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The importance of context: relocalisation and the Transition network

Abstract

The concept of 'relocalisation' requires global organisations to embrace radically different ways of operating. Relocalisation is considered to be a way of building resilience in communities (Rees, 2010), largely through 'meeting needs that can be met locally, locally' (Hopkins, 2010, p. 445) and is a cornerstone of the Transition Network. As each Transition initiative is responsive to its particular local conditions and contexts the 'face of Transition' will be unique, to some extent, in each community. Rob Hopkins, founder of the Transition network suggests that, as cheap energy becomes a thing of the past, relocalisation offers a 'tremendous opportunity to rethink and reinvent local economies' (Hopkins 2010). The Transition network, which is currently one of the more prominent relocalisation movements in the world (Bailey, Hopkins & Wilson, 2010) provides a case study in a strongly networked, context specific, movement for change that has had rapid uptake since its inception in 2005.

The Transition network provides a forum for its participants to work positively in the face of many environmental and societal challenges. Transition Towns grew out of a permaculture course led by Rob Hopkins in Kinsale, Ireland in 2005 that developed a community wide design for a low carbon future given the issues of climate change and peak oil. This prompted the development of an energy descent plan that incorporated the key aspects of a community such as food, housing, energy, transport, economics and health. The model was then implemented in Totnes in England and the process has been documented and promulgated by Hopkins and others, via books, online networking and training (Hopkins, 2011) and there are currently over Transition Initiatives across the predominantly Western world. Due to the dynamic nature of environmental and societal change, the Transition network continues to evolve both in the central organising hub as well as in each Transition initiative.

This paper suggests that Complexity theory offers a useful lens for understanding how the Transition model, which spans 35 countries, enables autonomy among individual initiatives and yet retains a distinct identity . Rees points out that complexity thinking offers a way to 'explain responses to change in interlinked ecological, economic and social systems across scales in both time and place' (2010, p.30). Thus, the use of complexity approaches which are also increasingly applied to understanding organisations (Kuhn, 2009; Mitleton-Kelly, 2003), are particularly apt for interrogating the Transition network. For instance, each Transition initiative clearly self organises as it finds ways of working with and integrating into

the local context and the concept of emergence provides a way of understanding the non-linear outcomes of transition in different communities.

This paper draws on research data from 25 in-depth interviews and 30 surveys completed by representatives of Transition initiatives in Australia. Using a complexity framework it analyses the ways in which the Transition Town Model straddles the global/local interface and the subsequent achievements and tensions.

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Introduction

Climate change, widespread degradation of the environment and loss of biodiversity as well as concerns about food, water and fuel security are increasingly on the public agenda (UNEP 2012; Steffen et al. 2011; Westley et al. 2011). Governments around the world are responding in a multiplicity of ways to these issues, particularly in many cases at a local Government level (Shen et al. 2011; Williams et al. 2011; Newman et al. 2009). However, many people are concerned that the action being taken is not sufficient and grassroot initiatives have emerged around the world in response to this concern (Bomberg 2012; Hopkins 2011; Chew 2008; Hawken 2007). These initiatives which are working towards catalysing systemic societal change range from the anti-globalisation movements such as the World Social forum and the Occupy movement to relocalisation movements and particular organisations such as the Transition network (Hopkins 2011; 2008). This paper considers how Transition, a significant grassroots movement, intent on building resilience in local communities, responds to the multiple crises confronting the world. I explore ways in which complexity theory makes sense of the Transition approach and the rapid uptake of the model in over 35 countries. Complexity offers a useful lens for understanding how the Transition model straddles the global/local interface and enables autonomy among individual initiatives, how it cultivates self organisation and emergence and how it facilitates connectivity and co-evolution.   As such, this paper will discuss resilience and localisation, and the broader Transition movement before focussing on examples from the experiences of different Transition initiatives in their local contexts in Australia. I will argue that Transition is constrained by the scale of the relocalisation project and is well placed to act as a catalyst rather than taking full carriage of relocalisation in communities.

Resilience

Sustainability related initiatives that are fostering systemic change are occurring in a multiplicity of forms across the world. In the European context the term creative communities is used to refer to those that are 're-orienting their spatial, temporal and human relationships towards increased sustainability measured from social, economic and environmental aspects' (Marrass & Bala 2008:147). Given that over 50% of the world's population live in cities, urban resilience has become a key theme in response to climate change and peak oil and there are a range of examples from North and South America of cities embracing a range of embedded holistic schemes and programs (Satterthwaite & Dodman 2009; Newman et al. 2009; Lerche 2007). Many of these approaches are based on a recognition that it is preferable to design a future that is sustainable and offers a good quality of life than to react to change that is imposed during crises. Roseland suggests that sustainable communities 'do not mean settling for less, but rather thinking of new opportunities along different and likely more satisfying dimensions' (2000: 126). Similarly, Stevenson (2007) argues that the current dominant mindset privileges top down, competition based individualistic approaches to life. He describes an emerging mindset that favours collaboration, networking and recognises complexity and plurality.

The concept of resilience is increasingly used as a way of understanding the ability of individuals and communities to respond to challenging situations (McDaniels 2008). However, it is a term with many definitions which 'can look wildly different in different contexts and according to different developmental stages of community life' (Wilding 2011:4). Goodwin describes resilience as 'the characteristic needed in individuals, communities, nations and the world, to prepare for disasters, to reduce the suffering and loss they bring and to rebound in positive ways' (2008:2). Building resilience into a community is seen to be a way of improving its living conditions as well as its ability to withstand major stresses (Dodman, Ayers & Huq 2009). Jackson suggests that a resilient economy is one that can resist external shocks, maintain people's livelihoods and live within the planet's ecological means (2009: 157). McLennan (2012) describes resilient societies as having a centralised cultural fabric and a decentralised physical infrastructure. In contrast, vulnerable societies tend to have a decentralised cultural fabric supported by a centralised infrastructure. A recent study of community resilience found the importance of connectivity within a community; 'resilience is a function of a community's capacity to foster diverse connections to other places, both near and far' (Wilding 2011:58). Hopkins describes resilience, especially to the impacts of peak oil, climate change and economic crises, as a key concept of Transition. He argues that resilience in this case is not merely about withstanding shock and returning to the status quo, but more about transformational resilience so that change 'offers huge potential to rethink assumptions and build new

systems' (2010: 448). The self organising capacity of a community is also seen as an important feature of a resilient community. Many communities across the world are creating initiatives that promote and develop resilience. Such responses fall under a range of nomenclature and intentions that include bioregionalism, relocalisation and the Transition model.

Localisation as a way of building resilience

Many proponents of localisation argue that in order to address the 'inequity, unsustainability and unreliability of the global economy' that structural change at both the global and local level is necessary (Douthwaite 2004:119). Curtis (2003) critiques globalisation as causing 'resource depletion, pollution and ecosystem destruction' and argues that localisation creates a viable path to sustainability. He coined the term eco-localism to describe an alternative economic paradigm that comprises 'local, self- reliant, community economies' (2003:83). Ife and Tesoriero suggest that globalisation has become a purely economic phenomenon that has relegated other internationalist agendas such as 'social justice, human rights, environmental protection to a secondary position' and that localisation has emerged as a reaction against globalisation (2006:187). They suggest that much of localisation is actually akin to community development, and 'it is from community based initiatives that viable sustainable alternatives are most likely to be developed' (2006:191). Rees argues that relocalisation as the development of regional self-reliance provides 'immediate economic and ecological savings' (2010:38). Similarly, McLennan suggests that working in a paradigm that values resilience will enable the strengthening of local economies and improving people's way of life (2012:17).

Localisation (also referred to as relocalisation) is a contested term that differs in meaning according to context and perspective (Woodin & Lucas, 2004:69). North differentiates between what he refers to as immanent and intentional relocalisation. He describes immanent localisation as happening as a result of market driven decisions made by 'business people for business reasons; and 'intentional' localisation as a 'normative political project', something which someone 'makes' happen.' (2010:589). He describes the 'new' social movement as intentional localisation which is 'developing radical new conceptions of livelihood and economy' and that this provides opportunities for building 'more ecologically sustainable, more local and more convivial economies' (2010:586). There has been a long history of localisation movements (North 2010), but the current movement tends to perceive

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localisation as an essential aspect of confronting global problems such as peak oil, climate change and financial meltdown (Shuman 2010:283). Localisation does not mean an end to global trade, or an isolationist protectionism in each community; rather it is about production occurring at the most appropriate level and is an argument for economic subsidiarity (Scott Cato in North 2006).

The Transition model

The Transition network, which is currently one of the more prominent relocalisation movements in the world (Bailey, Hopkins & Wilson, 2010) provides a case study in a strongly networked, context specific movement for change that has had rapid uptake since its inception in 2006. Hopkins, co-founder of the Transition network, suggests that as cheap energy becomes a thing of the past, relocalisation offers a 'tremendous opportunity to rethink and reinvent local economies' largely through 'meeting needs that can be met locally, locally' (Hopkins, 2010: 445). He argues that localisation is not 'so much a choice, but an inevitable change in direction for humanity' (2010: 445). The Transition model is situated in the context of the imminent effects of climate change and peak oil and is based on the four assumptions that life with lower energy consumption is inevitable and consequently it is better to plan for it than to be taken by surprise, that many communities presently lack resilience, that action needs to be collective and urgent and living sustainably can be enriching (Hopkins 2008). The Transition Model grew out of a permaculture course led by Rob Hopkins in Kinsale, Ireland in 2005 that designed a community wide plan for a low carbon future given the issues of climate change and peak oil. The plan incorporated the key aspects of a community such as food, housing, energy, transport, waste, economics and health.

Hopkins took these ideas to Totnes, England where it captured the imagination of many residents. The Transition model was developed and implemented in Totnes and the process has been documented and promulgated by Hopkins and others via books, films, online networking and training (Goude 2012; Hopkins 2008, 2011; Chamberlin 2009). Transition has been described as having a 'viral uptake' (Transition Network 2011) and there are now well over 1000 Transition initiatives across the world. Various terms are used to describe what was originally called 'Transition Towns' but the term, Transition network seems to be the preferred term for 'the broad international community of individuals and groups basing their work on the Transition model' (Transition Network 2011). The Transition model refers to

the concepts of Transition elucidated by Hopkins (2008; 2011) and Transition initiatives refer to the settlements such as villages, towns and cities that identify as such. The Transition network has a significant online presence and provides an open source, resource sharing forum. Due to the dynamic nature of environmental and societal change, the Transition network continues to evolve both in the central organising hub as well as in each Transition initiative. Following the ethos of relocalisation each Transition initiative is responsive to its particular local conditions and contexts. Accordingly the 'face of Transition' is unique, to some extent, in each community.

Research

This paper is informed by my current doctoral research on the Transition movement in Australia. I have interviewed 30 actively involved participants of Transition initiatives and representatives of 32 initiatives have completed a qualitative survey. The interviews have been transcribed and interviewees given the opportunity to edit their transcript. Pseudonyms have been used to de-identify the participants, and where initiatives are referred to specifically the data has come from publically available sources. As has been noted, the nature of each Transition Initiative is specific to its local context and therefore it is only through a multiplicity of voices and examples that a fuller picture of Transition can be conveyed. Therefore, the following section includes excerpts from interviews and surveys to portray both the similarities and differences in participants' experiences of Transition. As a member of a local Transition Initiative since 2008 I am aware that my 'invested positionality' (Lather 1991:xvii) determines my research approach and interpretations. Active involvement in Transition provides the benefits of a shared discourse with participants, as well as providing the challenge of ensuring that I consistently check my assumptions. Edwards notes that an insider 'deeply embedded in an organisation speaks of matters which may be hidden from the public gaze' (2002:71). I would suggest that this applies in my situation, as I have attended Transition Training, participated in regional meetings, maintained contact with participants from other Initiatives and been active in my own community and can therefore claim reasonably close familiarity with the Transition Model in Australia.

Complexity theory

Complexity theory has been increasingly utilised in management and organisation fields (Maguire et al. 2011; Kuhn 2009; Mitleton-Kelly 2003) . It provides a resonant lens for analysing Transition as a dynamic, evolving and simultaneously global/local organisation. This paper draws on some of the key principles of complexity as elaborated by Eve Mitleton-

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Kelly (2003) including emergence, self-organisation, connectivity, co-evolution and the space of possibilities. Underlying these principles is the recognition that all aspects of the human experience such as the social, cultural, technical, physical, economic and political are interdependent and multidimensional and consequently they interact and influence each other. Complexity perspectives recognise the inherent uncertain and unpredictable nature of the world (Morin 2008), and that complex behaviour arises from interactions (Kuhn 2009). Through engaging with the world as complex, dynamic and multidimensional, organisations are able to be responsive to and create enabling environments for emergence and the creation of new order (Mitleton-Kelly 2003). For instance, each Transition initiative self organises as it finds ways of working with and integrating into the local context and the concept of emergence provides a way of understanding the non-linear outcomes of Transition in different communities. As we experience the impacts of climate change (Westley et al. 2012), peak oil (Heinberg 2010) and the raft of ecological and economic crises confronting the world, complexity thinking offers a way to understand 'change in interlinked ecological, economic and social systems across scales in both time and place' (Rees 2010:30).

The Transition model would seem to have been devised according to the principles of complexity theory although this was not explicitly the case. However, the correspondence between Transition and complexity theory is not surprising as Transition is derived from permaculture, a design system based on an ecological world view of interdependence and interconnectedness (Dawborn 2011). Transition also draws on systems thinking, resilience theories, eco-psychology and the stages of change model, pattern dynamics, relocalisation and organisational design (Hopkins 2008, 2011). The structure used by Transition is a networked, distributed structure with national and regional hubs which can facilitate resource sharing and communication between initiatives. According to complexity perspectives, systems are scale invariant (Mitleton-Kelly 2003), so that the same principles are reflected at all scales. An organisation that espouses principles of inclusion and collaboration would ideally then reflect these principles at all scales of operation. The key principles that underpin Transition are described as i) positive visioning, ii) helping people access good information and trusting them to make good decisions, iii) inclusion and openness, iv) enabling sharing and networking, v) building resilience, vi) inner and outer Transition and vii) subsidiarity: self organisation and decision-making at the appropriate level (Hopkins 2011:78). Transition is not a prescriptive organisation and other than an initial application process for official status, Transition initiatives are not monitored to check that they are adhering to the Transition principles. Rather there is an expectation that initiatives will factor ongoing reflection and evaluation into their processes and maintain some communication

within the Transition network. It is very much a collaborative, power sharing approach that counters more traditional notions of the need for hierarchical control. This means that the approach of the Transition network is one of creating an enabling environment for relocalisation to be addressed according to the capacity of each initiative and the peculiarities of their specific context.

Space of possibilities

Transition can be seen to have emerged from an exploration of the 'space of possibilities' which refers to the process of considering new and different ways of understanding and working with a situation (Mitleton-Kelly 2003). The Transition model continually evolves in response to a changing environment and feedback from its activities and processes. As people participate in Transition they are also personally exploring the space of possibilities in terms of responding to their concerns about peak oil and climate change. The types of reasons that people engage with Transition include it being an enjoyable and constructive way to be involved in their community, a forum for addressing issues of social justice and equity, because it provides a means for initiating and participating in practical sustainability related projects and 'because it feels like the most appropriate thing to be doing and is a source of hope' (Hopkins 2011:35). Comments from Australian participants about the purpose for their involvement complement these reasons with the greatest emphasis being the positive approach to global challenges, and the opportunity to build community in their local area. Bill explains that from his perspective: 'the purpose at a local level is to get enough people in the local community actually talking to each other and finding common interests and allies and supporters for whatever their particular interests are, around local viability as a place to live, and a place to work'. Rebecca was attracted to Transition due to perceiving it as 'an extremely inclusive flexible and positive model, contextualised to place'. Harry was drawn to the way that Transition equips a community for the future through building self reliance and Susan felt that 'this is how we can make our lives better and make our world sustainable and build our community.' Roger pointed out links between thinking globally and acting locally, as did Mikhail who participates in his local Transition initiative 'as a way of being involved locally in some of the local challenges in response to the global challenges'.

A survey of Transition groups in Australia found similar patterns. The responses relating to the predominant purpose of the respondents' Transition initiatives can be distilled into catalysing change in the local context, raising awareness about peak oil and climate change, building relationships and encouraging and fostering change in their local communities. Specific comments in relation to their purpose included 'to promote the need for our

community to prepare for the combined impacts of peak oil and climate change, and to encourage local resilience and community sustainability'; ' to raise awareness of the need to move towards a more sustainable way of living with less dependence on fossil fuels, and to support, inspire and empower people to find ways to act locally to achieve this'; 'encouraging and fostering moves to a more sustainable and resilient local community' and 'bringing awareness of the three issues (climate change, peak oil and economic uncertainty) to community consciousness to develop seeding programs to be in place for the time when the problems become more pronounced.'

Catalysing change

Due to the multidimensional nature of any community and the scale of the localisation project it is unlikely that a group of predominantly volunteers could be the vehicles for localisation. It would seem that Transition groups hope instead to catalyse opportunities that can build   momentum in relocalising their communities. One approach has been to develop local projects such as community energy schemes which tend to serve as exemplars of the possibilities within a community. Respondents indicated that it is mostly through working with other groups in the community, and the business sector and local government that sustained and large scale change will occur. This is resonant with the complexity principle of the ecology of action (Morin 2008) whereby once a project or process is initiated it moves beyond the control of the initiator and into the field of multidimensional interactions. By increasing the number of stakeholders in a project the range of potential outcomes and influences is also increased. For example, many Transition initiatives tend to engage in projects related to food such as initiating food swaps, local growers markets, community and school gardens and seed saving days. The networking that occurs at such events may lead to new groups or links between people forming who create new Transition related projects or simply new friendships and possibilities may be ignited.

Co-evolution with first and second sectors

Importantly, Transition has maintained an exploratory approach which is what enables the organisation to continue to co-evolve at the scale of the network and within each initiative. As a network it co-evolves both at the level of interrogating and adopting/adapting ideas and theories and also through different partnerships with the three sectors. The process of co-evolution refers to the way that interactions between different entities will inevitably create influence in both directions (Mitleton-Kelly 2003). For example as Transition groups change and evolve there will be influences on the different sectors they engage with in their community. Working with the first sector and particularly local government is a key aspect of

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Transition. The Transition Companion states, 'to deepen your effectiveness, developing a good relationship with your local authority will be vital' (Hopkins, 2011:205). Again this is dependent on the local context. The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) in Australia, the peak body representing local governments in that state, has developed a program called 'Councils and Communities In Transition' (2009) where councillors and council staff are educated about the Transition model. Some of these Councils have been formative in initiating and supporting Transition groups (Whitehorse City Council 2010). Derek is cognisant of the need to maintain some independence within this relationship arguing that Transition needs 'community involvement within the community and owned by the community and not part of the governing structure of council so that we can also be critical of the council, that we can develop ideas independently from council and without the bureaucracy and approval of council'. Arly had a different experience of the council commitment to the MAV endorsed program: 'we thought they [local council] were on board because they appointed a councilor to be on the communities in transition committee but when we pushed them to take the next step, they expressed reservations about it … So on the surface it can look like councils are on board, and some are, but you scratch the surface and you find there's some negativity'. In a study of the relationship between Transition and local Government, Storey (2011) cautions about the potential issues for local Councils and Transition working together given their differing ethos and organising structures. Where these can be addressed the capacity for localisation can be greatly enhanced in a community through a co-evolving dynamic between Transition groups and local government.

Plugging the leaky bucket

Hopkins likens the capacity of communities to relocalise their economies to plugging a leaky bucket. He points out that much of the money that enters a community leaves it almost immediately and Transition initiatives can help to plug the leaks through approaches such as local markets, local currencies, trading schemes, encouraging buying locally and developing social enterprises. Although some initiatives have good working relationships with their local business community, it seems that the second sector is the least engaged by Transition Initiatives. The Transition Network (2011) emphasises the importance of working with local businesses and suggests 'this may not come naturally, and we are likely to need to learn a new language, new concepts, and a new way of connecting'. They recommend that a 'Businesses and Livelihood' working group can be a way of connecting with local business. Other Initiatives have taken different approaches and teamed up with local businesses for events or cross promotional activities such as film nights in cafes, tours of local artists studios and shop locally campaigns. It seems that synergies between Transition and local business are facilitated more easily where participants have personal connections with local

businesses, or businesses are already sustainability oriented. Luke observed that when a member of the local chamber of commerce attended one of their planning meetings they expressed frustration at the 'informal and organic' nature of the meeting. Consequently his group is now planning more strategic ways of engaging with the Chamber. It is essential for innovation that Transition groups continually explore their space of possibilities by considering the needs of their context. The Transition network has launched a project called Reconomy that is designed to 'help build the capacity of Transition Initiatives, and other community organisations doing similar work, to grow a new kind of local economy' (Reconomy project 2011). The project considers three dimensions of the economy: leadership and visioning, transforming existing businesses and starting new enterprises. It provides examples of existing models and resources for initiatives interested in exploring the possibilities in their own communities. Localisation is unlikely in a community without the support of the second sector in co-evolving a local economy.

Connectivity

Complex organisations are typified by networks of relationships with different degrees of connectivity (Mitleton-Kelly 2003). As mentioned previously, connectivity is also a feature of a resilient community and fostering this is a part of the process of relocalisation. Connors argues that 'Transition towns are colonising by their very nature' (2010:243), and although this may play out in some locations, interviewees conveyed great sensitivity around imposing Transition on their communities. Nell remarked: 'rather than trying to say, you've got to be part of us', [we are] actually trying to reach out and coordinate with other groups'. Bernie commented on her experience: 'we network and relationship build with other groups to put on events and share energy and support and contacts'. In another instance a local Transition group formed after first building relationships in the community: 'our first meeting grew out of a lot of existing contacts that we had formed in the area around neighbourhood groups and local business partnerships'. Similarly George commented that 'we worked at getting people interested and built relationships, then Transition came out of that rather than the other way around'. Many participants in Transition are also members of other sustainability related groups although members of the core groups usually spent most of their time on Transition related activities. Almost every interviewee emphasised the importance of relationship building as being a critical feature of their Transition work, and quite a few reititerated 'it's all about relationships'.

Transition initiatives are inherently self organising as they are generated by people within the community who are drawn to the Transition approach. One of the original steps of Transition

is: 'Let it go where it wants to' (Hopkins 2008) referring to the context dependent nature of the model. Several interviewees alluded to this as being an inevitable outcome of their capacity as a group and the context of their local community. This means that rather than feeling that they needed to be fulfilling certain aspects of Transition, they were responding to both gaps and possibilities in their community. Participation in community groups is more likely where people feel that they will make a difference (Ife & Tesoriero: 2006) and this seems to be reflected in greater involvement where initiatives have formed working groups or are running particular projects. Hopkins uses the analogy of a journey to explain the process of a Transition initiative and suggests participants will notice that they 'seem to have created an organisation that has different needs from those it had originally' (2011:15). One way that Transition engages the community is through using visioning processes and projecting forward to the type of future that they want to inhabit. Noel commented on this: 'well I think Transition's real strength is that idea of envisioning a future in the local neighbourhood … what would my neighbourhood be like if we are living a zero carbon lifestyle and that gets you picturing , fruit and veg on every nature strip, people can pick overhanging fruit and talk to neighbours and weekly food swaps at every local park, combined with a neighbourhood pizza oven event which just becomes part of what everybody does and it means all the neighbours know each other so you are there for each other when crises happen and because so much of your life is bound up with the local neighbourhood you don't need the car so much … envisaging that could seriously mean social change if it happened everywhere. I like that approach'.

A commonly expressed concern among interviewees was being able to reach beyond the 'usual suspects' and to ensure that their Initiative was inclusive of their whole community. By working on domains such as food growing, retrofitting homes and local transport interviewees felt that they were striving to make Transition relevant and accessible. However there was widespread acknowledgement that increasing participation needs to be one of their goals. One of the main constraints that groups face, which is common to third sector organisations, is maintaining aspirations commensurate with their capacities as volunteers who often lead already busy lives. The scenario of a few people 'keeping the boat afloat' seem to typify many situations, and although most groups had substantial emails lists of over 300 people the stalwarts were often less than ten. Nell spoke about how a good turnout at public events does not translate into more active participants: 'people were very engaged but nearly everybody is too busy to do anything else'. This can create frustration among involved participants who want to see outcomes. Other interviewees were more sanguine,

Jasmine remarked: 'you can only go forward at the rate you can take the rest of the community with you'.

Transition Town Totnes (UK) received a significant grant which enabled them to employ project officers and to fund activities. In contrast, most, if not all, Australian Transition Initiatives are run entirely by volunteers, and need to fundraise whenever they require money for events, projects or resources. Certainly some groups have been successful in obtaining small government grants but they are generally for one-off projects. Interviewees expressed the need for funds for staff and projects if they were to be able to scale up, but most were focussing on what they could achieve with their current resources and energy levels. Ruth commented on the challenges often faced by activists: 'transition groups can tend to introduce the same paradigm of unsustainability into their sustainability groups and people will burn themselves out ... so we've taken the position of being personally sustainable, and we'll do what we have the passion and energy to do'. Virginia also noted the need for Transition to be wary of 'doing everything'. She elaborated 'I think the role of Transition is to help provide a local structure, where if things really start to fall apart people can gravitate towards it and have an instant community, it's also a way to inform local government and other people ... it's that thing of working from the ground up so we are actually doing things, but I don't think it's wise to try and create all of that. When you think about it, it's like trying to duplicate what local government are doing but on no wages and with no resources at all'.

A cultural shift

Transition is increasingly recognised as an important strand in civil society action on climate change the increasing human induced ecological destruction on the planet (Westley et al. 2011; Barry & Quilley 2009). Westley et al. (2011) suggest that Transition 'represents a deliberate effort to ''decouple'' from the broader economic and institutional system to secure local resilience in the face of possible collapse of the broader system'. However they point out 'while undoubtedly innovative' that this is not sufficient to bring about the type of transformation needed urgently to 'avoid pushing the earth system beyond planetary boundaries'. (2011:768) Interviewees similarly expressed frustration that Transition alone cannot address the situation adequately. Oscar expressed his concern that from his perspective 'a disaster is coming and … to bring everyone along on the Transition model is too slow … the linkages are lacking, the structures are lacking. So what we are doing is great but it is not enough'. The need for significant societal change echoes the call of complexity thinker Edgar Morin (2008) for a shift to a complexity paradigm where interdependence and mutual causality are recognised as inherent aspects of our planetary

culture. Ray believes that this shift is integral to an effective Transition: 'unless we change our culture, which is the way we believe about things and the way we do things, we can't transition; a shift in consciousness is important ... So Transition really has to create enough of a swell of a different subculture initially, that will assist a culture change'.

Conclusion

From a complexity perspective Transition can be seen to be providing a space for people to dwell simultaneously in fear and hope and in overwhelm and action. Through the enabling environment it has developed, Transition provides a means for people who are concerned about the many challenges confronting our planet to explore the space of possibilities at a whole of community level. By developing a dynamic and adaptive framework for people to engage in change contextualized to their community, Transition creates possibilities for influencing the direction of local communities. However, for effective localisation to occur in any community, significant collaboration is required between the three sectors of each community. The capacity of reasonably small groups of volunteers in a community is limited but where Transition initiatives foster co-evolution and connectivity they are better placed to contribute to localisation. Perhaps this is one of the greatest strengths of Transition: that it can catalyse change that might otherwise not occur.

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