

Participatory Budgeting in the context of Peak Oil and Climate Change

Weather is impacting on communities in increasingly severe and frequent ways. Weather disproportionately impacts on the poorest and more vulnerable communities in the UK (uninsured homes getting flooded, extreme weather affecting services to the elderly and schools) and it is likely that the gap between the haves and the have-nots will increase as a result. Combine this with the impacts of Peak Oil that we are already facing (increased travel and food costs) and we can see that the gap will be increased.

With its emphasis on participatory democracy, dealing with complex information and deciding difficult priorities, PB could create a useful skills base to help communities and authorities work together better in the face of disaster management (flooding, drought, etc) and making tough decisions over resource allocation, such as who gets flood defences and who doesn't. With its origins in Latin America and its continuing North-South links, PB can offer a timely response to the need to 'think global, act local' and the changes required to move towards one planet living.

Transition Towns

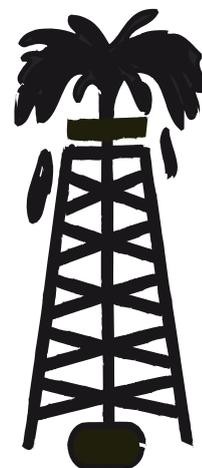
Transition Town/Village/City Initiatives are communities working together to look Peak Oil and Climate Change squarely in the eye and address this BIG question: "for all those aspects of life that this community needs in order to sustain itself and thrive, how do we significantly increase resilience (to mitigate the effects of Peak Oil) and drastically reduce carbon emissions (to mitigate the effects of Climate Change)?" There are many different initiatives around the UK using different approaches, but guided by the same basic principles.

www.transitiontowns.org

dependent economy and society to a world less dependent on, and less able to depend on, fossil fuels.

Peak Oil

This is the point in time when the maximum rate of global petroleum extraction is reached, after which the rate of production enters terminal decline – oil is a finite resource. If we have not already passed the point of peak oil, it is certainly very close. Oil will not run out straight away, but rates of extraction will on average decrease. As demand for oil is still increasing, this will provoke energy crises.



One Planet Living

This concept highlights how the UK and all the other economically developed countries use far more than their fair global share of the planet's resources. For example, if everyone on the planet lived like the average person in Europe we would need three planets to support us all. This is obviously unsustainable and relies on other countries having access to far less than their fair share of resources.

www.oneplanetliving.org

One initiative that could link well with PB processes, as well as its principles and values base, is the Transition Towns movement. One question relating to Transition Towns is 'a transition to what, and what kind of transition?'. The participatory and consultative aspects in PB processes, and the prioritising and negotiation between different community's agreed priorities, could be useful (even essential) practice for the probably quite rocky road we are faced with in transition from a fossil fuel



The Power of Community – How Cuba survived peak oil

In the late 1990s Cuba suffered a forced version of peak oil when the collapsing Soviet Union drastically reduced oil exports to Cuba and the US government increased sanctions on the island state. The resulting impacts on the population became known as the 'hungry years' as the country struggled to feed its population and prevent the standard of living from declining irreparably. Cuba had to move beyond oil, rapidly, and looked to its pre-industrial economy to save it. As fuel and spare parts for tractors ran out, the last generation who had been able to work with oxen were employed as teachers to a new generation of farmers, who soon became some of the most respected and well paid workers in the country. City farms were promoted and an organic revolution took place as food production could no longer be boosted by oil-based fertilisers. There is an excellent film about this time called The Power of Community, based on research done by Community Sololution who saw what had happened in Cuba as a valuable lesson which the rest of the world would do well to learn from.

The system of workers' farm cooperatives and other cooperative ventures promoted to help Cuba deal with its premature reaching of Peak Oil are worth investigating to inspire us in the UK as to how a timely meeting of PB processes and the need to respond to peak oil and climate change could be reached.

There is a film available called The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil. Details from www.powerofcommunity.org/cm/index.php. The film was produced as part of a reserach project of The Community Solution, a non-profit organization that designs and teaches low-energy solutions to the current unsustainable, fossil fuel based, industrialized, and centralized way of living. Visit www.communitysolution.org for more information.



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