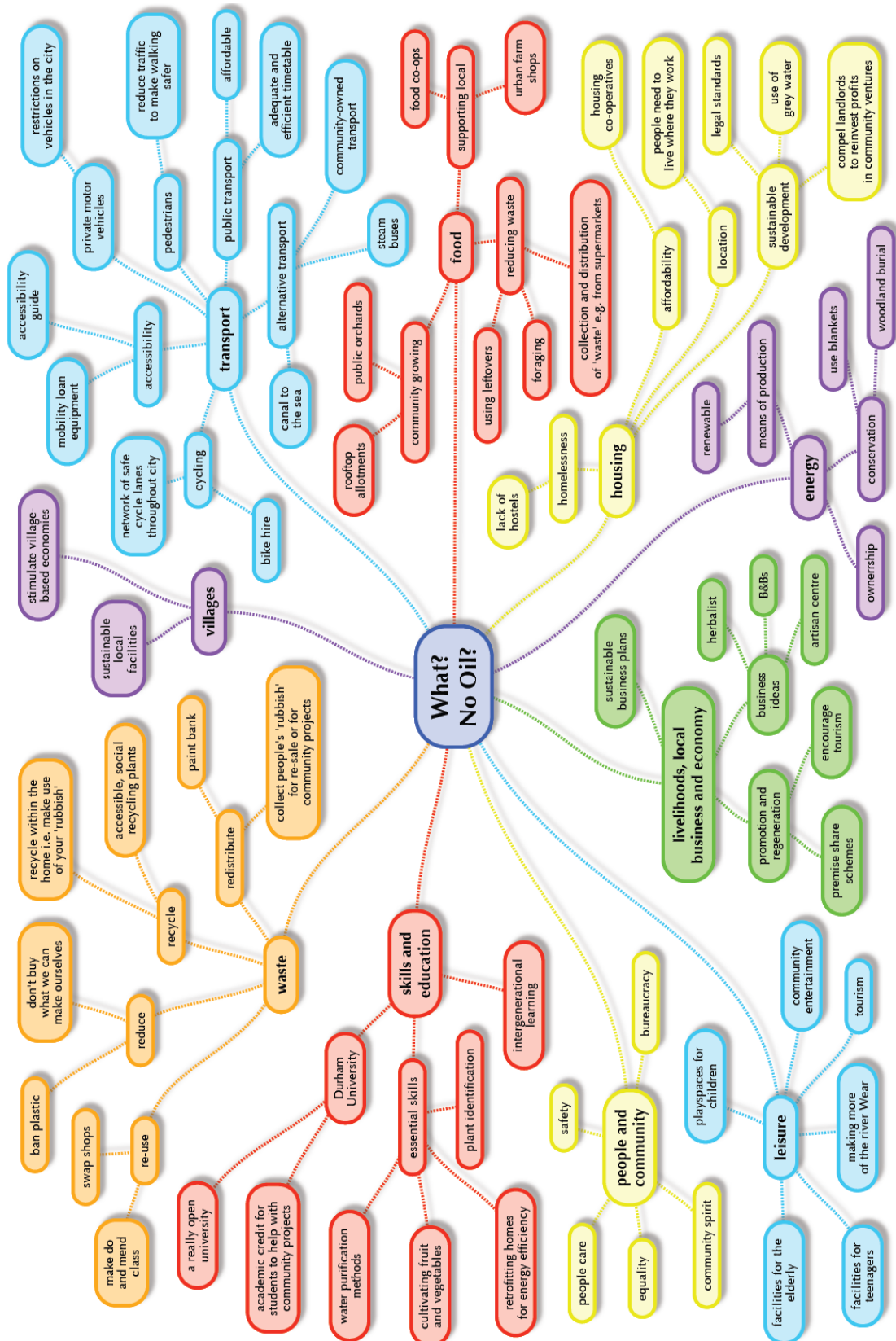


Figure 1: Overview of suggestions offered by shop visitors to ensure the sustainable future of Durham
 (With thanks to Adam Oflfer for his kind assistance in preparing this diagram)

Whitmarsh et al, 2010; O'Neill and Hulme, 2009; Szerszynski, 2006; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2010). Transition's locally-scaled, flexible approach provides an excellent way to engage with a variety of people who view problems like peak oil and climate change in more personal ways. Mooallem's (2009) description of Transition as a prism, offering a slightly different view of the problem depending on which way each person turns it, is particularly appropriate here.

The finding that many commonalities of interests exist between TD and a wide cross-section of the local community is reflected nationally in the research conducted by Capacity Global (2009a), who state that socially and economically excluded groups all demonstrate concern regarding environmental issues, particularly in relation to equality and fairness. This bodes well for Transition initiatives across the country who seek to engage a more diverse membership based on common goals and shared interests.

7.2 Inspiring Collective Action

For some shop visitors, such common concerns regarding sustainable futures translated into personal action directed towards resilience. Examples include:

"Trying to use local fruit and recycled jars [for jam]." (WNO-M)

"I'm on the Youth Council – we make changes in our village." (WNO-M)

"We have a business turning reclaimed wood and other objects into works of art for sale." (WNO-C)

"I've set up my own local florist and attempt to source what flowers I can locally." (WNO-M)

"I have my own allotment and I share the food with my friends and family." (WNO-C)

"I ride my bike more." (WNO-M)

“Member of Woodland Burial Ground group.” (WNO-M)

*“I try to encourage more bees in my garden by growing wildflowers.”
(WNO-C)*

“I’m seeking out a self-sustainable community to live in.” (WNO-C)

Such small-scale innovations hold great potential for Transition, not only because it demonstrates local understanding of and motivation to address the challenges facing us, but also because individual action can create a useful basis for collective, community scale action. Seyfang and Haxeltine (2010) state that social revolutions begin in the niche and diffuse into the mainstream through processes of replication, growth and translation. Organically occurring trends such as described here can be taken advantage of by Transition to attract wider participation in the movement by offering opportunities for involvement in projects that reflect current interests.

Contrastingly, TD noticed that many conversations with shop visitors followed an entirely different format:

Shop visitor: [This is my idea]; what are you going to do about it?

TD: Have you considered what action you could take to make it happen?

Shop visitor: It’s not my responsibility; somebody else should do something about it. Anyway, there’s nothing I can do about it.

(WNO-C)

This sense of powerlessness and apathy in the face of such large-scale challenges can be overcome by offering practical, community-based projects with short-term, realistic outcomes for people to participate in. There is little to be gained for TD in raising awareness and increasing membership numbers if people are then frustrated by a lack of realistic options to take action. In fact,

this could serve to amplify feelings of apathy and powerlessness (Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2009, 2010).

Reflecting on this, TD were concerned that opportunities to participate in the initiative beyond attending meetings were few and irregular. This may also pose a real barrier for existing TD members, many of whom have lain dormant for some time, suggesting that once-interested people are being lost due to a lack of tangible opportunities to participate, an idea reflected in the following excerpt:

*“I get the impression that TD has a lot of meetings and talking...but I'd actually like to **do** things...I don't want to go outside in the street for half an hour [protesting], but nor do I want to go to lots of meetings and talk about things. I suppose I'd like to find a balance between all those things.” (TD-I)*

TD has identified several routes for exploration to help overcome this problem. Volunteer opportunities will be advertised in a monthly newsletter, providing readers with practical examples of support that TD requires and inviting them to become involved. As the number of active members' increases, TD anticipates that the increased people power will allow for the establishment of more robust projects, thus providing further opportunities for participation. Currently, the small number of very active members and their own personal capacities limit the extent to which new projects can be formed, but opportunities for TD to work in partnership with local organisations to develop their work are plenty⁸ and should be utilised.

7.3 Frames of Reference

Resilience theorists suggest that building on a wide and diverse range of perspectives and capacities substantially improves a system's resilience (Holmgren, 2010; Pretty et al, 2009; Crane, 2010; Bell, 2004). Linked to the Transition movement, this suggests that planning for a successful EDAP must

⁸ See chapter 5, section 5.2 for a 'map' of the links that TD has already established with local organisations.

seek to include a wide diversity of people rather than risk developing solutions that are defined by a limited group of people who view the world in a particular way. This inclusive approach seeks to achieve benefits for all those who the EDAP will affect, thus appearing attractive to a diverse range of people and being informed by a broad range of thinking. The socially constructed frameworks through which Crane (2010) states that people approach problem-solving were apparent at WNO in the diversity of suggestions offered to help ensure a sustainable future for Durham, many of which may have been inconceivable for TD members who will view the issue of sustainability through their own culturally limited frames of reference. The following suggestions provide examples of how their author's particular frame of reference informed their composition.

“Stilt loan stations throughout the city.” (WNO-M)

This suggestion was offered by a small girl who, after listening to her parents discuss why a decreased reliance on motorised vehicles will be necessary for a sustainable future, explained that having to walk more when fuel became more expensive would get very boring and stilts could help make it more fun.

“A card for help: vulnerable and elderly people can have a sign (such as a picture of a fish on a card stating ‘please knock’) which they can put in their window to signify that help is required – other people living in the street or the local community will know to knock and offer help.” (WNO-M)

An elderly lady made this suggestion, explaining that it had been common practice in a retirement village she had lived in abroad. She believed that many elderly people she had met in Durham were very isolated and may lack the confidence to request assistance from a neighbour. She believed that her suggestion would help create a better sense of community and build trust amongst neighbours and generations.

“Organise a collection of unwanted goods from student homes and taffest or charity shop it.” (WNO-M)

A university student offered this suggestion to reduce unnecessary waste going to landfill sites based on her experience of seeing many of her fellow students simply throwing away good quality household items at the end of the academic year, rather than paying for storage or to have them shipped home.

“Bikes with umbrellas!! Encourage people to ride in the rain.” (WNO-M)
“Longer cycle lanes with rest stops offering cakes and smoothies.”
(WNO-M)

These suggestions were made by separate people, who both stated that although they could ride a bike and their workplace was in cycling distance, they were reluctant to and needed a little extra motivation to do it.

“I like the idea of cycle tracks but they need to be separate from the pavement so people can walk safely.” (WNO-M)
“No shared use cycle/pedestrian paths, at least until warning bells on bikes become compulsory – cyclists use them (the paths) very aggressively, often at high speeds.” (WNO-M)

In response to the numerous suggestions covering the map for more and improved cycle lanes, several people made the point that for people with impaired mobility, the elderly and small children, sharing pedestrian walkways with cycles must be avoided as it increased their vulnerability to trips, falls and collisions.

“ ‘Accessible’ toilets, NOT ‘disabled’ toilets. Language is powerful and the words we use affect the way people think about things.” (WNO-M)

A man in a wheelchair offered this thought, along with several suggestions regarding access and mobility issues throughout the city. He felt strongly that someone who has not spent time in a wheelchair would not be able to predict his mobility needs, so an effective plan for the future would have to be contributed to by people who have experienced similar disability.

7.4 Participatory Methods

WNO served as an effective pilot of the broader and more elaborate consultation process that creating an EDAP will involve. It demonstrated how

inclusive and participatory methods can potentially produce a better, more credible plan, with the scope to not only appeal to, but be owned and invested in by more people, thus increasing the likelihood of its successful realisation. The level of commitment and dialogue required to create a functioning EDAP using only the method explored at WNO is, in all probability, entirely unfeasible due to the amount of research, analysis and planning required to assess the suitability and practicalities of implementing each idea. Nevertheless, the event does provide a valuable indication of how using participatory methods to inform a plan can be a creative and effective way to generate critical knowledge, resulting in equitable and resilient outcomes. As such, the value of participatory methods to Transition is far greater than simply creating a better, more resilient plan; they also regulate the possibility of an EDAP becoming an elitist document that reflects only the limited vision, interests and ideas of TD hub members.

The use of such participatory planning is reminiscent of Freireian pedagogy, which advocates abolishing the traditional teacher/student dichotomy and replacing it with a reflective cycle of praxis where all are taught and all are teachers, participating equally in the generation of knowledge through ongoing sequences of action and critical reflection on context-relevant problems (Freire, 1970). Freire suggests that this participatory method creates a dynamic understanding of the world as, “a reality in process”, (Freire, 1970, p.64) which allows people to question the status quo through recognition of the fact that their action in the world can transform it, thus inspiring intervention in an active effort to alter oppressive situations for the better. There is a risk of Freire’s approach being misappropriated by a majority group to pursue its own social purposes, as any method of education can be, and it is over-reliant on polar extremes to signify the oppressors and the oppressed, when in reality most people fall somewhere in between. However, Schiavo argues that it still offers a useful approach, specifying that, “so many solutions [can] be found if [those who experience the difficulty are] included in the analysis of the problem...so often what is seen to be the root of the problem to an outsider is not what is seen to be the problem to an insider”, (Schiavo,

2000, online). This phenomenon was certainly evident at WNO as the discussion above on frames of reference indicates.

Transition's commitment to using participatory methodologies, with their potential to overcome oppressive power structures as described by Freire, demonstrates that the movement is promisingly positioned to address wider inequalities. In everyday practice, this dedication can be seen in numerous ways: Transition's use of 'open space technology' to facilitate meetings, a method which does not require a chairperson or formal agenda but relies on active participation and gives individuals present the responsibility for creating a working agenda, convening breakout discussion groups and taking notes (Hopkins, 2008a, p.162); the movement's eschewal of 'official' leaders and hierarchical structures (although charismatic leaders have certainly emerged, albeit unintentionally – not least Rob Hopkins himself); new initiatives are advised to “set up a steering group and design its demise from the outset” (Hopkins, 2008a, p.148) both to avoid rigidity and the prospect of it becoming a power base; groups are encouraged to act as catalysts rather than leaders for their community by “let[ting] it go where it wants it to go” (Hopkins, 2008a, p.172), a notion thoroughly championed by Wilf Richards, one of TD's founding members:

“I haven't got a fixed view on how TD evolves...I see it more as a work in progress, a research project, with new layers of the onion being added all the time.” (TD-I)

7.5 Practicalities

Although participatory methods are espoused, the actual practicalities of participating in Transition may prove a barrier to many people.

The most frequent issue which arose in our discussions at WNO was a lack of awareness of TD or the Transition movement in general – people cannot opt to participate in something they do not know exists. TD has now established an Outreach Group who plan to take steps aimed at remedying this situation.

A second subject which appeared regularly was that a significant number of shop visitors reported having no regular access to internet facilities or not using an email account. TD has always communicated with members via email, primarily due to a lack of resources rather than any presumption that everyone uses the internet. Signing up for the (e)mailing list is, in fact, the basic criterion for membership of TD, thereby denying many interested parties the opportunity to join TD or even find out about planned meetings and activities in which they could participate. The first task of the newly formed Outreach Group was to create a template for a monthly newsletter which is to be delivered to key locations throughout the city. The outreach group are also planning to make the TD website more user-friendly so that people can use public internet facilities to quickly check the virtual notice board and calendar of events.

Language, or 'jargon', was a further topic which TD recognised may have created some barriers during WNO. Although shop customers did not comment directly on this issue, we often found ourselves having to explain what we meant by terms like 'sustainable' (and this was despite a conscious effort on our part not to use 'Transitiony' words). Use of such insider terminology is not likely to be understood by outsiders, so can be used to create or maintain group boundaries, effectively denying access to those without the means to decipher the code – similar to the 'symbolic violence' described by Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). This exclusionary language also permeates TD meetings:

"I felt a great deal of fore-knowledge was expected...so I could only follow part of what was going on. There wasn't much explanation of people or events...For this reason I don't think I could participate completely or leave with any real sense of purpose." (TD-I)

Whilst a concerted effort is certainly required from TD to avoid use of jargon, it is also unrealistic to expect that a newcomer to the movement would have adequate background knowledge to fully comprehend all parts of a meeting.

As such, a meeting is unlikely to be the best starting point for most people's Transition journey, but, as attending a meeting is often the only way for newcomers to participate in TD, this problem links with the earlier point of developing a variety of community-based opportunities for people to get involved in the initiative. Practical and fun activities where constructive action is the primary goal of taking part and learning about Transition takes place as a secondary outcome would allow newcomers the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the Transition concept and decide whether or not they would like to become involved in meetings on the basis of a positive, communal experience.

7.6 Incorporating Dissenting Opinions – A Moral Quandary

WNO made clear that although a wide support base for Transition activities exists locally, not everybody shares Transition's view of a localised, powered-down future.

*“That sounds awful! Everything I've worked for, everything me and my sons enjoy doing together – gone. Let's hope it never happens.”
(WNO-C)*

“You don't want to hear this, but what I want is another supermarket, another Asda. It doesn't fit in with your plan but my husband needs a job, he's not had a job for years, there are no jobs here. Asda would give him a job, there'd be plenty for people like him too, good people that need a job and are willing to work. These little local shops, they don't need so many staff, and they might be better in the long-term, but my husband needs a job now, we need jobs now.” (WNO-C)

How Transition approaches such views is of vital importance: ignoring or suppressing them runs the risk of alienating people, whereas manoeuvring people into agreement with the Transition vision belittles peoples concerns and values, which is disempowering and threatens long-term resilience. Sharing anxieties and ideals to develop collaborative solutions is a more useful approach.

In some ways, however, Transition may undermine its own aptitude for diversity and inclusion by creating norms which presuppose that its members conform to a particular stereotype, effectively stifling diverse opinions which do not fit in with its vision⁹. Announcing the 2011 Transition Conference, the Network noted that “if anyone clamours for that spectacle [the Grand Prix] on the big screen, they’ll get frogmarched double-time to the next available ecopsychology workshop!” (Transition Network, 2011e, online). Despite the humorous tone, genuine Grand Prix fans are unlikely to feel welcomed and included, thus limiting the ability of Transition to genuinely engage with the diversity it is seeking to embrace. Our communities are not only made up of people from different ethnicities and religions and classes, but are peopled by Grand Prix fans and ‘Elle’ magazine readers (Chase, 2009), by people who purchase ‘industrial chicken’ (Greene, 2010) and dislike holding hands in a circle (Mooallem, 2009). Transition’s approach to inclusivity on such divergent perspectives from its own will test its resilience and versatility.

Connors and McDonald query whether Transition’s desire to have broad appeal must necessarily be constrained by its stated aims and vision, excluding those who disagree, suggesting that the movement “celebrate[s] place and diversity at the same time as [it] erase[s] it” (2010, p.11). At this point, such a statement is premature. Time and exploration are needed to determine how or even whether Transition is capable of giving equal value to such dissenting opinions and creating a truly participatory democracy. Research into this dilemma would provide a worthwhile avenue for future investigations which seek to further our understanding of the role of diversity and equality in resilient social systems.

7.7 Limitations of the Research

The methodology employed at WNO had certain limitations, not least that shop visitors were self-selecting. The people who walked blindly past the shop, or the people who categorically avoided entering, may have provided us

⁹ See ‘tyranny of the group’, discussed in chapter 6, section 6.1.

with a very different array of responses giving rise to entirely different conclusions from those people whose curiosity was piqued by the brightly coloured and evidently homemade map of Durham and the scribbblings of previous shop visitors covering the flip chart sheets blu-tacked to the walls. The frames of reference which led some people to be intrigued by the sight of the “messy, fun, colourful shop” (WNO-C) are likely to be developed through entirely different cultural perspectives than those of the people who scurried past.

Despite such limitations, the cyclical nature of action research, of which the community mapping event formed a part, means that although the investigative element of this dissertation has concluded, TD’s intervention and reflection on their practice will continue to raise important questions and develop novel solutions.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1 Key Findings

The research presented in this paper has established complex links between creating community resilience, incorporating diversity and addressing inequality, suggesting that one is not possible without the other. For movements such as Transition, who seek to address the challenges of peak oil and climate change, which they interpret as symptoms of a lack of resilience in current lifestyles, ensuring that a diversity of people are able to participate as equals in seeking solutions will be a necessity.

TD has established broad areas of common interest with its local community, providing a useful foundation for progression to collective action aimed at resilience. Using participatory methodologies to engage with a diverse community enabled TD to hear distinct perspectives that may otherwise have been inaccessible to it, allowing the initiative not only a better understanding of the barriers that prevent people participating in the movement and the practical steps that they can take to help overcome these, but of the array of needs and values that must be incorporated into a plan for a sustainable future. TD has modelled a method of collaborative planning that can be imitated and implemented in various contexts to encourage democratic participation.

Furthermore, using a participatory paradigm to inform my own methodology has enabled me to create a synergy between the academic aims of my study and the practical needs of TD. By becoming a part of the initiative I have been able to develop an insider perspective that would not have been accessible to me had I maintained a 'professional' distance from my area of study.

8.2 Future Research

Broad consensus within a community is unlikely and the fissures that are apparent between people with diverse needs and values can negatively affect social and individual resilience. How Transition seeks to engage and link

together with people whose perspectives diverge from its own is a useful topic for future research.

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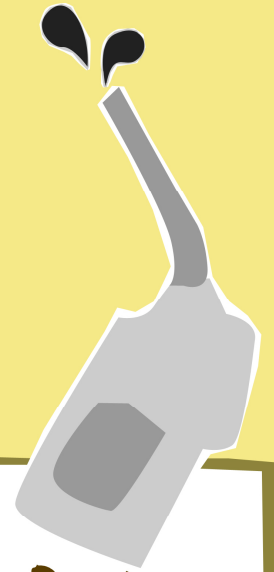
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Help create a positive future for Durham



*A creative community engagement project undertaken by
Transition Durham to lay the foundations for the city's Energy
Descent Action Plan*

**A Guide to Practice
July 2011**



About Transition Durham



Transition Durham seeks to promote local resilience through community-led responses to the three linked challenges of climate change, peak oil, and economic insecurity. Part of the international Transition Network, our goal is to collaborate with other local groups in developing and implementing an Energy Descent Action Plan for Durham City and the surrounding area: a positive vision of how the residents of Durham can work together to achieve a sustainable and prosperous low-carbon future.

Project Background

In common with the international Transition Network, Transition Durham recognised that addressing the existing lack of diversity in membership was a key issue for the development of the group, and were keen to make new connections and establish dialogue relating to climate change, peak oil and economic instability with a wider cross-section of Durham residents and organisations.

"It's becoming increasingly clear that the age of cheap oil is at an end, and a lot of people think that the current economic crisis could just be the first of the symptoms, with much worse to come. Against a background of growing concerns about climate change, it's easy to feel powerless, not to say a bit overwhelmed, but it's also a big opportunity for us to come together as a community, respond to these issues while we still have a chance, and start shaping the future of the city. A world without cheap oil doesn't have to be a bad place: if we start planning for it now, with imagination and passion and a commitment to social justice, we can build a brighter and happier Durham where communities have real power over their lives and livelihoods."

Out of this desire, an innovative plan for community engagement was born, with the concept of an interactive map of Durham as a tool for stimulating discussion and participation at its heart. Echoing the 'cheerful disclaimer' of the entire Transition Movement, Transition Durham had no idea if this particular social experiment would prove effective, but were willing and enthusiastic to trial a new method of working.

The Shop

Shop visitors were welcomed into the space by a member of Transition Durham, who then facilitated their individual journey around the shop. Visitors were initially introduced to the concepts of sustainability, climate change and peak oil and their impacts for Durham through an invitation to view previous visitor's contributions to the debate, which were displayed around the shop in the form of writing, drawings, models and idea cards. The shift from 'observer' – viewing other people's contributions - to 'participant' – offering their own contributions - was carefully negotiated by the shop staff who gauged the most appropriate invitation to 'join in' for each individual. An initial, "I'm just looking", often turned into hours spent discussing issues and making visible contributions to the shop, with a number of people returning to the shop on several occasions over the course of the week to see how the debate had changed and moved on and to make a new contribution.

The continuously evolving landscape of the shop allowed a virtual dialogue and connection between participants who were not in the shop at the same time, but who were linked through the medium of the map, which in this way became the centre of an ongoing debate about the sustainable future of Durham.

The welcoming nature of the shop, with staff on hand to greet new visitors and take a genuine interest in their ideas, cosy sofas, colourful art, tea, coffee and cake in free supply, created an atmosphere where people said they felt comfortable and where strangers in the shop were able to initiate meaningful discussions with each other on issues that affect their lives.

We used our AGM as a jumpstart for the whole process, inviting Transition Durham members to the shop to share in the AGM and food and then leave their mark on the map. We had planned a visioning exercise to be included in the AGM, and the ideas that sprung from the visioning could be transferred to the map.

Opportunities to Participate

Exploring Peak Oil

Visual images were displayed to illustrate the concepts of climate change and peak oil. Visitors were invited to reflect on the ways in which their lifestyles are dependent on oil and add their observations and understandings of their own dependence to a collection of thoughts of shop visitors who had come before them.

'Pick Me' Cards

Visitors were invited to select a card at random featuring a question or statement relating to peak oil, climate change, economic change or personal reflections on Durham, which shop staff could use to initiate and facilitate a discussion.

Resource Library

Visitors were invited to read through and reflect on a range of resources at their leisure, from informal visual displays about peak oil and climate change and the work of Transition Durham, to academic books exploring similar issues.

The Chill Out Area

Visitors were invited to make themselves comfortable on the sofas and take part in a conversation with shop staff or other shop visitors.

The Map

A giant map of Durham City Centre provided the focal point for the shop, taking pride of place in the heart of the room and drawing shoppers in from the precinct who were curious about its colourful adaptations and additions created by previous shop visitors.

Visitors were invited to imagine a more sustainable future for Durham where the city was less reliant on oil and more resilient against climate change and economic instability. They were invited to contribute an idea that could help achieve such a future and were offered a number of options to express their idea:

Write: note your idea on a 'My Idea...' card and place it on the map

Draw: create a piece of art which symbolises your idea and add it to the map

Build: craft a model which represents your idea and add it to the map

Talk: simply tell us your idea and allow us to add it to the map for you

Envisioning a New Economy

Visitors were invited to consider how ideas for a sustainable future for Durham might create new jobs, and people were offered the opportunity to add their thoughts on future livelihoods to a collection of similar thoughts presented by previous shop visitors displayed on a pillar.

Educating our Future

Visitors were invited to contemplate what skills and knowledge would be useful in a more sustainable future, and people were offered the opportunity to add their ideas on education and learning to a collection of similar thoughts presented by previous shop visitors displayed on a pillar.

The Big Challenge

Visitors were invited to deliberate on what first small step they could take to ensure that Durham could have a more sustainable future, and were offered the opportunity to add their idea for action to a collection of commitments to action presented by previous shop visitors displayed on a pillar.

A Sense of Community

Visitors were invited to add their email address to the Transition Durham mailing list, a forum whereby Transition Durham members can communicate with each other and request support for relevant projects, ideas and events, thereby sustaining the virtual dialogue commenced during the community mapping event.

Findings and Insights

A recurring theme throughout the research indicated that people are particularly concerned about how we make the best of our existing space and resources and regenerate derelict or underused buildings and land. People are proud of Durham and its heritage, but feel that so much more could be made of it – the river, Wharton Park, public buildings, green spaces, empty shops and houses – everywhere could be more productive, bringing life to the city and its people, and increasing local resilience. This theme has been incorporated within all the following subsections, but deserves a special mention due to its importance in people's imaginations.

Shop visitors contributed hundreds of ideas over the course of the week, out of which 10 key themes emerged:

1. Waste management
2. Transport
3. Food
4. Livelihoods, local business and economy
5. Housing
6. Energy
7. Leisure
8. People and Community
9. Skills and Education
10. Villages

There is much overlap and interlinking between themes, but an attempt has been made in this report to isolate key points from each. Whilst our research project aimed to inspire individual and collective action towards a more resilient community, many issues link in well with existing initiatives, both within Transition Durham and within the City as a whole, indicating a depth and breadth of support amongst a wide cross-section of the community for initiatives which serve to ensure the long-term sustainability of Durham.

1. Waste Management

People were very concerned about the amount of waste we produce and the ways in which we dispose of our excess. They made numerous suggestions

for reducing, reusing, recycling and redistributing our waste. Key themes were:

- Redistribution centres to collect unwanted goods, clothing, paint, short-dated food. These can be redistributed to those in need (e.g. homeless people, community groups, etc.) or sold to finance other projects.
- Swap shops.
- Improved recycling facilities and promotion (e.g. increased availability of recycling bins throughout the city, rather than just general waste bins; more accessible recycling plants).
- Bicycle recycling schemes.
- Reduce waste by banning unnecessary packaging and promoting alternative uses such as composting, use of grey water for toilet flushing, streetlights run from sewage gas. In particular, people felt that legislation should be implemented which bans the use of all non-recyclable materials in packaging, places tighter restrictions on the overall use of packaging by businesses and prevents people placing into landfill sites materials that could be otherwise used.
- Reuse – workshops to help people ‘make do and mend’ (e.g. repairing clothes, rug-making from old materials); supporting the establishment of second hand shops and flea markets.

2. Transport

How people move around the city was a popular topic when discussing how to reduce fossil fuel use and mitigate climate change. Key themes were restrictions on private motor vehicles, improved public transport, better provision for cyclists and pedestrians, and decrease the need for transport by providing facilities close to where people live (jobs, play areas, shops, etc).

- Provision for cyclists

Safe cycle lanes are required on all roads throughout the city and linking up with outlying villages, neighbouring towns and cities to encourage more people to use a bike. Cheap bike hire should be available centrally. Safe storage should be available for cyclists to secure their bikes; bicycle racks should be practically located such as nearby the train station and at the Park and Ride sites.

- Provision for pedestrians

Pedestrian safety should be paramount, with adequate kerbs, safe crossing places on all roads, including new walkways and bridges to connect more inaccessible places (e.g. between Wharton Park and DLI; between Fowler's Yard and The Gates), and no shared use cycle ways. Walking to be made more possible by ensuring people have local access to essential facilities such as shops, schools and play areas, thus reducing the need to drive.

- Accessibility

Considerations should be made for people with limited mobility, including wheelchair users, the blind and partially sighted and deaf. Better use of ramps, kerbs and mobility equipment. An 'accessibility guide' should be created to inform people how they can safely navigate their way around the city and which buildings are accessible. All city centre parking spaces to be reserved for disabled badge holders' only, thus simultaneously reducing traffic flow in the city.

- Public transport

Public transport should be better timetabled, more frequent, more affordable, more reliable and span a wider area. Improved links should be made between transport providers and to ensure that outlying villagers have more regular access to it. People were very vocal in their criticism of current public transport provision, stating that they were reluctant to use it as it does not meet their needs and is more expensive than using a car.

- Alternative transport

Possibilities for alternative transport methods should be explored and supported, including trams, steam buses and trains, Metro lines, riverboats and barges for transportation of produce, a canal to connect the city with the sea, cycle rickshaws, car clubs and horse-drawn vehicles.

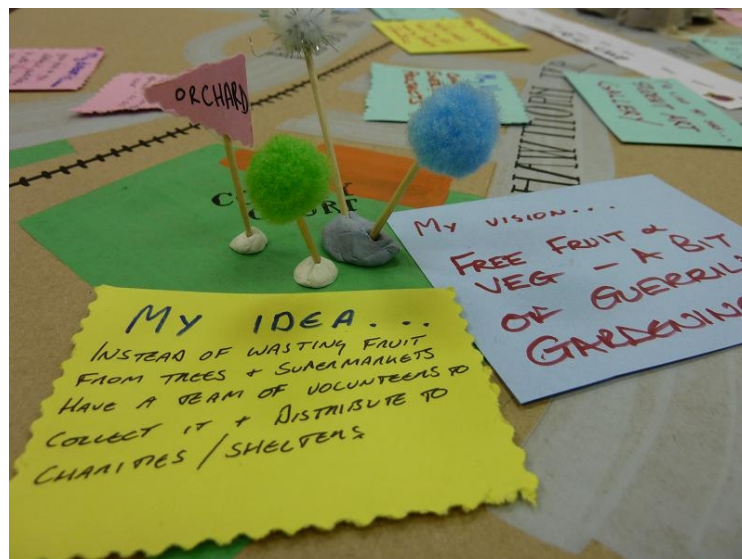
- Restrictions on private motor vehicles

Cars should be banned in the city centre, thus encouraging use of public transport or walking. Cars should be banned in school areas at drop-off and pick-up time to promote pedestrian safety and encourage more people to walk. Businesses should encourage staff to use alternative methods to come to work; in particular County Hall workers should be charged for car parking

as the area is well-served by buses and this would replicate the policies of hospitals; revenue earned could be used to improve public transport facilities.

3. Food

People were concerned about local resilience in food production and use. Their suggestions centred around teaching people skills for growing food, use of all available public space for growing community food, encouragement of foraging, better use of available food, more local food production and diversity.



Ideas about food

4. Livelihoods, local business and economy

The idea of local businesses selling and promoting local produce and crafts, thus ensuring employment for local people and a thriving local economy was very popular and raised much discussion. Suggestions abounded for how we support local businesses, including infrastructure, ideas and innovations, tourism, arts and crafts, and employment opportunities. People felt strongly that large chain stores and supermarkets have driven local businesses away and that action should be taken to revert this trend and allow local independent businesses the opportunity to establish themselves and prosper. Suggestions included:

- Councils to regulate how long business property can be kept unused before terms must be negotiated, thus preventing artificial “market rate” rents.

- Business start-up grants for unemployed people.
- Incentives to ensure new businesses have long-term sustainability plans in place.
- Opportunities for start-up businesses to share premises in expensive city centre locations, thus making the rent more affordable and promoting cooperation between businesses rather than competition.
- A 'local enterprise network' could be established for entrepreneurs to create connections and garner support for new business ventures, whilst also promoting local businesses to consumers and tourists.
- The River Wear area should be cleaned up and regenerated to be used to the city's advantage by establishing stalls, rest stops, picnic tables, and activities, thus attracting visitor's and making the area profitable, attractive and safe.

5. Housing

People are very worried about the prospect of new houses being built when current housing stock is not used to its full advantage. They believe that there should be more affordable city-centre housing for families, but that this could be gained by a restructuring of current housing use, such as restrictions on speculative buying; more accommodation provided for students in residential colleges and purpose-built accommodation at the university's expense in order to free up houses for families; compelling absent landlords to re-invest profits into the local community.



Affordable city centre houses for families, featuring solar panel roofs.

If further housing is to be built, people believe that it should be more 'useful' – mandatory energy saving/production requirements (e.g. insulation; solar panels, rainwater storage tanks), gardens to contain edible plants, affordable, useful location (i.e. houses where people live, work, play and learn, rather than 'commuter dormitories'), restrictions on speculative buying.

People also expressed concern at the lack of facilities for homeless people in the city. At a minimum, more hostels should be established.

6. Energy

Energy was a key issue – both its production and conservation – and linked inextricably with most other themes. Suggestions that were specific only to energy included the use of all public buildings for solar panel installation and wind power, micro-hydro on the river, and stricter energy conservation measures (e.g. decrease cremation and increase woodland burial; less reliance on motorised machines, especially where manual equivalents would create more jobs for people; keep people warm, not buildings – wear more clothes), legislation requiring all new buildings to have adequate energy saving and production measures.

7. Leisure

That recreation should not be dependant on fossil-fuel use and that people should not have to travel to enjoy their leisure time were key themes here. Numerous suggestions specific to use of leisure time for the elderly, children and teenagers were offered, stressing that facilities should be accessible and safe. Improved use of existing landscapes like the River Wear, Wharton Park and community buildings were felt to be the best solution to these issues.

In particular, facilities for families such as parks, playgrounds and truly interactive museums should be available in walking distance of everywhere.



A child's collage of the perfect park

Teenagers made their own suggestions for their leisure time, which included a central sports academy where physical exercise could be encouraged and sporting talent could be nurtured; dedicated arts and crafts spaces and a teenager-friendly café – a place where young people who feel they have outgrown youth clubs and are not old enough for clubs and pubs can go to ‘be themselves’ without the pressure of adults or ‘workers’ breathing down their necks.

More community events and entertainment should be prioritised, including live music, arts, dance, walks and talks, and a permanent community venue should be established to support such initiatives.

People felt strongly that tourism should be promoted, and that the regeneration and redevelopment suggested in this and other themes would encourage this, but that the Tourist Information Centre was essential in providing knowledge of all Durham has to offer to tourists. To support this, there were also suggestions that reasonably priced accommodation in the city centre, including campsites, youth hostels, and locally owned B&B’s should be established.

8. People and Community

People are very concerned that our lifestyles create divisions (e.g. intergenerational, locals and students, community groups) and they want to be able to foster a sense of community spirit and create vibrant hubs of activity that everyone is involved in. They are concerned about how we care for each other, how we relate to each other, equality and diversity, democracy and participation and how we stay safe.

Everyone should be able to contribute to their local community in a way which makes them feel valued, with enough jobs for everyone, including meaningful jobs for children and young people, people with disabilities and the elderly, and equal pay rights.

The bureaucracy which currently prevents people participating in local life – ‘red tape’, restrictive health and safety policies, excessive paperwork – should be reduced; all these things create an atmosphere of fear and confusion, leading to apathy.

'Street Angels', visible city, park and river wardens and more police officers on the beat will help improve public confidence and allow the proposed changes in other areas to flourish.

More day centres similar to Waddington Street Centre are required to ensure that isolated and vulnerable people have somewhere to go that is welcoming, safe and stimulating.

Additionally, schemes should be established to ensure people get the care they require – for example, feeding with dignity, temporary respite centres for people who are unwell but do not require hospitalisation, support to return home following an extended hospital stay.

9. Skills and Education

People are aware that many of the 'old' skills, such as cultivating food, plant identification, weaving, knitting and self-sufficiency are being lost and that if Durham is to become a resilient city, we need to ensure that our residents are suitably skilled to manage with the challenges ahead.

School curriculums should incorporate the essential skills that young people will require in a fossil-fuel free future, such as food growing, home cooking, maintenance and repair of everyday objects and foraging.

Funding and support for community education projects that provide such learning should also be established. Initiatives such as timebank learning, autonomous universities, skillswap sessions and intergenerational projects are all possibilities.

10. Villages

People who live in villages feel both cut off from the city centre and that their local area is in need of regeneration and has lost its community spirit. They recognise that diversified local economies are required to ensure their resilience and that significant redevelopment stimulating more village-based enterprise is necessary.

They are concerned that new housing developments cater for commuters rather than residents and that many of the villages feel like dormitories – people don't work, shop, play, socialise or send their children to the local school, and therefore have no personal investment in building an active and resilient community.

Villages should have easy, local access to adequate facilities and employment opportunities to create and maintain themselves as vibrant hubs of activity, and to attract new residents who will establish personal connections with the area. Practical links with neighbouring villages and the city should be encouraged and maintained.

Community-based enterprise should be encouraged and supported, school admissions policies should be based on catchment areas and new housing developments in villages should be accompanied by a reinvestment of profit into developing local facilities.

Outcomes and Future Developments

Transition Durham members are currently working on incorporating all the ideas provided by people attending the event into a new website, which will form the basis of ongoing dialogue among as broad a range of people with an interest in Durham City as possible. New users will be able to sign up to the website and discuss ideas already there, add new ones, and in this way identify and discuss ideas and plans with people with similar interests and concerns to their own. We hope that this will lead people to undertake new projects in which they put their ideas into action, in which they will be welcome to join one or another of Transition Durham's task groups (currently there are groups working on Food, Energy, Economics and Livelihoods, Outreach, and Local Authority Liaison), to set up a new task group, or to request our support in other ways. We will also undertake a proactive programme of further engagement with representatives of community groups and other organisations in Durham, encouraging them to identify areas where their work could contribute to building a resilient, fossil-fuel-free city. The results will form the basis of an 'Energy Descent Action Plan' for Durham City.

A report summarising the findings from the event and providing a detailed breakdown of suggestions was written and submitted to Durham County Council for consideration in their 20 Year County Plan consultation exercise. Additionally, the report was presented to the local Area Action Partnership – Clean and Green/Climate Change Group, who have agreed to support us turn ten of the suggestions into reality. We are currently conducting a poll to determine which of the suggestions should be put forward for this assistance.