Climate, Carbon, Capitalism:
Two Applications of the Transition Model

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ABSTRACT

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The Transition movement advocates for relocalising social and economic interactions as a solution to the increasing threats of climate change, carbon-reliance and capitalism. Building off a framework grounded in resilience theory and degrowth, this paper examines the contributions of the Transition movement to current environmental discourses. Founded in Totnes, England, Transition draws on the strengths, weaknesses and unusual character of the town, which makes the successful replication of the model a source of uncertainty. In this paper, I examine what the Transition model looks like in a very different context: Media, an affluent suburb of Philadelphia. While Transition Town Totnes has accomplish much in a very short time, Transition Town Media’s changes are less evident, indicating that cultural context and local character are instrumental in determining the success of a Transition Town. Drawing on a strand of resilience theory that stresses constant systematic change, I propose that, going forward, Transition’s success depends less on its ability to replicate the successes of Transition Totnes and more on a Town's ability to shape its own pathways and adapt to its unique local environment.
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I. Introduction

“It is one thing to campaign against climate change and quite another to paint a compelling and engaging vision of a post-carbon world in such a way as to enthuse others to embark on a journey towards it.”

--Rob Hopkins¹

Compelling, engaging, enthusiasm–this is not the way we usually talk about climate change. A post-carbon world is not something we want to journey towards, but a possible approaching reality that we are unequipped to deal with. The idea of climate change produces eco-anxiety more than it inspires enthusiasm. All but the most stubborn among us understand that the climate is changing rapidly, helped, if not caused, by human actions.

Suggestions for how to mitigate these changes have come from many sectors. This September, the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Changed suggested a “carbon budget” that would limit the amount of CO2 released into the atmosphere. Despite the tepid successes of past global climate change treaties, the IPCC’s recent 900 page report on the state of climate change reveals the global uncertainty surrounding climate change over the next few decades (Gillis 2013).

Climate change action comes from many sectors, from the much maligned Kyoto treaties of the early 2000s to the actions of 350.org, an American national environmental organization named for 350 parts per million, the benchmark that some scientists have set as the upward limit for carbon dioxide presence in the atmosphere (we currently hover around 400 ppm) (“Our Mission” 2013). 350’s recent project have included Fossil Free!, a campaign to get colleges and universities to purge their investment portfolios of fossil fuel related stocks (“Fossil Free” 2013), and an open letter to President Obama urging him to prohibit the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would transport crude oil from Canada to Texas (“Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline!” 2013).

And though not as quickly or aggressively as activists would like, governments have been responsive to the possible threats of climate change. In 2012, the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) introduced the first Resilience Challenge, a program that invited communities to submit proposals for projects to improve their resilience in the face of natural disasters (“FEMA Community Resilience Innovation Challenge Overview” 2013).

Resilience has long been used to refer to ecosystems within a scientific context, but the term has recently begun to be applied to social systems as well, especially when discussing climate change. Applying resilience theory to a human system is complicated, but resilience can be boiled down to

“the ability of a system, from individual people to whole economies, to hold together and maintain their ability to function in the face of change and shocks from the outside” (Hopkins 2008).

¹ The Transition Handbook, 84
“Changes and shocks” is a broad category. FEMA mentions “disasters” as a primary threat to resilience, but strong community resilience has been identified as ways of combating less abrupt disturbances as well, e.g. natural resource dependency (Smith et al. 2012), negative effects of globalization (Wilson 2012b). Wilson (2012a) suggests that a resilient community will have high levels of social, economic and environmental capital, which allow it to weather changes and shocks of all varieties.

The rise of large scale interventions for improving resilience indicates that larger structures of power are aware of how vulnerable human systems are to these slow changes and quick shocks, but there are also smaller scale approaches to dealing with these problems. In particular, I highlight the Transition movement’s technique of improving a community’s resilience via small behavioural changes that seek to transform the way we live—literally transitioning to a way of life that better reflects the conditions of life in the future. Transition acknowledges the inevitability of climate change and suggests that gradually changing the way we live now is preferable to being forced to rapidly adapt to these problems in the future. Transition is a young movement, but is rapidly gaining prominence among environmental and social movements.

In this thesis, I discuss the Transition movement in light of its contributions to larger environmental and social discourse. In addition, I examine what Transition looks like inside its original context—a small market town in the southwest of England—and outside—in a commuter suburb of Philadelphia—and briefly assess the validity of four critiques of the movement that may limit its success and longevity. Next, I define the movement and further introduce the methodology behind my analysis.

WHAT IS TRANSITION?

First conceived in 2006 during a permaculture workshop in Kinsale, Ireland by Rob Hopkins and Naresh Giangrande, the Transition movement has sprung to the forefront of British grassroots environmental movements. Created as an antidote to climate change, peak oil and economic instability, Transition supplies a set of principles and practices for communities looking to better weather these crises. From Hopkins’ 2008 Transition Handbook:

“The Transition movement is an attempt to design abundant pathways down from the oil peak, to generate new stories about what might be waiting for us at the end of our descent, and to put resilience-building back at the heart of any plans we make for the future” (Hopkins 2008, 15)

In the 2008 Transition Handbook, Hopkins outlines the 12 steps to creating a Transition Town, from ‘Set up a steering group and design its demise from the onset’ to ‘Create an Energy Descent Action Plan’ – Hopkins is adamant that anyone can start a Transition initiative and he tries to make it easy for readers to do just that. The book covers topics from permaculture, to the science of peak oil, to strategies to combat eco-anxiety and stress in a rapidly changing world. Though the movement is very young, its do-it-yourself aspects and positive vision make it as appealing approach to community resilience.

In the 2011 Transition Companion, Hopkins clarifies and expands upon his earlier theories for Transition. In particular, Hopkins refines his 12 steps into ‘ingredients’ that a community can
combine in any order into tailor their strategies to meet their specific needs and skills. Already several years old at that point, the Companion reflects the ways in which the movement has grown, in particular spending time talking about the ways in which Transition can include partnerships with local governments and businesses to increase resilience in many different sectors. In addition, after having witnessed the global recession and economic instabilities of the past few years, Hopkins devotes more attention to increasing the resilience of local economic structures. Whereas Hopkins previously focused more on peak oil and climate change as problems addressed by the Transition movement, the Companion adds economic instability as a serious threat to community resilience.

At the time of writing, there are over 1,100 Transition Towns worldwide, all created within the last seven years, some which have already implemented Transition actions and some which are still in the ‘mulling’ process. These hundreds of initiatives benefit from the Transition Network, an online community and resource centre that provides materials, inspiration and support for Transitioners of various stages and serves as a unifying force in a movement that now spans many continents. Much of Transition exists within the English-speaking or European world, but as the movement gradually spreads to the South, Transition has been translated into other languages as well.

Transition draws its inspiration from a wide variety of sources, but the approach is rooted in the principles of permaculture. Hopkins defines permaculture as “a design system for the creation of sustainable human settlements” that recognizes the multitude of various components within human systems and looks to combine them in the most efficient ways possible (Hopkins 2008, 137). Permaculture looks to sustainable natural systems for inspiration and calls attention to the symbiotic relationships that are often unnoticed in human and natural systems alike.

This whole-systems approach to human systems is reflected in the activities that Transition Towns pursue. Some of them are more expected for current environmental movements (a focus on local food (always a unifying force), energy use reduction, and attention to patterns of consumerism) but Transition also draws attention to inner transitions as well. The Companion notes a disconnect in our (Western) society between the inner and the outer—that is, a lack of being in-tune with our inner selves—but Transition seeks to solve this through the intentional creation of spaces for the contemplation of inner transitions (141). In days of climate uncertainty, eco-anxiety is a driving force behind people’s environmental actions, and a supportive space for voicing these concerns both soothes nerves and creates strong social networks.

Called Inner Transition or Heart and Soul, these groups draw from several different philosophies, including Western psychology and psychotherapy (including positive psychology), eco-philosophy, Eastern philosophy, mindfulness, and sustainable knowledge from indigenous people. It is easy to interpret these initiatives in terms of spirituality, but the Companion advises against this, as religion/spirituality can be a divisive force within any movement, but instead promotes cooperation and acceptance from people from “the whole area of human experience”.

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2 As of 9/29/13, there are over 900 initiatives in North America and Europe alone (“Transition Initiatives Map | Transition Network” 2013)
These Inner Transition groups guide Transitioners’ inner transitions and also serve as a support group for issues like eco-anxiety.

In the same way that Transition eschews overt spirituality, it also disregards politics. Transition is not associated with a particular political party or agenda. Its ideals are well suited to liberal audiences, but its main interest in pursuing resilience outside of public policy also makes it attractive to libertarian audiences. Though as the movement has grown, Transition has become more accepting of policy change and cooperation with local governments. Whereas the Handbook expressed a distrust with political structures, the Companion devotes a section to effectively partnering with local politicians and gives ideas for Acts that may lend Transition increased legitimacy and buy-in from other organizations (Hopkins 2011)3. Still, Transition is not in search of political power or political office, but looks to politics when necessary to further its goals. In setting aside a political stance of its own, Transition renders itself more appealing to government and political actors and can promote its agenda under the guise of representing the community (Aiken 2012, 92).4

The rhetoric of community is very important in Transition. Aiken (2012) argues that using the language of community allows Transition to occupy a “meso-level scale…between the micro (or, individual) level and macro (governments and corporations)” (90). By occupying this middle ground, Transition can collectively resist “ecologically destructive socio-cultural norms” imposed by dominant structures of power (91). The rhetoric of community sets Transition away from the individualism that has caused so much environmental degradation and inequality and orients it on a path that focuses on the health and wealth of others and draws upon ‘community’s warm, positive connotations. Applying a place-based word such as community also taps into existing local identities and focuses energy on goals that affect a certain location or population.

Transition’s goals and actions, too, are shaped by the community in which it is located. Totnes originated the terms ‘visioning’ and ‘backcasting’ to lay out its path towards resilience. Using group facilitations strategies such as the Law of Two Feet, which challenges Transitioners to find an area of Transition that appeals to them and, if they feel like they’re not being useful or inspired, to use their two feet to move elsewhere and participate in a different way, Totnes’ encourages participants to contribute what they can. In visioning, Transition Towns lay out what they would like their Towns to look like in the future. In backcasting, Towns move backwards, figuring out the steps they will need to take in order to get there. In recent years, following Totnes’ creation of is Energy Descent Action Plan, which guides Totnes’ resilience actions through 2030, formalizing this backcasting into a published plan has become increasingly popular. Creating real plans for change allows Transition to capitalize on the strengths of collective action and hold themselves accountable to their professed goals.

3Even so, the Companion asks: “What would it look like if the best responses to peak oil and climate change came not from committees and Acts of Parliament, but from you and me and the people around us?” (13).

4 Some, like the Trapese Collective (2008), cite Transitions apolitical stance as a limiting fact for Transition and proof of a wider problem with Transition—its refusal to ask the difficult questions of itself: What do we really stand for? Aiken (2012) suggests that Transition is instead removing itself from politics as a broken system entirely and creating new ways of looking at the world (96).
Drawing on a rich background of permaculture, various aspects of inner transition and community rhetoric, Transition portrays a complete version of what a resilient community might look like.

**METHODOLOGY**

Above, I have synthesized existing literature relevant to my discussion on the Transition movement. Next, I identify four critiques of the Transition movement given by prominent scholars of Transition and discuss them using two case studies, Transition Town Media (PA, US), a suburb of Philadelphia, and Transition Town Totnes (Devon, UK), a small market town. In comparing these two Towns from very settings, I examine the resilience initiatives within each Town, investigate Transition’s contribution to the discourse on community resilience and environmental activism, and raise the importance of cultural context in the success of the Transition movement. Finally, I reframe the criteria for evaluating the Transition model to better reflect the increasing transcultural diffusion of the movement and posit avenues for future study.

**Structure for Analysis**

As the first Transition Town, Totnes is the obvious choice for a case study and an analysis of Totnes provides information about the replicability and trajectory of the movement. I have selected Media, PA as the second case study due to its status as the first Transition Town in Pennsylvania. While still supported by the online community of Transition Network, being the first Town in PA nonetheless poses some of the same challenges to Media that Totnes faced. As far as American Transition Towns are concerned, Media is old and should be at a stage in development where its initiatives and structure can be compared to Totnes.

In evaluating the Transition Town model and its applications, it is important to move beyond a normative approach. Although ‘Do Transition Towns increase community resilience?’ is perhaps the bottom line for evaluating the model, even the evaluation of changes in resilience is difficult. Wilson’s (2012) use of economic, social and environmental capital as a way to assess is helpful, allowing us to see the interplay between the three capitals and serving as a reminder that all capitals are important in improving community resilience. However, Wilson’s qualitative and quantitative analysis of the levels of the “three pillars of resilience” is a complex process and outside the scope of this paper.

The Transition Town model does seek to improve resilience on all three fronts: strengthening and expanding social ties amongst community members (social capital), embedding the economy in local, sustainable business practices (economic capital), and preparing for a post-Peak Oil way of life that involves greater respect and care for the environment (environmental capital). Were the Transition Town model to be implemented exactly as written, community resilience would increase on all three fronts. This is a lofty goal, as increases in one sort of capital may lead to decreases in others (e.g. divesting from fossil fuels may improve environmental capital, but lower a community’s economic capital) and it is thus difficult to improve resilience on all three fronts.

Here, we are reminded the importance of context in evaluating community resilience. Location, size, local economies and infrastructure, social networks, presence of pollutions, all of these factors influence a community’s resilience and its ability to improve this resilience. A successful
strategy for raising social capital in one town may unhelpful in a different town. Evaluating community resilience is a highly subjective and difficult task, as there are many measures to do so (see the Smith et al. (2012) technique of counting membership in local organizations as an indicator of the presence of social capital or Wilson’s (2012) discussion on how to quantitatively measure resilience) but each only tells a part of the picture of resilience. Improvement of community resilience is important, but as the movement is so young and entirely community-driven, should not be the only criteria used to assess the success of the movement. For instance, Transition has been criticized for its lack of inclusivity and homogenous membership and should be held accountable for maintaining the status quo in this way—serving the needs of a few is not a good way to build a new society.

In this thesis, I evaluate the changes in resilience wrought by Transition against a backdrop of common critiques of the movement. To evaluate community resilience, I focus on one aspect of Transition’s vision of resilience: behavioural change. Voluntary behavioural change is a hallmark of a bottom-up approach to solving social problems and will demonstrate the progress that Transition has made. It is through lifestyle changes that Transition seeks to engage the problems of climate change, peak oil and economic instability, and thus I believe, that conscious changes in the way people live (that is, changes in line with the Transition Town’s vision) are an indication of improved resilience.

In conducting my research, I have relied on publications and information that the Towns themselves produced as well as secondary sources of analysis. Though some Towns publish infrequent update or reports, there is overall a clear lack of data and publications from Transition Towns, which makes the movement difficult to study without undertaking a thorough ethnography. In Media, I was fortunate enough to speak to several Town coordinators and attend some meetings. In addition, Transition Media has published all of their meeting minutes and flyers on their website.

While British researchers have been studying Transition since its inception (among them Bailey, Seyfang, North and Wilson), less academic research has been done on Transition Towns in the US. This lack of documentation has made me more reliant on first person narratives, primary source documents from Media, as well as my own observations.

The Transition Network has a strict researcher protocol put in place and states:

“Research is often undertaken as an extractive process with minimal benefit given back to the subject(s) being researched. This approach is not viable in the context of transition. All researchers needs to have identified and agreed a clear benefit for, at minimum, the Initiative(s) involved and preferably the wider network of transitioners.” (“Researcher Protocol” emphasis added)

As a result, I have had little interpersonal contact with coordinators from Transition Totnes who refused requests for even very short interviews, instead directing me to the Transition Research Network, an affiliated beta-version site for other publications about Transition. Though this is understandable given the sheer number of research requests that Transition Totnes claims to
receive, I was puzzled by this response, given that Transition Totnes has spawned its own tourism movement and prides itself on training and educating people about Transition.

As Transition has grown, an important question has risen regarding this: does Transition Totnes have a responsibility to educate and inform people even at the expense of pursuing their own projects? How much energy should be put into educational programs vs. continuing to incubate new projects, both strategies that help the movement grow, albeit in different ways? Clearly it is possible to do both, but Totnes’ refusal of interviews and the creation of the separate Transition Research Network (which is at this point, a list of resources and scholarly publications about Transition) indicate that Totnes sees education as a secondary role.

Luckily, Transition Totnes publishes reports on its progress far more often than Transition Media, which made up for my lack of interviews. Furthermore, a broader knowledge of the structure and successes of Totnes proved a sufficient base for a closer reading of Transition Media its application of the Transition model. The focus of this paper is not Transition Totnes, but rather what Transition looks like outside its original context.

Transition is an evolving approach to dealing with the climate change, peak oil and economic instability, reflected by the differences between the Transition Handbook (2008) and the Transition Companion (2011). In using these two sources, I have tried to be mindful of the fact that the Companion most accurately reflects Transition’s current outlook, but have not always been able to tell which parts of the Handbook have been done away with. The evolution of the Transition literature hopefully speaks to the flexibility of the model as well. Hopkins blogs regularly at Transition Culture and readily engages with outside critiques of his work, some of which have influenced the evolution of the Transition movement. Hopkins wrote his own PhD on Transition and has also co-authored other academic work; I cite both in this paper and make attempts to specify when I do so as Hopkins himself admits that he is inclined to discuss the movement in a positive light.

Above I have introduced the Transition movement in light of a preliminary discussion on resilience theory and presented the methodology for subsequent analysis. In the next chapter, I delve deeper into resilience theory, explore how resilience is approached by different actors, and explore frequent critiques of the Transition movement. I then turn to my two case studies and examine their locations, populations, members and initiatives, and use these findings in assessing the changes in resilience within each Town. Finally, I return to my four critiques of Transition, elaborate on Transition’s contributions to current environmental discourse and reframe my analytic criteria in order to suggest avenues for future research.

Though the Transition movement is flawed in many ways, I assert that it adds a positive, comprehensive and forward-thinking model for environmental action that takes into account constantly changing conditions when addressing community resilience. As can be expected, Transition works differently in different contexts, which suggests a need for understanding of local conditions and subsequent adaptations are necessary for Transition to be a widely successful

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5 Indeed, pushing Totnes towards resilience and piloting new projects is an essential role of Transition Totnes. Other Towns look to Totnes for inspiration and if Transition Totnes cannot continue to innovate and progress, this is not a good example for other Towns to see.
strategy for increasing community resilience. Nonetheless, the recent trajectory of the movement, its wide spread and continued adaptations show that the movement has great potential for social, economic and environmental change.
II. Questioning Resilience
The subtitle of the Transition Companion reads “Making your community more resilient in uncertain times,” from the very beginning impressing upon readers how central resilience is to Transition’s mission. A thorough understanding of resilience theory is necessary to fully engage fully with the explicit and implicit messages of the Transition movement, as well as an understanding of how Transition uses the term.

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?
Recent natural disasters and instabilities have impressed upon us the need to build stronger, more resilient systems to withstand shocks, whether they are economic or weather-related crises. Though long used to talk about non-human ecosystems, the term resilience is increasingly being applied to human-created systems as well. In scientific literature, resilience is the ability of a system to bounce back after an external shock.

As in the natural world, there are many threats to human ecosystems. In the wake of recent climate-change related disasters, ‘climate-proofing’ and urban social-ecological resilience have become keywords in urban policies, though urban social-ecological resilience can be defined in many ways. Some schools of thought emphasize the importance of governance and policy on resilience; others stress the significance of economic resilience, or risk-reduction strategies for managing urban infrastructure. Though focusing on different aspects of urban resilience, these different schools of thought all emphasize the importance and inevitability of preparing systems for a broad range of shocks—in preparing for climate-change related events, the changes will also have implications for the resilience of other economic, social or political structures (Leichenko 2011, 162). Leichenko also points out that resilient cities—that is, cities with high levels of “diversity, flexibility, adaptive governance, and capacity for learning and innovation”—are also those that stand out for their innovation, sustainability and overall stability (Leichenko 2011, 163). In social-ecological resilience theory, a resilient city is one that can absorb and manage shocks without losing its “identity, structure and key processes” (Leichenko 2011, 162).

A common critique of social-ecological resilience is that human institutional and social processes are not as easily understood as strictly ecological systems, which makes the practice of applying ecological concepts to social systems questionable. In light of this criticism, social resilience theory emphasizes the importance of social learning when discussing resilience. As presented by Geoff A. Wilson, a leading scholar on resilience theory, social resilience theory also places importance on the adaptations that a human system undertakes after a shock to reorganize and improve itself (2012a, 17). This strain of resilience theory focuses on the complexities of the interactions between “politics, power and socio-economic, psychological and moral parameters than social-ecological resilience” (Ibid). Too, the literature stresses that systems are constantly undergoing change and thus a shock to the system only adds to the system’s adaptations—it is impossible for a system to remain static or to return itself to its state pre-shock. This places importance on the idea of innovation and progress, as human systems work to adapt themselves to changing conditions, not just to a shock.
Adaptation to changing conditions is often referred to as *active resilience* in comparison to *passive resilience*, which only looks to bring the system back to its previous equilibrium (Sterner 2011, 153). The importance of adaptive capacity and recognition of the multiplicity of actors within a system makes social resilience a useful framework for analysing resilience in human systems. In social resilience, vulnerability is seen as the antithesis to resilience, which can be thought of as a linear progression with the terms on opposite sides of the spectrum. Of course, this raises normative evaluations, ‘good resilience’ and ‘bad vulnerability’ (Wilson 2012a, 20). This dichotomy is easily understood—surely a strong, resilient system is preferable to a vulnerable, weak one—but requires a method for evaluating resilience in a system.

Wilson (2012a) synthesizes the literature around the notion of ‘capital’ to define resilience as the interplay between three types of capital: economic, social, and environmental. In addition to the well-discussed idea of social and economic capital, Wilson draws particular attention to the recent idea of environmental capital, which looks at the “attributes of human-environment interaction linked the availability and sustainable use of natural resources for human consumption (e.g. soil or water quality, availability of forest resources for a community, etc.)” (Wilson 2012a, 23).

These three capitals form Wilson’s “three pillars of resilience” and inform the triple bottom line of sustainability, which must recognize the intersectionality of these three conditions to create a resilient and sustainable society (Wilson 2012a, 24). Wilson suggests conceptualizing these capitals as a hub with three spokes leaving the centre; the length of the spoke shows the degree of the development of each capital (Wilson 2012a, 49). Smith et al. (2012) point out that resilience is a measure of *stability* of a system, not its prosperity, and thus a balance of the three capitals is necessary to create a truly resilient community. A system can be economically prosperous while still being vulnerable due to its lack of social or environmental capital.

Here it is important not to prioritize or romanticize the development or presence of one type of capital over the others (Bailey, Hopkins, and Wilson 2010). From a Western or developed world standpoint, it is tempting to idealize societies (generally less developed ones) with highly developed social and environmental capital—that is, sustenance agriculture, and high degrees of community interaction and strong social bonding ties—that are reminiscent of simpler, agrarian times. However, this is to ignore the less developed and competitive economies of these areas, who may be at the mercy of larger economic forces that will eventually weaken the environmental and social capital of the community as well (see Wilson’s (2012b) example of Japan as an eco-predator, maintaining its environmental capital by leveraging its economic capital to purchase goods produced elsewhere).

This is why improving resilience is often identified as a bottom-up approach, as the needs and wants of a community must inform the policies and actions created; communities differ greatly in the development of their capitals, their locations, their size, their populations etc. In improving resilience, it must also be considered that by improving resilience in one capital may have consequences for the others (e.g. by placing more importance on the preservation of the local environment, it may be more costly to acquire certain resources and thus negatively impact environmental capital). Wilson (2012a) also wonders whether improving resilience is a zero-sum game in that if one community succeeds in improving resilience in one area, it will have negative
ramifications for a community somewhere else. This raises issues about structures of power and has implications for the ways in which negative externalities of improved resilience affect disadvantaged populations worldwide.

Given that Wilson’s depiction of social resilience pays particular attention to the human and community adaptations to change, this paper applies Wilson’s account of social resilience as a method for understanding community resilience as well.

**WHAT THREATENS COMMUNITY RESILIENCE?**

In social resilience literature, the ‘external shocks or events’ that can threaten a system remain quite vague, but, in practice, these factors can look like anything from an extreme weather event to the gradual shift towards an unsustainable way of life. Threats to resilience do not need to be major events, but can instead be gradual processes that damage the ability of a system to cope with change. Ernstson et al. propose the concept of “slow variables,” or unnoted processes of change, that can push a system to a breaking point and cause “a rapid reorganization into a new stable regime with qualitatively different system dynamics” (2010, 532). In this example, though the system stabilizes and reorganizes itself, as resilience is gradually lost, it takes fewer and fewer disturbances to push the system over subsequent thresholds.

Smith et al. (2012) use the example of natural resource dependency as a slow variable to show how communities in Appalachia that base their economies on the production of a single natural resource make themselves vulnerable, should anything happen to that natural resource. However, Smith et al. also stress that while “natural resource dependence has a significant and negative effect on socio-economic stability,” there are multiple resilience pathways that a community can undertake in a situation of resource dependence (351-352); that is, human systems have the autonomy to react to changing environmental and economic conditions and an increase in vulnerability can be counteracted, in this case in the creation of stronger social networks.

Transition also references economic instability. For example, see Chapter 2 of the Transition Companion:

> “The crisis most in the public eye since 2008 hasn’t been peak oil or climate change. It has been the economic crisis: the mountain of debt we have accumulated…This intense period of economic unravelling has been fascinating, terrifying and enlightening. The issue of money as debt means that economic growth has been necessary just to stand still…I have yet to see a convincing argument as to how economic growth will be possible in a world of volatile oil prices” (33, emphasis added).

Lurking under the surface here is the idea of “degrowth” or moving to a system that does not value economic growth above all else. Though not explicitly discussed in Transition’s literature (probably because it comes with a political ideology that Transition is unwilling to associate itself

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6 This trade-off of resilience may occur between communities of the same size (town to town) but also between scales of communities (family to town, for example).
with?), the concept of degrowth underlies many of Transition’s assumptions about the current economic systems. Degrowth advocates for lowering the economy’s throughput, or “the materials and energy a society extracts, processes, transports and distributes to consume and return back to the environment as waste,” which can be conceptualized as the food that drives the economy’s metabolism (Kallis 2011, 874).

In calling for degrowth, advocates are not just hoping for a steady-state economy, where production and consumption proceed at more reasonable levels, but for a divorce from the growth paradigm, which drives modern economic interactions. It is also important to note that a decline in GDP is not a priority of degrowth; a fall in GDP is inevitable, but recent radical degrowth economists are more concerned with restructuring and reimagining the economy than they are with working within the existing framework (Ibid). Though specific proposals for radical degrowth vary, many “emphasise redistribution (of work and leisure, natural resources and wealth), social security and gradual decentralization and relocalisation of the economy, as a way to reduce throughput and manage a stable adaptation to a smaller economy” (Kallis 2011, 876). Proponents of degrowth suggest reforms such as alternative currencies, relocalisation of economies and communities (both important concepts in the Transition Town model), a shorter workweek, taxes on environmental damage, and a universal basic income. These ideas seem innovative at first, but proposals for universal basic incomes have been suggested from the late 18th century “and then pretty well every couple of decades right through the twentieth century” (Quilley 2012).

Transition is only the most recent of a long list of past social and environmental movements that have proposed similar solutions to contemporary social problems. In the back-to-the-land movement of the 1970s, the communes sought emancipation from the oppressive, “technocratic” and work- and consumption-centred lives that their suburban parents led (Edginton 2008, 283). Similarly, in his plans for Broadacre City, Frank Lloyd Wright proposes a return to a relocalised rural life, where “the basis of the whole [plan] is general decentralization as an applied principle and reintegration of all units into one fabric…[and] the ghastly heritage left by over-crowding in overdone ultra-capitalistic centers would be likely to disappear in three to four generations” (Wright 2009, 335).

At the crux of these movements lies the assumption that current economic systems have crumbled and need to be redesigned. Quilley (2012) asserts that while we talk about these problems in different ways (within the modern context of neoliberalism, for example), these problems are centuries old. Here, Quilley invokes Polanyi in The Great Transformation and states that only by disembedding economic from “the wider cultural, religious, social and political institutions of society” does our economy pursue maximum economic growth (Ibid). To counter this dangerous disembedded economy, economic interactions must be relocalised and households must become more than “units of consumption” (Ibid).

7 Neither “capitalism” nor “degrowth” show up in the index of the Transition Companion, despite the fact that many of the actions that Transition take are designed around removing interactions from dominant economic structures and completely reimagining the economy.
And unlike degrowth, localisation is a term that Transition feels comfortable using. Indeed, in the Transition Companion, “Resilience and localisation” is the chapter that lays the theoretical framework for the Transition movement. Hopkins does not see localisation as a choice, but “an inevitible change as we pass the oil peak, as we decide to treat the climate issue with the urgency and practical response it requires” (Hopkins 2011:47). Localisation places increased value of the wellbeing of the local economy and community and represents one of Transition’s main strategies for improving community resilience.

In speaking the language of degrowth, relocalisation and resilience, Transition pits itself against current economic and societal norms. Though the movement bills itself as looking “more like a party than a protest march” (Hopkins), when looked at through the theoretical framework of degrowth and relocalisation, it becomes clear that Transition is in fact a direct rejection of dominant economic practices. Transition is subversion at its most demure and, implicitly makes a clear statement about its political agenda.

As discussed previously, Transition cites climate change and peak oil as factors that necessitate immediate Transition and, when added to “economic instability” (read capitalism) creates a comprehensive picture of the kind of society that Transition is moving away from: a society based on environmental degradation, irresponsible consumerism, and an impersonal, destructive economic system. North and Longhurst (2013) refer to these problems as the “triple crisis” of “climate, carbon and capitalism” (1425). These Three Cs are part of a broken system, but, unusually, Transition sees this as an opportunity for a living a “more connected and enriching…more sustainable and inclusive world” (Ibid)

**WHAT DOES RESILIENCE LOOK LIKE?**

Above, I have discussed what resilience means and how Transition fits into that framework, what does resilience look like?

Hopkins suggests three criteria that can be used to evaluate a community’s resilience (2011, 45):

1. The community’s ability to shape its own pathways and decisions

2. The capacity of a community to adapt and learn (especially new skills and education).

3. The intentionally of the community’s approach and plan

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8 Hopkins draws an important distinction between localisation and localism. To Transition, localisation will allow communities to develop diverse economies that will allow them to produce products and services locally and sustainably and balancing that against necessary imports (an often used example is that it is impractical for a community to grow its own spices or grow its own coffee beans) – localisation is not about depriving a community of the benefits of globalisation, but instead being more pragmatic about the way it approaches consumption. On the contrary, to Transition, localism represents a romanticised and isolationist reversion to complete self-sufficiency and rejection of important modern technologies. Transition claims that their views have been interpreted as localist while they are actually in favour of localisation (Hopkins 2010, 46-49)

9 These criteria are taken from the Transition Companion (2011), not the Transition Handbook (2008). The intentionality mentioned is less of a focus in the Handbook, where one of Hopkins’ suggestions was to let the process “go where it wants to go.” In the Handbook, Hopkins provided ‘steps’ for Transition, but the Companion
As for what this will look like in practice, Hopkins is less clear. Transition provides an approach to find a “healthier and happier community while reducing its vulnerability to risk and uncertainty” (45). Given its emphatic bottom-up approach, no two Transitions are alike and Hopkins frames his list of steps as ‘ingredients’ that enable a creative and holistic approach to resilience.

Hopkins’ notion of community resilience is also unique in that in the Transition model, the ‘inner’ transition is as essential as the outer transition. Drawing on psychology, the Eastern-influenced “transformation of consciousness” and appreciation of the earth stemming from indigenous beliefs, the Transition movement’s focus on total-system transformation informs behavioural and societal change at a deeper level (Hopkins 2011, 141). The positive and total-system approach to environmentalism found in Transition is comprehensive in the way that many similar social movements are not. Focusing on economic, social, and emotional transitions, Transition is a transformative model of social change that questions the systems our society is built upon and manages to frame it as an inspiring but challenging journey towards a better society.

**HOW IS RESILIENCE APPROACHED?**

In response to the presence of these threats to resilience, cities around the world have put an increased focus on climate-proofing. In 2012, the Federal Emergency Management Agency launched a program called the Resilience Challenge designed to “assist local areas in building and revitalizing community-based partnerships to advance the nation’s resilience to disasters” (“FEMA Community Resilience Innovation Challenge Overview” 2013). Funding of up to $35,000 was awarded to 30 local governments, businesses and community groups that proposed actions to strengthen their communities in the case of a natural disaster. Projects ranged from an awareness and education campaign about nuclear detonation in DC to a project by the Wisconsin Association for the Deaf to create disaster-proof communication tools appropriate to deaf residents (“Program Awardees” 2013).

In September 2013, the Rockefeller Foundation accepted proposals from cities across the US and will award 100 cities “technical support and resources for developing and implementing plans for urban resilience over the next three years” (“About the Challenge’ 2013). As the foundation points out, 50% of the world’s population lives in cities in 2013 (and an estimated 75% by 2050, thus making the resilience of urban centres increasingly important (“100 Resilient Cities Challenge” 2013).

A difference between these two projects is FEMA’s use of the word ‘community.’ Though funded by the national government, the project awards funds to individual groups to improve community resilience at the community level, a bottom-up approach despite the source of the funding. In comparison, the Rockefeller challenge includes the creation of a Chief Resilience Officer of each city who will create a resilience plan and policy strategy, a top-down approach.

has since reframed them as ‘ingredients.’ Even the different book titles represent this change in Transition’s language choice – the first book will tell you what to do, the second will only guide you towards resilience.

10 The FEMA challenge imposes criteria on its applicants, so there are constraints on the projects selected, giving it an interesting hybrid quality between a top-down and bottom-up approach. I maintain that it is more reminiscent
Wilson (2012) builds on Martens and Rotman’s idea of policy corridors (conceptual spaces where decision-making fits into established estimates of social, ecological and economic risks) to show that policy corridors are often conservative, in that they push policy towards safe and established ways of thinking (301). Through policy learning, policies can be adapted to fit the needs of local communities, but this is an expensive and time-consuming process, often beyond the scope of policy makers.

Instead, I assert that grassroots action is more effective in improving community resilience, as it arises from the specific needs of individual communities and can easily be adapted to suit changing conditions. That is not to say that public policy cannot increase community resilience. Among others, Hopkins (2008) and Wilson (2013) cite the UK’s WWII policies where agriculture was forcibly relocalised and resources were provided to educated citizens about farming and conserving resources, though Wilson wonders if this policy approach is only possible in times of ‘extreme disturbance’ (302).

As discussed above, the rise in resilience programs across the world indicates a consensus that climate change and economic instability will continue to disrupt our current patterns of life and necessitate action. Within policy-oriented circles, policies and plans tend focus on disaster preparedness plans (even FEMA’s Resilience Challenge) and view the changing world as a crisis that much be managed.

In urban areas, resilience policies and plans are an important part of addressing climate change. Cities tend to be in areas vulnerable to climate change related natural disasters and climate-proofing the infrastructure of a city may be the difference between its survival or destruction (Ernstson et al. 2010). Many, including Ernstson et al. view cities as the drivers in innovation worldwide and, given that they are home to over half the world’s population, the preservation of urban areas through public policy protects these centres of culture and innovation (Ibid).

Whether or not cities are suitable sites for Transition initiatives is a source of much debate. Most Transition Towns are in rural areas, but North and Longhurst (2013) posit that urban centres are an underlooked potential spot for Transition projects, as they provide a diversity of networks, resources and people that are unavailable elsewhere. Though Transition presents a spatial imaginary linked to a rural bucolic lifestyle, that traditional rural resilience has faded in many places and therefore, Transitioning a rural area may be no easier than an urban one (Ibid). There are many successful urban Transition Towns (namely, Liverpool and Nottingham), though North and Longhurst admit that the ideology of Transition is well suited to a rural environment and Transition in cities requires different negotiations with local authorities and existing communities.

So, grassroots bottom-up resilience programs can be implemented in urban settings as well. In examining bottom-up vs. top-down programs, I suggest that the difference here is that Transition proposes a transformative model of resilience, rebuilding society from the bottom up, while in many cases top-down approaches focus on managing climate change. That is, of a bottom-up approach as it will be implemented on a smaller scale, though its focus on disaster preparedness indicates a similarity with top-down approaches.
Transition’s use of prefigurative politics allows it to simultaneously rebuild society for the future as well as for the present. Preparedness for external shocks is a consideration of the Transition movement, but seen more a by-product of a transformative, comprehensive process of reimagining the way we live.

**RESILIENCE AND TRANSITION**

The creation of 1,100 Transition initiatives worldwide in under a decade indicates that Transition is relevant to the lives of tens of thousands of people and an important part of the discourse surrounding bottom-up environmental movements. Popularity is a measure of success in and of itself, but the movement has been critiqued, both from groups who think that it has gone too far in its pursuit of resilience and those that think it has not gone far enough. Below, I outline four critiques of the movement in order to assess their validity in the context of Transition Totnes and Transition Media.

A. Inclusion and equity

As discussed in the Introduction, the Transition movement draws its inspiration from a wide variety of sources and is thus designed to be an inclusive movement, not one for just the bastion of hardcore environmentalists. By having a comprehensive view for Transition, a Town may appeal to many different interests and allow for people to participate as much as they see fit (Bailey, Hopkins, and Wilson 2010, 603). The movement also bills itself as apolitical and not involved with outside political structures.

While this may increase involvement from all political parties, several researchers, including the Trapes Collective (2008) and North and Longhurst (2013) point out that Transition does not exist in a vacuum and refusing to engage with outside political structures is foolish. The disinterest in politics indicates a belief that The Three Cs can be solved through bottom-up approaches alone, a bold assumption. Wilson (2013) points out that involving outside political structures may be wise as “a much wider range of actors is now involved in interpreting and producing resilient pathways at community level in both the developed and developing world” (307).

But while the Transition movement eschews politics and radicalism in the name of inclusivity, it has also been criticized for its primarily white, liberal, middle-class, educated membership (Bailey, Hopkins, and Wilson 2010, 601). This is a common criticism of environmental movements, which, unless they specifically engage with other demographics, represent the interests of a privileged few. In order for the movement to be transformative (that is, to fulfil its goal) it needs to reach new populations and engage with issues of race and class that currently limit its membership. Current strategies for inclusion (e.g. a non-political stance) may open some doors, but not the ones that bring extensive diversity.

Here, I emphasize that not all Transition Towns represent the values of the white middle class. Some Transition initiatives have succeeded in diversifying and including from the very beginning. Jamaica Plain, a street-car suburb of Boston and “one of Boston’s most diverse and dynamic neighbourhoods” (“Jamaica Plain” 2013), houses JP NET (Jamaica Plain New Economy Transition) a Transition Town that also focuses on “new economy” principles that assume the
need for a different model of growth. JP NET seeks to bridge sectors of the sustainability movement and emphasizes social-justice principles in addition to its Transition mission (“About JP NET” 2013). With bilingual workings groups and a focus on climate activism, JP NET is an example of an innovative Transition Town that has issues of equity and inclusion built into its structure and core values.

Jamaica Plain is a centre of racial, ethnic and economic diversity in a way that neither Media nor Totnes are, perhaps meaning that considerations of equity and inclusion are essential to a successful Transition Town in Jamaica Plain. JP NET’s “new economy” and social-justice oriented mission are an interesting new turn of the Transition movement and, pending the progress that JP NET makes, indicate the potential of Transition to address pressing social concerns as well. Transition is often viewed (and, judging by Media and Totnes, perhaps rightly so) as a movement that can appeal only to groups of privilege who have the resources to be “post-materialist” (Bailey, Hopkins, and Wilson 2010, 601), but Towns such as Jamaica Plain show that is not always the case.

As Aiken (2012) points out, Transition’s use of the word ‘community’ appeals to people who are already involved in community services initiatives. By virtue of their leisure time, this ‘civic core’ tends to be middle aged or retired, well educated and live in wealthy areas (97). Additionally, using the word ‘community’ tends to attract people who already feel included, not those who are disadvantaged or oppressed, which only furthers these patterns of exclusion. In order to address these factors, Transition must undertake serious and explicit efforts to increase the diversity of its membership. Transition may emphasize inclusivity by not taking a political stance, but increased attention to structural inequalities in existing systems is required to make this inclusivity a reality.

B. Pitfalls of relocalisation

Early on in the Companion, Hopkins addresses the subject of relocalisation after receiving serious criticism over his stance on it in the Handbook. He sees relocalisation not as a desire for insular communities and romanticizing the past, but an inevitable consequence of The Three Cs that promotes recentering livelihoods and the economy to a smaller scale. As Quilley (2013) points out, a balance needs to be struck between relocalisation and isolation. If, as Quilley asserts, relocalisation is the polar opposite of cosmopolitanism, we have a lot to lose by relocalisng, and relocalisation may validate a return to past socially unjust practices. Globalization is a centuries old process; there is no model for the process going in the opposite direction, so it is important to consider the implications of relocalisation.

Will, as Quilley suggests it may be, a relocalised society be characterized by higher levels of interpersonal violence, loss of individuality, the return of serfdom and feudalism or drastically reduced standards of living? Will relocalisation strip other communities of their livelihoods? Will we become heathens again? These are hard (and perhaps hyperbolic) questions, but also ones that Transition should be asking of itself. When combined with Critique A, Transition’s policy of no explicit exclusion, the movement could easily be used by groups with unjust or discriminatory platforms (for example, survivalists stockpiling weapons for the upcoming apocalypse). As the Companion indicates, the ingredients for starting a Transition Town can be combined in any number of ways, but this includes problematic ones. By refusing to assert a moral agenda and
focusing on the positive aspects of relocalisation, Transition places itself in a dangerous situation and could be used as a platform for any number of socially unjust causes (Barnes 2013).

Quilley's points are valid, but also necessitate that the movement progresses far enough to reach this stage of extreme relocalisation. In relocalisation, I see an earlier problem for Transition – by retreating and focusing on resilience of small communities, Transition denies itself the ability to spread its message and create moderate-scale change. In a globalized, hyper connected world, each community is present within nested hierarchies of scale and denial of this creates an exclusive environment harmful to improving community resilience. In discussing resilience from a sustainable design perspective, Sterner (2011) points out that “a critical aspect of resilience is necessary matching the sale of a plan or policy with the scale of the system it addresses” (165). Thus, small scale plans are appropriate small systems, but when a Transition initiative attracts enough attention within its locality, larger scale plans or policies may be helpful. By adhering too closely to relocalisation, as Quilley and Barnes point out, Transition limits itself growth-wise and potentially guides itself towards a more oppressive society.

C. Show, Don’t Tell.

Transition espouses lofty goals, reimaging many things about our lives and society that we take for granted. Transition advocates for radical changes, yet goes about them very slowly. Going forward, it will be important for Transition to show demonstrable results and involve members in more than film screenings and discussions, though these are important first steps. Too, Transition needs to reach beyond the civic core of communities, beyond community members who already participate actively in community initiatives, and the existing environmentalists, to accomplish anything meaningful. Bailey, Hopkins, and Wilson (2010) present this is one of Transition’s major challenges going forward, a critique which is echoed by many others, including North and Longhurst, and Shawki.

Given Transition’s positive message and no-commitment-necessary approach to participation, participants may walk away with a false sense of accomplishment after a discussion or meeting without applying their knowledge to transform their own lives and create change in their communities. Without attention to his problem, the value-action gap, where people’s actions do not measure up to their professed morals, also has the potential to undermine the movement’s progress. While Transition may be widely appealing, it is perhaps more important to ask whether or not it causes action or behavioural changes.

A useful concept here is entailment, or the way in which systems are interconnected and depend on each other in order to function properly (North and Longhurst 2013). North and Longhurst use the example of a failing community currency and suggest that it is insufficiently entailed—that is, it is not sufficiently woven into the economic system so as to be readily accessible and easy to use (1432). According to North and Longhurst, reducing the barriers to use, or entailing a community currency system within wider systems, creates an avenue for growth as the community currency becomes a more vital part of larger systems.

In terms of the value-action gap, when Transition initiatives are sufficiently entailed within their communities, when buying vegetables automatically means paying a visit to the farmers market,
the value-action gap will become less of a problem and Transition will better be able to demonstrate significant results. This, too, requires that Transition interact with larger structures of power so that projects can be sufficiently entailed.

D. Replicability

In his 2010 thesis, *Localisation and Resilience at the Local Level: The Case of Transition Town Totnes*, Hopkins asserts that Totnes was the ideal starting location for the Transition movement as it already had a progressive population, commitment to environmentalism and history of local agriculture (Hopkins 2010). Some communities are better suited to Transition than others and, given that the model was designed around Totnes’ well-known unique character, the model may fall apart when applied elsewhere.

Transition was designed around the cultural character of the U.K. as well, so the transnational diffusion of the movement must be considered when discussing the replicability of the movement. Dissecting the many effects of cultural context on Transition’s replications is beyond the scope of this paper, but as the movement becomes increasingly global, it provides an interesting lens for analysis. Certainly cultural context affects how Transition is implemented, but the flexibility of Hopkins’ ingredients implies the possibility of a modularity that is widely applicable, though Towns have still folded. What is lost when Transition is brought overseas? What is gained? And, what does the rapid spread of the Transition movement mean for its future?
III. Transition Town Totnes – Welcome to Narnia

Transition Totnes was launched in 2006 in what Hopkins calls a “Great Unleashing” or “a celebration of place, history and the potential of a low-carbon, post-oil future” (2011, 184). After the birth of the concept during a permaculture class taught by Hopkins and Naresh Giangrande, the project underwent an in-depth planning process, before finally being unveiled to the community several months later in the form of this Unleashing. The Unleashing advertised Transition Totnes as “a new initiative seeking to engage the community in the process of designing a practical pathway to a more sustainable society” (Hopkins 2008, 157). Since then, the organization has tackled 39 projects, engaged approximately 3270 residents and generated a conservatively estimated £861,000 in income for Totnes and the surrounding district through the creation of support and local businesses (“Totnes” 2013).

In “So, What Does Transition Totnes Actually Do?” a report from 2010, TTT claimed to have trained over 3000 Transition organizers, partnered with 25 other organizations, held dozens of public meetings, engaging over 1000 Totnes and district residents, and have over 4500 registered users on the TTT website (Banks et al. 2010). These numbers are three years out of date, but nonetheless show the scope of TTT’s affects on the Totnes community and the Transition movement at large.

Transition Totnes favours a decentralized model of organization that gives each of the Theme Groups autonomy to conduct their own projects while still checking in with the TTT administration. In 2008, TTT set themselves up as a limited company with charitable status, with the goal to “carry through the strategic objectives of the Core group and to provide the legal and financial framework for the project” (Hopkins 2008, 11). The Core Group (made up of a representative from each Theme Group, a Trustee, and the TTT Service coordinators), TTT Ltd., the Board of Trustees and TTT Services11 (the administrative support group) make up the administrative core of TTT. TTT has several theme groups (or working groups as they are sometimes called) that focus on one aspect of TTT’s mission. For example Food, Education and Energy are all theme groups. Each theme group produces its own projects and initiatives that are determined by the interests and skills of the theme group members. This could mean that the Transportation group takes on many different projects at once, for instance holding a weekly bike ride and also having a stop-in clinic for bike repair. This member-driven focus for Working Groups means that the groups are more or less active and productive depending on the current membership. Participation in any TTT initiative save the Core Group is not a defined commitment, and periods of heightened activity / inactivity tend to balance out. If the theme

11 Despite its decentralized form of leadership, TTT Services has a number of important responsibilities that serve as the invisible framework for the group. Administrator / coordinator positions in Totnes may be paid, but the group also includes several non-paid roles including the volunteer coordinator and the communications team. Project support / managers may or may not be paid depending on the project. TTT Services is responsible for maintaining the organization’s central office, organizing the program of events, managing volunteers and visitors, proposals for outside funding, website work, press responsibilities and the management of large projects that do not fit under the purview of a theme group. It may seem that TTT Services takes on a huge amount of responsibility, which I do not deny, but I maintain that it is the working groups that drive the organization forward by planning and implementing projects and the TTT administration exists in a support capacity, not a leadership role.
group becomes inactive or unproductive, it means that there is not sufficient community interest to keep it going, indicating that it is not a priority for the community or for TTT.

As the working groups are the actors that drive the movement forward, TTT is run on mostly volunteer labour, which considerably cuts the organizations’ operating costs. Transition Totnes is funded by non-mandatory contributions from members and investments and sponsorships from outside organizations and businesses. In cases of larger projects, TTT has pursued specific sources of extensive funding such as the Low Carbon Community Challenge which gave TTT £625,000 for the Transition Streets project.

Totnes is the original Transition Town, which gives it a particular role within the Transition movement. Firstly, it serves as a resource for other Transition Towns just starting out; TTT regularly holds workshops and trainings. Secondly, it serves as an incubator, pushing the Transition initiative further by creating new projects, the most successful of which are adopted by other Transition Towns. Totnes is the model for Transition Towns, but Hopkins stresses in the Transition Companion that all of the steps that Totnes has taken are just ‘ingredients’ in a collection of steps that other Towns can take.

**TOTNES, DEVON, UK**

Totnes is a town of approximately 11,000 located in Devon, UK (“Census Profile - Totnes Town Area” 2011). Totnes is located in the South Hams district of Britain and has the highest number of registered historical buildings in the country, which attract tourists year-round (“Totnes Guide 2013” 2013, 5). Totnes is a former market town that used to boast high agricultural production and a history of successful local farms (Hopkins 2010, 134). Totnes has the reputation of being a progressively minded area and thus favourable to the presence of a Transition Town.

In his 2010 dissertation, Hopkins asserts that Totnes has a history “as a centre for cultural creatives, for green thinking and for openness to new and innovative ideas” (Ibid, 129). Pre TTT, one of the most prominent anti-GMO groups was based out of Totnes and, still prior to TTT, Totnes was already actively avoiding what Hopkins calls “Clone Town Britain” or when areas lose their distinctive character and local businesses once large chains move in (Hopkins 2008, 176). The nearby Schumacher College, whose motto is “Transformative Learning for Sustainable Living,” frequently attracts important speakers on environmental issues. Totnes is also home to Riverford Organic Farms, one of the largest organic suppliers in the nation (Hopkins 2010, 98).

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12 However, in reference to Aiken’s point about the civic core, having only unpaid positions makes participation in Transition possible only for those with enough time and money to do so. In terms of replicability, this poses a serious problem—unless something in the financial structure is altered, Transition can only be implemented in locations where there are people with enough time and money to take on the significant responsibility of being Transition coordinators, dividing the movement along class lines. While Transition emphasizes a part time approach where members can put in as much or as little time as they like, the amount of work that coordinators put in often determines how successful the Town is—coordinator burnout or unavailability seriously limits the growth and longevity of Transition Towns.
Totnes is often recognized for its ‘boho’ image. The Guardian has called Totnes “Britain’s alternative capital...the country’s funkiest address” and home to scads of “shiny hippy people” (Siegle 2005). Time Magazine declared Totnes the “capital of new age chic” (Dembina 2004). This perception of Totnes’ uniqueness is perhaps exemplified by a practical joke that has made its rounds on the internet several times over the past several years. Upon entering Totnes via the A385 from Dartington, there is a sign that reads “The historic Borrough of Totnes, twinned with...” At this point, there should be the name of Vire, a French town that is Totnes’ twin city. However, in at least three instances since 2006, a practical joker has replaced ‘Vire’ with ‘Narnia’ (“Twin Town’s Return to Narnia” 2013), a reminder that Totnes is in some way special in comparison to other towns.¹³

In his 2010 thesis, Hopkins states that Totnes is already plagued by high housing prices and the presence of many second homes (131). In 2007, a local news organization called the area’s housing prices “comparable to London” (“Property in Totnes: Wizards of the Wacky West” 2007). The recession has not lowered housing prices either. In 2012, the Minister of Housing, Grant Shapps, declared housing prices in Totnes “unacceptable” as the average house in Totnes cost more than 16.7 times the national average income (“Housing Prices Unacceptable” 2013). Indeed, houses in the South Hams district (where Totnes resides) cost an average of £298,632, in comparison to the national average of £242,415 (“In Depth | UK House Prices” 2013). Without London’s high house prices push this number up, the country’s national average would be considerably lower, showing that Totnes is one of the most expensive places in the country to live.

All this is to show that, despite Totnes’ quirky, independent character, the cost of living is very high, indicating a degree of economic privilege in Totnes residents (further discussed in the following section) and thus Transition Totnes participants. Transition Totnes brings many visitors to the area, which has certainly helped the area’s tourism industry, but also may make Totnes a more desirable (and thus more expensive) location in which to live or travel. The consequences of Transition tourism remain to be seen, but, like eco-tourism, have the possibility to create problems for the surrounding communities and distract Totnes from its Transition-related work.

¹³ It is important to note that the outsider’s perception of Totnes as unique and bohemian is not always true to the insider’s view of the town. In Hopkins’ 2010 thesis, some residents spoke out against the hippy characterization of the town, believing that this segment of the population was much smaller than reported (Hopkins 2010, 138)
How was life in the 40s and 50s? Two generations on, we take a look at how Totnes was before the age of globalisation & cheap energy. What did a local food system look like?

Hear first-hand stories of life growing up in the 1940s & 50s through the memories of those who were there. A time where central heating was unknown, and food was, by necessity, local. *This fascinating and illuminating evening will leave you seeing the town in a very different way...*

- illustrated with images from the Totnes Image Bank & Rural Archive presented by Barrington Weekes
- introduced by Rob Hopkins of Transition Town Totnes

**Totnes Methodist Church.**  
**Wednesday 25th November 2009. 8pm.**  
£4 (£3 concessions). Totnes Pounds welcome.  
[www.totnes.transitionnetwork.org](http://www.totnes.transitionnetwork.org)
MEMBERSHIP
The Transition Network Totnes page approximates that there are 3,300 members, though it is unclear how the organization defines a member (“Totnes” 2013). Transition Totnes does not release demographic data on its membership, but the demographics of the Totnes area are helpful in understanding what the Transition Totnes membership might look like. When analysing Totnes’ demographics, four important things stand out.

Firstly, it’s important to notice that Totnes is 98.1% white, with “mixed race” residents making up an additionally 1.1%. 95% of Totnes residents were born in the UK (“Census Profile - Totnes Town Area” 2011)

Secondly, the population skews towards the older end of the spectrum. Nearly 60% of Totnes residents are over 45, and this number would be much higher if Devon County Council did not list 24-45 as the next youngest age group. The median age of a Totnes resident is 45 and 19% of residents are retired (Ibid). Additionally, the number of residents above the age of 65 is projected to rise 35.3% between 2006 and 2021, while the number of residents in all other age groups will fall (“Totnes | Devon Town Projections” 2007, 3) Several times in Transition Totnes literature, the Town mentions retirees or ‘pensioners’ as an important demographic, as they have significant leisure time and also benefit from the social support system that Transition can provide.

Thirdly, Totnes is a town full of highly educated people. The Devon County Council measures education in terms of ‘qualifications’ that indicate the amount of schooling and successful evaluations a person has undergone. Over half of Totnes residents have ‘Level 2’ qualifications or above, several percentage points above the numbers for surrounding district and region (“Census Profile - Totnes Town Area” 2011). Furthermore, in Hopkins’ 2010 thesis, he remarks that when Totnes residents brought Transition initiatives before the local council, several Transitioners had doctoral degrees, while the town council members had none, indicating that Transitioners are even more highly educated than normal Totnes residents.

Finally, 84% of Totnes residents are “deprived in 1 area or less.” By this, the County Council means being disadvantaged in one of the following categories: employment, education, health and disability and housing. This is a peculiar way of measuring the prosperity of Totnes residents, but the low level of “deprivation” among Totnes residents indicates the overall economic and social well being of the area (Ibid).

These four factors combine to create an overwhelmingly highly educated, racially and ethnically homogenous, middle-aged and prosperous population. This is a demographic well-suited to Transition, which builds off a substantial knowledge of environmental and issues (not that these cannot be taught, but already having this education puts Totnes residents at an advantage when working towards Transition), as well as the resources (money and time) to be able to participate in Transition projects. Though the large age census bracket of 24-45 somewhat obscures this conjecture, Totnes’ predominately middle-aged and older population has been successful in the past seven years, but as the movement progresses and Totnes residents grow older, engaging a strong younger demographic (which Totnes does not currently possess) will be an important part of keeping the movement moving forward.
INITIATIVES
Over its seven plus years of existence, Transition Totnes has pursued a wide variety of projects that are well tailored to the specific needs and strengths of the area. In the first year of TTT, several important projects were launched including a movie and lecture series, the Heart and Soul Group (inner transition), an heirloom seed project, an initiative to increase interaction with local government, the Totnes pound, the Totnes Local Food Directory, a SwapShop for local businesses and the TTT Arts Group. From the beginning, TTT has pursued activities to increase resilience across all sectors. In the first year alone, Totnes worked on initiatives in the following areas: economy, psychology, food security, local economic transactions, education and outreach, and reduction of consumerism.

Since then, TTT has maintained its broad focus and pursued many projects simultaneously. That is not to say that all TTT projects have been successful. Interest in certain areas have waxed and waned over time and some projects were not possible (an ambitious co-housing project which failed due to the recession and budgetary problems), but overall, many projects are being pursued and completed at the same time. The ability of TTT to multitask successfully indicates a strong, committed membership with diverse skills and interests existing outside the core administrative roles and leaders.

As the Transition Network page boasts, TTT has pursued 39 projects over its lifespan, though other estimates put the figure somewhat higher. Totnes categorises its current initiatives by the following groups: Transition Town Totnes Arts Network, Building and Housing, Education, Food, Inner Transition, Totnes REconomy Project, Free Skillshare Project, Transport, and Transition Streets. As it has grown, TTT has increased its working capacity as groups have spawned multiple sub groups. For example, the Arts Network now has multiple sub-groups that include the Halle-LOO-jah Composting Loo project and a vibrant calendar of ‘reskilling’ events where participants learn new, practical skills that may be helpful in a post-Peak Oil world.

Given that Totnes has accomplished so much, I cannot offer a complete inventory of projects but below, I have highlighted four Totnes initiatives that I believe to be particularly relevant to my analysis.

Energy Descent Action Plan,
In 2010, Totnes published Transition in Action: Totnes and District in 2030, also called the Energy Descent Action Plan (EDAP), a 300 page undertaking that incorporated the efforts of over 500 Totnes residents (Banks et al. 2010, 12). In the EDAP, TTT visions what life will look like for Totnes in 2030. The EDAP is thorough, providing an oral history of the area and Transition Totnes as well as visions of Totnes at various points along the way to 2030. There are subsections for each theme groups and also discussions of key terms such as resilience and localization. In creating the EDAP, Transition Totnes visioned what 2030 will look like and then backcasted from that, following up with the formal publication of the EDAP, complete with colour illustrations.

The EDAP lays out benchmarks for what certain groups will have accomplished over time. For example by 2012, “Edible landscapes replace the need for council mowing and maintenance (potatoes, fruit and nuts grown)” (95). The EDAP is not an ordinance, but instead a vision of
what Totnes could be in 2030. Transition is a very flexible approach to increasing community resilience and the plan reflects this with both hard criteria (the new food garden will produce 5% of the food in the school’s canteen) and soft criteria (there is competition for stalls at the farmers market and it is always well attended).

The Companion stresses that as a document, the plan “has little value. It needs to have a central role in inspiring, raising awareness, organizing the initiative and determining its progress” (237). The document itself may have little value, but by writing it down and participating in the extensive process of writing it, members become more invested in seeing the projects through and Totnes leaves with a document to which to hold itself accountable. EDAPs function as a way to measure progress towards greater resilience and a way for the organization to design its own course towards this goal, very much a hallmark of the Transition approach. Here, Transition Totnes

I include this initiative because I believe the presence of an EDAP helps a Town define its vision and its priorities, which also carry over to the projects that it undertakes and the progress that it makes. Totnes is a successful and productive Transition Town and I do not attribute this solely to the presence of an EDAP but having a clear vision for the future, desired outcomes for all the Theme Groups, and hundreds of hours of collective brainstorming not only strengthen the collective identity of the Transition group and makes the participants more engaged in the Transition process. The creation of such a detailed EDAP (a 300 page published book with colour illustrations) indicates a high level of community commitment to the Transition Town and to its future.

**Totnes Pound**

Begun in the year of TTT’s inception, the Totnes Pound has developed in several stages, which reflects the amount of thought that went into its creation and management. Local currencies are far older than the Transition movement\(^{14}\), and, especially in the UK, many Transition Towns have community currencies that encourage residents to make more economic transactions within the community.

Though complementary currencies in Brixton, Bristol and South London have been more successful (Mendelson 2013), the Totnes Pound has nonetheless helped to create an environment favourable to relocalised economic interactions\(^{15}\). In the first stage of development, which began in May 2007, only 300 Totnes Pounds were issued and accepted by 18 local businesses. Phase Two, beginning in August of 2007, saw 6,000 pounds in circulation and accepted at 50 businesses. Phase Three began in January 2008, with 6,500 Pounds in circulation.

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\(^{14}\) The Totnes Pound cites several examples of historical complementary currencies as inspiration and justification that the model works, including the Austrian Worgl (which helped bring the town out of poverty in the 1920s) and the local currencies that helped Argentina stabilize itself after a financial collapse in the 1990s (“Home - Totnes Pound” 2013).

\(^{15}\) Local or community currencies are also called “alternative currencies” and “complementary currencies” which raises an interesting question about whether they are designed to be used alongside mainstream currencies or instead of mainstream currencies, which is far more of a political statement. Given Transition’s non-political approach, I would label the Totnes Pound as a complementary currency in comparison to currencies like the Worgl, which are designed in response to a failure in the national currency.
and accepted at 75 businesses (“Home - Totnes Pound” 2013). Phase Four is still underway and there are an estimated 9000 Pounds making their rounds in the local economy (Mendelson 2013).

TTT is realistic in their assessment of the Pound’s success, admitting that Totnes Pounds make up less than 1% of the area’s economic transactions (“Home - Totnes Pound” 2013). This seems like a discouraging number, but is important to note that the presence of the Pounds alone is a reminder to residents to spend their money locally, even if they are not using the Totnes Pound notes. Furthermore, the currency continues to evolve, with plans for electronic denominations and partnerships with local credit unions, which will increase the Pound’s entailment. The Totnes Pound is just one part of Totnes’ economic plan for the area, but it is an important part.
Money, Money, Money.
The Recession Explained....
...the Solutions Outlined...

What’s up with the world economy?

Confused about the current recession? Do you turn off when macro-economics comes up? Or feel like you’re missing too many chapters to even begin to join in? What does it mean to you? ‘Money, Money, Money’ is a 0-90 bluffers guide to the recession that will give everyone a chance to get to grips with the basics of the credit-crunch, in a form that makes sense.

Thousands of people are losing their jobs. Shops & businesses in Totnes are closing. Many economists argue that this is just the beginning. Come to an evening where we will work out the roots of the problem, & how we can ‘recession-proof’ our lives. Hear from Colin Hines, of the recent ‘Green New Deal’ concept & Ralf Becker, the coordinator of the Regional Currency Association advisory board. The evening is a benefit for the Totnes Citizen’s Advice Bureau.

Wednesday 4th February. St John’s Church, Bridgetown, Totnes. 8pm.
£4. (£3 concessions) Totnes Pounds welcome.

For more information tel.01803 867358 or visit www.totnes.transitionnetwork.org.

Figure 2 – The Totnes Pound is part of a larger Transition Totnes discussion of economics.
**Transition Streets**
Like many environmental movements, the Transition movement has been criticized for its lack of inclusion of populations outside the white, educated, middle class environmentalists. Totnes is 98.1% white (“Census Profile - Totnes Town Area” 2011), so there is not much to be done about the racial homogeneity of Transition Totnes, but Totnes has made preliminary steps in addressing its socio-economic diversity. Through Transition Streets (a project where groups of neighbours band together and follow a curriculum about energy efficiency and ways to cut energy costs), Transition Totnes creates economic and social incentives for participation in Transition.

As of 2010, 35-50% (accounts vary) of the hundreds of participants in Transition Streets were low-income residents of Totnes and surrounding district. Levels of participation from low-income residents in other TTT projects are unclear, but it is encouraging that Transition Totnes has succeeded in reaching these populations to begin with. As part of Transition Streets, Transition Totnes applied for funding from the Low Carbon Communities Challenge and was able to install solar panels on local buildings (including many individual houses) to further cut the area’s energy costs.

Transition Streets is a noteworthy program, not only because it has diversifed Transition Totnes’ membership, but also because it addresses the value-action gap that often limits what Transition projects can accomplish. When household participate in Transition Streets, they are committing to their neighbours that that they will attend the meetings and also implement their learnings. This mild form of social pressure encourages Totnes residents to save energy and fosters a sense of community and accomplishment, evident in energy bills every month and new relationships with neighbours.
Figure 3 - Transition Streets has installed over 100 solar panels, helped hundreds of Totnes residents save energy and money, and engaged low-income Totnes residents in Transition projects.
**Nut Tree Initiative**

One of the first Transition Totnes projects was a campaign to increase the amount of nuts and fruits produced in the town. After planning a few trees earlier in the year, March 2007 saw the inception of an official new Totnes campaign: “Totnes, Nut Tree Capital of Britain.” Pruw Boswell, the mayor of Totnes at the time, helped plant several trees himself and officially declared Totnes as the nut capital of Britain (Hopkins 2007).

There have been over 300 trees planted in Totnes since 2007, more than 70% of which have survived and are bearing fruit (“Nut Tree Planting” 2013). The project’s aims were threefold: to create a diversity of local food in town, raise awareness around TTT’s mission and also to absorb carbon from the atmosphere (Hodgson and Hopkins 2010: 103). Totnes’ nut tree initiative was also a part BBC’s Breathing Spaces’ national tree planting day, showing that Totnes really was recognized for its accomplishments in the nut-and-fruit-tree realm.

I include this initiative not because it is the most effective or popular program, but because it demonstrates Transition Totnes’ early attention to branding itself as a unique and important player in the environmental movement. By calling itself the Nut Tree Capital, Totnes asserts itself, in yet another way, as a zany town pursuing new and attention-grabbing activities. Since its inception, Transition Totnes has been a media darling, which has led to training sessions for new Transition leaders, a tourism industry and, most recently, an affiliated network for academic Transition researchers.

The Nut Tree project shows Transition Totnes’ careful management of its image as well as its creativity when it comes to designing Transition projects—becoming renowned for fruit and nuts is not an expected publicity strategy for grassroots environmental organizations. With this project, Transition Totnes succeeded both in attracting attention for Transition and for themselves and creating a new Transition initiative that was well suited to Totnes’ environment and improved the area’s food security.

**THE LARGER PICTURE**

As shown above, Totnes has accomplished much, often with the support of outside groups. Hopkins’ thesis shows initial conflicts between Transition Totnes and the various circles of government, Totnes Council, South Hams District Council and Devon Regional Council, but a positive rapport later on (Hopkins, 2010).

Transition can be read as promoting independence and isolation (see Quilley (2013)), but, even in a small, rural town, nothing exists within a vacuum. Transition is embedded in many “hierarchies of scale” that inform its actions. Engaging with outside structures is inevitable and, indeed, necessary. Totnes has had great success collaborating with the government, local businesses, and even outside organizations. In the Handbook, Hopkins advocates for a ‘bottom up’ approach, but in the Companion is much more enthusiastic about partnerships with other groups, indicating that Transition’s envisioned role within the larger economic or societal picture has evolved.

Though Transition Totnes has had many successful partnerships with local government or community organizations, I use the example of the Totnes Pound to show the significant buy-in
that the currency has from dozens of local businesses. The currency’s growth and presence the community indicates that there is wide support from local businesses for Transition, even if it means accepting the inconvenience of using a non-standard form of payment.

**The Bottom Line: Resilience**

Since 2006, Totnes has followed a comprehensive approach to improving resilience with interest and successes in a variety of sectors. Transition has increased the area’s food security, significant amounts of money and energy have been saved, thousands of people have been educated in Transition methods, and thousands of local social and economic interactions have been fostered (for more details, see *What Does Transition Town Totnes Actually Do?*). Using Hopkins’ criteria of resilience from Chapter II, Transition Totnes has undoubtedly increased Totnes resilience; Totnes has been very intentional about its approaches to changing resilience and has demonstrated significant adaptive capacity (see the many stages of the Transition Pound).

In many ways, Totnes was an ideal candidate to be the first Transition Town as it possessed an alternative and eco-minded community and a history of local agriculture and the presence of Transition Totnes has only increased this image. Totnes has been a well-known tourist destination for decades due to its historical architecture, and Transition has added another reason to visit the area. In the *Welcome to Totnes* town guide, TTT is mentioned three times, once in reference to Totnes as the birthplace of the movement, once in reference to the Totnes Pound, and once, in the lodging advertisements, an invitation to stay in a bed and breakfast with a “friendly ‘Transition’ household” that includes local fare, bicycles for loan, and Fair Trade organic cotton bedding (“Totnes Guide 2013,” 71)

Indeed, TTT has sparked a whole Transition tourism industry. The 2010 *What Does Transition Town Totnes Actually Do?* report says that visitors have brought in £122,000, a number which may have doubled by now. Tourism is good for local businesses, but TTT has added a section on their website encouraging “people to look for that "wellspring of ideas" in their own community or in other transition initiatives closer by, and to look for that "magic" in their own capabilities and potential” (“Visiting Transition in Totnes” 2013). Visiting TTT has a carbon footprint attached and also may take away from the work that the organization is doing. The Transition Network has even implemented strict research protocol (“Researcher Protocol” 2013) in attempt to limit the people who see Transition as a tourist destination or quaint site for observation.

Despite the fact that Transition Totnes may not be interested in becoming a tourist destination, the influx of Transition pilgrims led to the creation of Big Green Canoe, an eco-tourism agency that leads tours of Transition Totnes and other local environmental sites (“biggreencanoe - Home” 2013). This raises an interesting question for TTT, as the money that the tourists bring in is strengthening the local economy but perhaps contrary to the vision behind TTT. Despite its non-political, inclusive front, Transition is a movement about action and encouraging tourism is neither environmentally friendly and takes time away from the projects and behavioural changes really necessary to increase community resilience.

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1. The community’s ability to shape its own pathways and decisions.
2. The capacity of a community to adapt and learn (especially new skills and education).
3. The intentionally of the community’s approach and plan
Behavioural change is a difficult but essential part in the success of the Transition movement. Peak Oil necessitates a dramatic lifestyle shift, which will be easier if it is a gradual transition and not an abrupt shock. Value-action gaps are prevalent and notoriously difficult to get rid of in many social and environmental movements (for example, timebanks), which makes Transition Totnes’ Transition Streets program impressive. By having members undertake this process as a group, it reframes the process. Members undergo the Streets program together, providing them with a support group and people to hold them accountable. Furthermore, TTT presents Transition Streets as a process with a financial incentive. Each Streets participant saves over £600 and 1.2 tons of carbon emissions a year (Banks et al. 2010).

Despite some eco-sceptics who believe that Hopkins and Transition are nothing more than purveyors of ‘woo’ (hokey faux-science and alternative medicine), reception to Transition in Totnes has been very favourable and the organization has accomplished a lot in a short amount of time. This is impressive, but Transition was created for Totnes, so if the project didn’t succeed here, it is unlikely it would accomplish things elsewhere. Totnes’ success and relevance to the lives of many Totnes residents show that the model has the potential to be quietly transformative within this unique setting.

Transition and Totnes are well suited to each other, but it remains to be seen whether or not Transition is well suited to other locales. To examine this, I turn to Transition Town Media. I realize that an analysis of Media does not indicate whether or not Transition can be successfully implemented anywhere other than Totnes, but I maintain that Totnes and Media have enough similarities (for example, demographics of population) and differences (small British market town vs. east-coast American suburb) to make a salient comparison. Even if an analysis of Transition Media cannot be generalized, these findings can still be used to guide further research.

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17 However, Transition Totnes appears successful this vantage point, but its resilience has yet to be tested in any meaningful way, as the detrimental effects of climate change or economic instability have not yet reached its doors. Transition Totnes has been very productive this far, based on our sunny day notion of what resilience means, but given the uncertainty of the future, it remains to be seen if this is the kind of resilience that will actually be of use in ten or fifteen years.
IV. Transition Town Media: “Community Change for a Local, Resilient Future”\textsuperscript{18}

Transition Town Media was founded in 2009 by a group of seven residents who had met through a previous environmental group, the Crum Creek Sustainability Community. During 2009, they read the Transition Handbook and became eager to found Pennsylvania’s first Transition Town.

\textbf{MEDIA, PA – EVERYBODY’S HOMETOWN}

Media is located southwest of Philadelphia. It is the county seat of Delaware County and in the midst of several well-off townships including Upper Providence, Swarthmore, Wallingford, and Springfield. Media’s status as a county seat brings the downtown a lot of visitors, which helps to support the town’s bustling main street, better described below. Many TTM participants come from these other boroughs, so Transition Media’s reach extends past its home borough.

TTM coordinators believe that Media is a prime location for a Transition Town. The area is large enough to have a distinctive local character but also small enough that there is still a sense of community among residents. Coordinators report that Media residents are generally socially and environmentally conscious; Media was the U.S.’s first Fair Trade Town and prior to the creation of TTM, sustainability was already a local topic of conversation.

Media’s main street, State Street, is full of small, locally owned businesses (and a Trader Joe’s) that residents enjoy supporting. There is a trolley line running down the street, which obstructs traffic, but, in combination with the small businesses and quaint architecture, provides the area with a small-town feel that is difficult to find in a commuter suburb. Unlike the Main Line suburbs of Philadelphia, Media’s main street is not a major thoroughfare. Baltimore Pike (PA Route 1) passes to the south of State Street, which allows Media’s downtown to escape the traffic and noise of the Pike. Media’s motto is “Everybody’s Hometown” which alludes to the sense of pride many residents have in their area.

The area’s liberal-leaning politics and environmental consciousness make it a good fit ideologically for a Transition Town, but Media’s prosperity has also meant that some aspects of the TT model are a hard sell. Peak Oil, severe economic instability, climate change, these are not things that have had visible impacts in the area, which gives residents less of an incentive to participate in TTM. And, despite the appearance that Media residents have similar values (namely environmental consciousness), coordinators have expressed that a lack of “philosophical cohesion” (especially in comparison to Totnes) has held Transition Media back. Perhaps it is that Media residents are not united around a certain set of values, or perhaps they are not united around a way of approaching them (that is, perhaps Transition is not convincing, uniting or even relevant to the values of Media residents).

\textsuperscript{18} The information in this chapter comes from the following interviews and email exchanges with Transition Media coordinators: (Steuber and Morfei 2013) (Steuber 2013) (Transition Town Media Steering Committee 2013) (Goodwin 2013).
Administrative Structure of Transition Town Media

From the beginning, TTM has been fairly centralized with a very small administrative Core Group (at first called the Worker Bees), various Working Groups and a Steering Group made up of representatives from each working group and the Core Group. All meetings are open to the public. The Steering Group meets biweekly to update each other on progress made, propose new ideas, and to advise each other on best practices. Once a year there is a Strategic Planning Meeting where members re-evaluate their vision for Media and their goals moving forward.

Transition Town Media has been a 501(c) 3 non-profit for several years and established formal bylaws and a constitution soon after its creation. This has been important in making the group appear more legitimate, both to participants and to outside organizations. When TTM members sign up, they are asked to make a donation, but none is required. The organization has yet to pursue external grants, so almost all TTM projects are funded by donations from members. All TTM positions are unpaid, but given the amount of work that goes into running TTM, coordinators were excited about the prospect of creating part-time paid positions in the future to tackle some of the more onerous administrative tasks.

TTM has experimented with many different projects, some of which have stopped due to lack of interest (for example, the Recycling Working Group). As reflected on the TTM website as of October 2013, the Working Groups listed are:

- Food (which is working on expanding local agriculture using permaculture principles),
- Healthcare (hoping to create a “wellness cooperative” or alternative health centre, but currently inactive),
- Economy (the group that sponsors the popular “reskillings”),
- Inner Transition (which focuses on spirituality and the emotional well-being of members),
- Outreach (responsible for publicity, event organization etc.),
- Energy (currently engaged decreasing energy usage of Media homes and businesses, but currently inactive), and
- the TimeBank group.

As mentioned above, each Working Group has a representative that sits on the Steering Committee. However, often the representative to the Steering Committee is often the leader of the Working Group as well, which places a lot of responsibility and time commitments on that member. Recognizing the shortcoming of this model, TTM coordinators are interested in decentralizing their administrative structure so that individual groups take over some of the work that the Outreach/Core group is currently doing.

Using this system, individual working groups will be more responsible for writing their own blog posts and press releases, event planning, and publicity with support from the Steering Committee. Decisions and feedback that were previously the prerogative of the Core Group (who currently put in between 10 and 20 hours of work a week) can then be dealt with in the working groups, giving them more autonomy and allowing the Steering Committee and Core Group to focus more on growing their membership, finding sources of funding and steering TTM towards the overall goals of relocalisation and resilience. This decentralized plan is similar
to the organization of Transition Totnes discussed in Chapter III, where working groups have significant autonomy and the administrative group plays a supporting role and takes care of things like finances and capacity building.

But while this decentralizing plan has wide support amongst the overworked coordinators, TTM struggles with maintaining a second cadre of members, those who are not part of the Steering Committee or Core Group but are still committed enough to take on smaller leadership roles and lend a hand in the organizational processes. TTM is driven forward by a small group of very committed leaders, but participation from other members waxes and wanes quite significantly. Working groups come and go, as does participation in leadership roles. Totnes’ decentralized leadership plan works because of the widespread community support behind Transition, but the lack of constant commitment from Media residents implies that Transition Media may have more difficulty implementing this model.

While Media residents are in in favour of having a local Transition Town, they are less committed to the idea in practice as it requires hard work and a dedication to making the ideals of the movement come to life, a clear illustration of the value–action gap, where individuals’ values and their actions do not match up. Unlike being a Fair Trade town, which requires little active participation, Transition needs the community behind it in practice as well as in principle. When only a segment of the population is working for Transition, the Town’s trajectory doesn’t fully represent the unique needs of the community nor will it survive long. Running a Transition Town is hard work and when too few people are in leadership roles, they will eventually run out of energy and the Town will collapse.

Decentralizing Transition Media provides an opportunity for the working groups to take on more responsibility and pursue projects independently. Freed from some administrative work, the Core Group would have more time to pursue capacity building strategies and pursue outside sources of funding. Furthermore, this new plan will demonstrate whether or not Transition Media has reached beyond Media’s civic core and deeply engaged new demographics of Media residents. If other members are unwilling to step up and take on smaller leadership roles, this indicates that Transition Media is the work of a few and thus not a priority for the area’s residents.

**MEMBERSHIP**

It is difficult to pin down how many members TTM has at any given moment. Over eight hundred are on the mailing list, and the organization uses several platforms of communication (Facebook groups, Twitter, website calendar updates and blog posts) which implies a still broader reach. Though the social media strategies employed are somewhat basic, competence in a variety of platforms has allowed TTM to spread their message more widely than would be the case otherwise.

TTM considers anyone on the mailing list as a member of TTM, which makes it difficult to assess which members are active and which are not. The presence of a several hundred person mailing list should not be confused with having several hundred active members. There are no official dues to become a part of TTM, but members who donate $35 or more also are eligible for membership into TimeBank Media.
Media and the surrounding boroughs are not known for their racial diversity. Nearly all of the TTM members are white (“approaching 100%,” as one coordinator described) and non-white participants in TTM are very rare; coordinators believe that there is little interest in participation from minority communities. Transition, and the wider environmental movement has been criticized for being dominated by the white middle-class and this trend holds true in Media.

Like, Transition Totnes and most other Transition Towns, Transition Media also does not collect demographic information on its members, making it even more difficult to analyze the population that TTM serves. Media and the surrounding boroughs are predominately white and upper middle class, something which also holds true for the TTM memberbase. According to the coordinators, TTM members skew towards middle aged, but with retired folks and a few young families or people on either end as well. In interviews, Transition Media coordinators cited the “bourgeois values” of the area, indicating a middle-class complacency and privilege in line with expectations for a racially homogenous commuter suburb.

The publication from TTM’s 2013 Strategic Planning session, highlighted the lack of young adult and teenage members (“2013 StratPlan Minutes” 2013). This is a desirable demographic to Transition Media, not only because of the trope that young people are the future of the world etc., but because young people have the skillsets, new ideas, and energy to push the movement forward. A group of young activists with experience in online or on the ground community organizing would be a valuable addition to Transition Media. A TTM coordinator pointed out, however, that young adults are less likely to participate in part because they aren’t settling down in Media, lead more transient lives and don’t want to invest in a place they may not be in for long. So far, Transition Media has acknowledged lack of young adult participation in TTM but has not found a way to combat the problem. Transition Media is frequently self-aware of problems like this (see also, acknowledgement of highly centralized leadership circle), but lacks the strategies or manpower to solve them.

**Initiatives**

One thing TTM has done well (perhaps too well, as it has spread the coordinators rather thin) is to take a broad approach towards increasing community resilience. The group has events in many sectors (energy, food, spirituality etc.), which uses the skills and interests of a variety of participants and raises awareness around more than a single avenue of change. As the organization has grown, there have been other subgroups and initiatives that have been retired or put on hold due to lack of interest or other difficulties. For example, there was once a weekly yoga class and at one point recycling was a strong area of focus for the group.

However, many of the working groups are inactive or very slow-moving and events tend to centre around education or socializing and less around implementing change. In the 2013 Strategic Planning Session, where participants discuss the projects that they wish to see happen in 2013, one of the things listed was “fewer events, more initiatives,” so Media is aware of this problem as well (“2013 StratPlan Minutes” 2013, 7). This visioning process creates an image of a Media on the right track towards action and resilience (Media’s “2025 Vision” also gives a convincing picture of an active, engaged Town), but there is no evidence of a backcasting process (“Vision of 2025”). From reading the minutes, these sessions serve more as brainstorming sessions than they do as planning sessions. That is, TTM does not take their goals for the rest of
the year and work backwards from them, creating a plan from an end goal instead of the other way around. There is no evidence of a strategy to synthesize and implement the ideas laid out in the yearly Strategic Planning sessions.

Despite this lack of overall focus, working groups continue to meet regularly (or at least, their meeting are posted regularly online). Media has many working groups to choose from (though not all are especially productive) and below I have highlighted three working groups or projects that are relevant to my assessment of Transition Media in the context of Transition Totnes or in the cultural context of Media, PA.

Reskilling
Reskilling is a very important part of many Transition Towns, but especially so in Media, where it is one of the more active working groups. We no longer have many of the skills that we will need to survive in a post-Peak Oil society, thus necessitating “reskilling,” or practical skills that will enable us to become more self-sufficient. The Transition Handbook is a little vague in what these skills actually are, and provides guidance for an educational, discussion-based curriculum instead of a guide to the hands-on skills that we may need in the future (194). This leaves the choice of skills to learn up to the coordinators of each TT, which can be used as an opportunity to tailor the skills learned to the specific location or needs of the population.

In the fall of 2013, there was a lot of excitement surrounding TTM’s Reskilling Group, which meets bimonthly for three hours at a time. In November, the group pursued a beekeeping session and a session about small-scale sustenance agriculture. These workshops represent the hard skills that participants hope will be useful in a post Peak Oil world. And, should Peak Oil not come to pass, learning weatherizing, agriculture, or canning can still help TT members save money, educate themselves and reconnect with skills that will allow them to be more self-sufficient and less reliant on dominant patterns of consumption.

The coordinator of the group has proposed seeing the Reskilling Group as an offshoot of all of the other Working Groups, teaching the hands on skills that the other groups need. This has the potential to provide TTM members with a comprehensive education in a variety of practical skills for increased self-sufficiency; brainstormed topics include decontaminating garden soils, weatherizing a house, canning surplus food and introductory TimeBank skills. Reskillings also serve the purpose to bringing TT members together to collaborate and share their skills in a supportive and social setting.

However, Media’s Reskilling Group also got side-tracked by other less sufficiency oriented skills, such as Ebay lessons or designing patchwork pillows (both of these were proposed by a TTM coordinator in a Steering Committee Meeting). This is not to make a judgement as to which skills are more important than others, but if reskilling is viewed as a hobby or crafting group, this will take away from its legitimacy as an essential part of any community’s Transition.
Figure 4 - Media’s reskilling workshops introduce participants to a variety of new skills.
TimeBank

Timebanks are a community currency founded on the principle of equal exchange, where time or services are exchanged between members and then recorded in an online database. For example, someone might ‘buy’ an hour of French lessons from a friend, and then ‘earn’ an hour by driving an elderly neighbour to run errands, who would in turn earn an hour by hemming someone’s pants. An hour of anyone’s time is valued equally, even if one person is a lawyer and the other is a landscaper.

Timebanks are a community currency with a tremendous amount of potential. They validate underappreciated forms of labour, reembed economic transactions with local communities, deepen social ties within an area, and, like Transition Towns, promote unconventional ways of thinking about people and the economy. In areas with disadvantaged communities (namely, the elderly or disabled), timebanks have a strong social justice component and allow these groups to participate socially and economically in new ways. In a bank like that, these economic and social interactions are removed from traditional structures of exchange, and provide social services that the state neglects to provide (e.g. employment for the disabled). Timebanks allow communities to have greater control over their economic and social interactions and relocalise them within systems of social justice and fair exchange.

On the other hand, there are many factors that make it difficult for timebanks to succeed. Areas with homogenous populations, like Media, often have similar skillsets, which does not create an atmosphere conducive to timebank transactions\(^\text{19}\). Furthermore, in areas like this, it is easy for timebanks to get side-tracked from their social justice oriented platform.

Both of these critiques are true of Media’s bank, but the continued existence and growth of Media’s timebank (it is not uncommon for a timebank to fold after a few years) indicates that members still find value in their timebank exchanges and do have unique skills to share.

Media’s TimeBank has over 200 members and has clocked over 23,000 hours traded in the past two and a half years—making it one of the most popular TTM initiatives. The Bank holds weekly drop-in hours and partners with local organizations (for instance, Hedgerow Theatre) that ‘pay’ their volunteers in time dollars. However, not all 200 members are active, and a lack of administrative support and staff has meant that the bank has not had the resources it needs to better engage these members and expand its membership further.

Many of the services that TimeBank members exchange are alternative medicine, crafting or food related (which could perhaps be described as skills people \textit{want} versus skills people \textit{need}), which led a coordinator to describe the bank as “a fun bourgeois experiment in alternative currencies.” This is not an initiative that has greatly improved community resilience, created

\(^{19}\) TimeBank Media has reached out to other groups with different demographics in order to increase the diversity of their skills inventory and allow the other groups to take advantage of the skills that Media residents have to offer. In particular, TimeBank Media had begun a program with the nearby underperforming Chester school district, which was severely lacking tutoring programs, but due to a variety of reasons, the project never went forward. This is the kind of work that TimeBank Media needs to pursue in order for the bank to fulfil its potential as a social-justice oriented alternative currency, but, once again, Transition Media has been limited by low participation in leadership roles and very busy coordinators.
significant behavioural change, or forced members to truly re-evaluate their participation the larger economy (and TimeBank coordinators acknowledge as much), but its presence still serves an important function in slowly building the area’s social capital, a safety net for the possible economic or environmental crises of the future. TTM members participate far more in the TimeBank than they do in other initiatives, demonstrating that the bank is engaging Transition Media participants and other local organizations in a way that other initiatives do not. That said, if Media’s TimeBank, one of TTM’s most active working groups, trades mostly in things like reiki or canning lessons, this is an indication that Transition Media has engaged with resilience at a mostly superficial level.
Figure 5 - TimeBank Media has partnerships with many local organizations
FreeMarkets & similar projects

Transition Media has a Facebook page called “TTM Share, Swap, Buy, and Meet” where Media residents (who do not necessarily participate in other TTM initiatives, though they must be invited to the group by a TTM coordinator) can list items that they would like to part with or procure. In addition, Transition Media has now hosted two FreeMarkets (one in 2012 and another in 2013), where people bring items they no longer want and then spend the afternoon swapping these items with new and old friends alike. Both of these projects have been very popular.

On one hand, these initiatives reduce consumerism and relocalise economic interactions, encouraging Media residents to look within their own communities for things they need. On the other hand, especially on the Facebook page which has ~750 members, these exchanges have not fully been removed from profit-driven systems of exchange; often items are being sold on the Facebook page, as sort of a hyper local Craigslist. The FreeMarket items are free (though people are allowed to advertise their own businesses on the side), but nonetheless still focused on consumerism.

These local economic exchanges keep products out of landfills and promote interactions between community members (and a greater knowledge of Transition Media), but the projects are still consumption-focused. Given the self-professed “bourgeois values” of Media, it is unsurprising that these events are so successful—if the bourgeoisie do anything well, it is consume—and it’s unclear whether this is more of an exercise in simplifying one’s life and denouncing consumerism or a form of consumption that masquerades as such.
MEDIA FREEMARKET
Sunday, September 8, 2013 • 2-5 pm

WHERE! Providence Friends Meeting,
105 N Providence Rd., Media, PA

STUFF! Clean-out your house, shed, car, office, basement and your garage sale leftovers. Or share your hand-mades.

SKILLS and TALENTS! Play us a song, give a massage, read a poem, juggle, read tarot cards, challenge us with your chess skills.

FOOD! Bring your savories. Bring your sweets. Bring your hens’ extra eggs!

The possibilities are endless. The rules are few. And they are: No goods giveaways may be brought after 4 pm. Everything must be free. You may share your business card along with your gift, but do not primarily promote your business. Feeling extra generous? Help us clean-up after 5 pm. Leftover goods will be donated to a worthy charity.

Grassroots Community Change
for a Local, Resilient Future
www.TransitionTownMedia.org

Figure 6 - Media’s FreeMarkets are some of its most popular events
THE LARGER PICTURE

TTM has a healthy and growing relationship with the local government. In particular, the local Energy Advisory Council and TTM have co-sponsored many events (for example, weatherization seminars) and continue to trade connections and advice. TTM’s collaboration with the EAC has also resulted in TTM being able to use the Borough of Media’s community spaces for free. TTM’s opinions and input are often sought by the local government; TTM coordinators have been asked to sit in on the Borough’s Comprehensive Planning Sessions and TTM’s vocal presence in local affairs means that the issues they are working on often make it into the official agenda of local governmental agencies.

Media also has strong relationships with other businesses and community organizations in the area. Several of these organizations (the Media Business Association, the Media Arts Council, a community theatre, a nature centre etc.) are partners in the TimeBank, which means TimeBank Media members get timebank hours for volunteering at the organizations. Given Media’s status as a Fair Trade Town and its emphasis on local businesses, there is a camaraderie amongst local Media initiatives that has been very helpful to TTM. In October, TTM hosted a candlelit Gratitude Night, focused on thanking all of the Media non-profits for the work they do in the community. Like many TTM events, the Gratitude Night is pot-luck style and designed to facilitate meeting new people in the community.

TTM also maintains relationships with many other TTs in the region. The Mid-Atlantic Transition Hub, which has member TTs from VA, NJ, NY, CT, DE, and PA, is an important resource for TTM. Coordinators of Towns in the Hub have biweekly conference calls and are able to bounce ideas off each other and learn from each other’s mistakes. Due to its status as the first Transition Town in PA, TTM has mentored and advised several newer Transition Towns.

With regards to the larger society and economy, TTM coordinators point out that while the TT model itself is radical, suggesting a reconceptualization of traditional economic and social practices, in practice, TTM’s actions are complements to already existing structures of power, not alternatives. TTM chooses not to associate itself with a specific political agenda, aware that this is not only off-putting to potential members but also that it is difficult to classify the TT movement with a political movement or party.

TTM’s non-profit status means that the organization may not lobby for any political causes, which some coordinators feel has been very limiting, given how difficult it is to separate the political from the environmental.

THE BOTTOM LINE: RESILIENCE

Media is a community that has not been hard hit by either economic or climate-related crises, which mutes the urgency of Transition’s message and has made it difficult for Transition Media to create a large and engaged membership. Transition Media has struggled with structural inefficiencies and the time and energy limitations that come with having a few people run the show. Coordinators, who are unpaid though often compensated in timebank hours, may put in 20+ hours a week, which, has meant that some coordinators periodically need to step back and relinquish or redistribute their work with Transition media. As mentioned above, decentralization of responsibilities has been identified as a way of distributing the organizational
burden. This also raises questions about the longevity of Transition Media – depending on coordinator investment in the future, will the organization be able to survive (or perhaps more importantly, grow) without an influx of new energy and committed members?

Judging from the TimeBank, the reskilling sessions and the Free Markets, Transition Media has not succeeded in instigated significant lifestyle changes among Media residents or noticeably improving community resilience. The changes that TTM has wrought in the community are evident: FreeMarkets, smaller workshops or meetings every week, a larger monthly event, partnerships and networking with local, regional and national organizations, new connections through the TimeBank or other TTM activities, but these are projects that just scratch the surface of resilience; perhaps they are a good foundation for Transition Media to build on in the future, but only if the Town can engage more residents beyond the superficial level of attending discussion events or trading reiki sessions.

Transition Totnes did very well against Hopkins’ three criteria for a resilient community, but Media hasn't demonstrated this autonomy or adaptive capacity yet. The fact that Transition Media recognizes its flaws (e.g. education and not action oriented programs) but cannot solve them shows a step in the direction of adaptive capacity, but the Town still seems to proceeding without a focus.

Media’s bylaws state, “We do not have a blueprint. We believe in multiple paths, ideas and possibilities” (“BYLAWS” 2011). This flexibility is reminiscent of the old Handbook’s step, “Let it go where it wants to go” (172) and is less in line with the more action and plan oriented path that is is expressed in the Companion and in Hopkins’ three criteria. In adhering too closely to the original Transition guidelines, Transition Media is not going about their Transition in a structured or intentional way.

Furthermore, the dormant status or slow pace of some TTM working groups demonstrate low commitment to certain areas of resilience and a lack of a committed membership beyond the civic core. This, in turn, has made it difficult for Media to decentralize its structure and give more responsibility to the working groups, which would in turn allow TTM to more actively pursue its goals (which would ideally have been defined through an EDAP or other formalized plan).

North and Longhurst (2013) would say that lagging participation shows that Transition Media is insufficiently entailed in the community, but why?

Media and the surrounding area are affluent and well off enough that higher oil prices are so far not enough to make TTMers alter their ways of life. In fact, TTM coordinators frequently reference the “bourgeoisie lifestyles” of Media residents that make them less motivated to work towards Transition. While plans for larger projects have been discussed (a community health clinic, perhaps the creation of an alternative currency), TTM’s efforts to improve resilience—a FreeMarket here, a TimeBank there—have so far remained moderate enough that Media residents have not had real cause to participate in Transition initiatives.

\[\text{Footnote:} \quad 1. \text{The community’s ability to shape its own pathways and decisions.} \quad 2. \text{The capacity of a community to adapt and learn (especially new skills and education).} \quad 3. \text{The intentionally of the community’s approach and plan.}\]
Transition Media has had a hard time incentivizing participation in Transition. TTM is careful to avoid politically charged language when discussing the initiative and as a result and focuses on the positive reasons for increasing community resilience (e.g. tastier local food) instead of negative ones (e.g. possible collapse of global capitalist system), which does not frame the movement in a context of urgency or importance. This is so far not enough to get middle class white suburbanites to really invest in Transition and Media has not figured out how to solve this problem.

From a small staff, to a disengaged bourgeoisie population, to a non-urgent and non-radical presentation of Transition, to a lack of entailment and incentive, it is clear that the success of Transition Media has been limited by many factors. Though Media’s population has some of the same characteristics of that of Totnes (white, middle-class, liberal-leaning politics, well-educated), the low levels of regular and committed participation in Media show a lack of conviction and philosophical cohesion that Totnes had from the beginning.

Given the many problems of Transition Media, it is tempting to conclude that the town has accomplished nothing. Transition Media has yet to alter consumption patterns or bourgeois lifestyles, but it has strengthened the area’s social networks which provide a base for future projects and, though educational events, is building this philosophical cohesion bit by bit. Furthermore, TTM has allowed Media residents (and especially the coordinators) to find their voice in the environmental movement. Above all, TTM seems to function as a support group and community building tool for participants who are at least peripherally aware of the environmental problems the world faces. In a pre-meeting check in, all of the TTM coordinators listed TTM as something that brings them joy.

While this is not as transformative as a cooperatively owned utility company for example, TTM does create a supportive space for people to work towards self-sufficiency, even if they do not have the time, energy, support or inclination to do this very quickly or comprehensively. Some of TTM’s actions can be seen as tinged with romanticism and naïveté (e.g. crafting patchwork pillows to improve self-sufficiency), but the initiatives can still empower and educate a population that has little pressing reason to be concerned with environmentalism otherwise, though progressing into full-fledged action mode necessitates a dedication from coordinators and residents that is simply not there yet.
V. Discussions
Even in an analysis of two Transition Towns, the variability of the model is evident. It is incredible that a concept that originated in a small permaculture class in rural Ireland has had such a broad-reaching impact. The creation of the Transition Network and regional Transition hubs has been an instrumental support system for developing initiatives. The trainings that Totnes hosts and the consulting that the Media TimeBank does indicate that the creation of a Town is a collaborative event based on the collected successes and failures of earlier initiatives.

This possibility of collaboration has been attributed to mass communications, particularly the internet. Shirky’s (2009) presentation as the internet as a “new ecosystem” of communication is relevant to the Transition movement, as it has brought together a group of like-minded people who would normally operate below the Cosean floor. Mass communications have allowed Transitioners to communicate amongst themselves and also streamlined the process of organization for Transition coordinators. In an analysis of the transnational diffusion of social movements, Shawki (2013) finds that media and the internet is a main contributor to the spread of the Transition movement to the US (152). Shawki also writes that Transition hubs and Transition US are important actors in “mediated diffusion” which “occurs through the activities and efforts of movement brokers” which is especially important in a globalized context of parallel social movements (136).

But while the Transition movement relies so heavily on globalized discourse, it aims for relocalising economic and social interactions. The internet, the globalization of technology, facilitates a model that seeks to temper other forms of globalization. Perhaps this is what Hopkins means when he says he does not advocate for isolation, and Transition’s splicing of the results of globalization, taking some parts and leaving others, is reminiscent of the transformative aspirations of a movement that seeks to create a better world.

Of course, seeking to build a better world is an age-old goal. Transition is not the first environmental or social movement to propose such a goal, or even go about it in a similar way, and Transition will not be the last, Transition brings several new and important things to the current discourse on environmental and social movements.

The above example of the internet as a powerful player in the spread of Transition is a powerful tool in and of itself, and one, I argue, that Transition has employed very well (an opinion also shared by Bailey, Hopkins, and Wilson (2010). Transition’s rhizomic spread depends on these new channels of communication, but also on the way that the movement markets itself.

From Transition’s use of the word community to its refusal to use political language, the way that Transition talks about itself is very important. Transition prefers to focus on the things that it supports, not the things it is against (a reason why Transition stays away from terms like “capitalism” or “degrowth”). Transition’s hopeful and positive vision for the future is nonthreatening, even to dominant structures of power. Adorably subversive, Transition can appeal to local governments even as it attracts hardened activists. Several times, I have mentioned Transition’s successes in partnering with other organizations. This is a huge strength of the movement, its capacity to work within many scales, many actors, and many sectors at the
same time. Communication, transparency, and a welcoming atmosphere – these are the skills that have allowed Transition to flourish so far.

Though Transition is often compared to past utopian movements, including the back-to-the-land movement, it is not seeking a divorce from society, nor “dropping out” in any sense. Instead, Transition wants to engage with this society and transform it from the very bottom up. That’s not to say that Transition succeeds in appealing to (or including) everyone, but the way that Transition brands itself has been important in its success and spread.

Indeed, Transition brings a positivity and joy to the environmental discourse, which is often full of dire predictions and eco-anxiety. Transition’s Inner Transition groups help to assuage these fears and give participants something to journey towards and not run from. Again, I invoke Hopkins’ assertion that Transition is “more like a party than a protest march” (Hopkins). Transition may be criticized for being idealistic, but it has also succeeded in reaching people without previous activist or environmental awareness and making Transition a positive, joyful process.

All of the above builds to one of Transition’s largest contributions to the current discourse on environmental issues: its comprehensiveness. Transition is looking to transform our society mind, body and soul. Working groups span the whole range of human needs, including arts and culture, education and inner transitions. The Companion is a comprehensive guide for a more resilient community – if everything works as it was designed to, Transition represents a life that is dramatically healthier, happier and more sustainable than our lives now. The next question, of course, is does Transition worked as it was designed to?

After this assessment of Transition’s strengths, I return to the four critiques of the Transition movement presented in Chapter II and reassess them based on the above case studies.

A. INCLUSION AND EQUITY
With Transition Streets program, Totnes has addressed inclusion and diversity to some degree of success, showing that individual programs can be tailored to increase membership and diversity. However, diversity is not a hallmark of either Totnes or Media—both areas are predominantly white and relatively stable, economically, which is reflected in their memberships limits both Towns’ ability to address issues of equity and inclusion. The fact that Transition has sprung up in these mostly white, educated, middle-class neighbourhoods demonstrates that these are the groups of people that Transition appeals to—those that have the time, resources and education to spend time on a project like this. Starting a Transition Town necessitates some degree of social capital, community cohesion and intact social fabric, increasing the likelihood of Transition Towns starting in prosperous areas. While Transition Towns like JP NET represent the needs and views of a more diverse demographic, it is important to note that JP NET has altered the original Transition model by including new economic principles that are helpful in a diverse and gentrifying area.

B. PITFALLS OF RELOCALISATION
Hopkins’ disclaimer about relocalisation in the Companion addresses many of the critiques made about Transition and relocalisation and, given Transition’s unwillingness to engage with radical
forms of anything, claims about consequences of radical relocalisation seem largely irrelevant to Transition as implemented in Totnes and Media. In neither Totnes nor Media is there evidence of the initiative going in a socially unjust direction, though I maintain that a focus on social-justice would improve the work that Transition does and guide the movement in a socially just direction.

In particular, I point to Hopkins’ discussion of localism and localization in the fourth chapter of the Transition Companion, where he clarifies the difference between the two. To Hopkins, localism is the term that encompasses the critiques that Quilley and Barnes have made about Transition (e.g. isolationism, survivalist tendencies), while localisation is the more balanced and pragmatic version of relocalising certain interactions while still benefiting from and participating in the outside world.

Despite Quilley’s concerns about relocalisation and isolationism, both TTM and TTT have made it a point to engage with outside organizations, in many cases to great success. In Media, the TimeBank and its partnerships with local organizations and businesses has been mutually beneficial (TTM members get paid in time and organizations get volunteers and community engagement) and thickened the community’s social fabric, an indicator of improved resilience. In Totnes, the success of the Totnes Pound demonstrates that local businesses are very much behind Transition principles.

Quilley and Barnes chide Transition for romanticising the dark days ahead, and in Transition there does remain hints of romanticism for a fictitious and bucolic localised past. It’s a feel-good project that may not adequately convey the dangers of climate change or relocalisation, but perhaps a slight romanticism is beneficial may help temper the fear that comes from awakening to the realities of the Three Cs.

However, the critiques of Quilley (2013), Aiken (2012) and the Trapese Collective (2008) raise an important point: in many instances, Transition ignores the difficult questions that it should be asking itself about diversity, commitment from members, inclusion/exclusion and ideological stance. In trying to be inclusive, Transition mutes what it stands for; why does it refuse to use the words degrowth and capitalism? Why does it not address more explicitly with the white middle class values inherent in the model? In order for Transition to reach its full potential as a radical social and environmental movement, it may need to be more explicit about what it’s fighting against and what it’s fighting for.

C. SHOW, DON’T TELL

This critique is well illustrated by the differences between Media and Totnes. Totnes’ efforts to dease the value-action gap through collective action and keep the movement moving forward show a strong commitment to action as well as discussion and education. In particular, the Transition Streets program creates financial incentives and a built in support group for neighbours participating in Transition together. Furthermore, the EDAP has been essential in guiding the initiative forward. Using the processes of visioning and backcasting, Totnes has outlined what their want their future to look like and how they will get there. The EDAP is not a set of instructions, but it imposes much-needed structure on an otherwise idealistic movement.
Totnes has pursued large-scale and successful initiatives in many sectors, implying that the autonomy of its working groups drives the movement forward. The EDAP has sections for each of the working groups which shows that thought has been given to each sector and that there is commitment to all areas of community development and an engaged membership.

On the other hand, Media, like most Towns, lacks an EDAP and is guided by bylaws that specifically discourage making concrete plans for the future. At the end of five years, Totnes had far more to show than Media at five years, highlighting the importance of *visioning*, *backcasting* and *creating a plan* for moving forward, points that are in accordance with Hopkins’ three criteria of a resilient community.

Furthermore, there is more evidence of behavioral change in Totnes, often in the form of publications or reports. Given Transition’s limited participation in politics, behavioral change is one of the main ways that Transition engages with the Three Cs. Have economic and social interactions been relocalized? Do people live differently than they did before Transition? Though my primary source research in Totnes has been more limited, I argue that the large number of Transition participants in Totnes (over three thousand!) and the comprehensive nature of their initiatives indicate that people are questioning their old lifestyle choices and moving their livelihoods towards the Transition ideals. As an example of this, I point to the EDAP (which lists lifestyle changes that have been made since Totnes’ inception as well as those that will happen in the future). Transition Streets is another example of significant lifestyle change in Totnes. Through a variety of incentives (energy savings, friendships with neighbours, supportive space for learning about climate change), people collectively learn new skills and behavior.

On the other side, I see less evidence of behavioural change in Transition Media. There is certainly questioning of current lifestyles (as evidenced by many discussion-oriented events), but behavioural changes have been less clear (for instance, the energy group is fairly inactive currently and many recent initiatives center around education and not direct application of knowledge). In an area that lacks the philosophical cohesion of Totnes, perhaps a direct climate or capitalism related challenge for the area is necessary to really incite behavioral change. There is nothing to hold Media residents to their words about participating in Transition and initiatives need to be further entailed and incentivized if they are going to appeal to a disinterested suburban population.

**D. Replicability and Resilience**

Transition Media and JP NET show that the Transition model can be implemented in areas outside the UK with varying degrees of success. Shawki (2013) finds that US Transition initiatives tend to *follow* the model while UK initiatives are the ones “breaking new ground” (153). She attributes this in part to the UK focus in most Transition trainings and the British cultural context implicit in the model, indicating that changes need to be made for model to thrive in the US.

This is where the difference between replication and adaptation comes in. Transition Media has used the steps in the Handbook (and less so the Companion) to build their model, and while my knowledge of JP NET is more limited, I see a higher degree of adaptation in their Town; they
have melded new economic principles with the Transition model to create a hybrid structure that meet the needs of the area. Totnes’ is a rural market town with a history of local agriculture and openness to new ideas; these are not common characteristics but they are the ones that spawned the Transition model and that must be taken into account when building a new Town.

Perhaps a better question here is “Can the model be adapted?” How effective is it in different environments? Transition has proven itself to be successful in Totnes, an area with strong economic, social and environmental capital, and it will be interesting to see how well Transition will serve areas with lower levels of capital. Bailey et al. (2010) hypothesize that while the global North will be most affected by Peak Oil due to its high carbon lifestyles, the developing world will feel the brunt of the effects of climate change, (602); luckily, Transition was designed to combat both Peak Oil and climate change, which implies that Transition may useful in the developing world as well. Indeed, Transition projects already exist in the developing world, though many are very young, and their development and successes will be very telling about Transition’s future.

The rhizomic spread and evolution of Transition over the past eight years highlights that the ideas presented in the Handbook and Companion resonate with thousands of people, but it remains to be seen how the practices presented in these books work for the communities that try to implement them. In Totnes, Transition has increased resilience across the board, built a strong network of businesses, community members and government structures, and served as an incubator and training ground for thousands of Transition trainers who have gone on to create further social change. Transition Totnes continues to innovate and refine its mission while also educating hundreds of trainers a year.

In Media, the effects of Transition are less apparent. While less successful at increasing broad resilience (that is, the level of activity in working groups is very uneven, showing that the community is not interested in increasing resilience in all sectors), the Media TimeBank is nonetheless an positive presence in the community and a resource for other TimeBanks across the region. Media, too, has done well in partnering with other organizations to extend its reach and increase social capital.

At its core, Transition proposes a significant societal and economic change (speaking the language of degrowth implicitly if not explicitly) yet is willing to collaborate and transform outside structures as well. Both Media and Totnes report a softening of relations with local governments who begin to see the potential of Transformation and may jump on board with certain projects. In this, Transition toes the line between being an alternative structure and a complementary one, showing the possibility for collaborative change between radical environmental movements and existing structure of power. Though Hopkins at first advocated for not involving governments in the Transition process (2008, 76), the initiatives the include partnerships between a multitude of actors have been among the most successful and involved many sectors of the population (for instance, Media’s TimeBank). Larger structures of power have access to resources and networks that grassroots movements do not and are not always as embedded in conservative policy corridors as it would seem. This follows with Wilson’s theory that “resilience is not ‘made’ and does not emerge out of a vacuum, but is transferred through complex processes of policy and other exchanges between communities and wider society” (309).
The complexity of actors is further intensified when considered against the constant flux of any living system. Here, I return to the idea of active resilience as presented by Sterner (2011) and Wilson (2012). Transition, like everything else, exists within a constantly changing world, and must adapt accordingly. This brings into consideration the adaptive capacity of the movement itself. Taking the communities out of the equation, is Transition itself resilient? Can the movement bounce back after a sudden shock (a failed project) or slow decline (gradual declining participation)? Is the movement prepared to deal with challenges from the outside world?

Here, I believe that the difference between the Handbook and the Companion is a salient example of the adaptive capacity of the movement. Whereas the Handbook was a list of steps that suggested a resilience more in line with Hopkins’ definition of localism than with localisation, the Companion engaged with critics and the progresses (and failures) of the movement’s early years to produce a new vision for the future that was more adaptable, comprehensive and collaborative21. The differences between the two books show that the model has evolved with changing conditions (for instance, the recession-era Companion spends more time talking about economics).

Naturally, Transition Totnes has evolved alongside the movement’s published manuals, engaging more with outside structures, pursuing collaborative projects and formalising its goals for the future while still maintaining an openness to change. However, Media’s bylaws indicate an adherence to the Handbook and less to the Companion, which implies that the Town has not adapted as well as it could have. In Strategic Planning sessions, members talk about the future, but they don’t move towards it in the same way that Totnes does. Media does not seek to copy the Handbook word for word, but its suburban locale provides unique challenges that require an adaptation that TTM has yet to find.

This discussion of adaptation raises the question of context and locale in the creation and success of a Transition Town. First, in relation to cultural context, resilience literature frequently references WWII-era policies in the U.K. as an example of rapid, effective relocalisation that dramatically increased food security and made the entire nation more self-reliant (see Bailey, Hopkins, and Wilson (2010), Hopkins (2008), and Wilson (2013) among others). Totnes’ status as a historic market town with a history of local agriculture is documented in many sources as well (see Hopkins (2010) and “Totnes Guide 2013” (2013)). This context of (and pride in) local agriculture and adventurous thinking makes Totnes’ character difficult to replicate. Cottage farming, Victory Gardens, small and historic market towns—these exist to much smaller degrees outside of the UK but are implicit in the Transition model.

Media has none of those things and, while I do not thing a lack of British-ness can account for Media’s difficulties, here Shawki’s point about replication vs. innovation becomes particularly pertinent – British Towns come with the cultural baggage that Transition includes and this may

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21 Interestingly, the Companion (a more flexible approach to Transition) also advocates for the creation of a formalized plan for the future (EDAP), while the Handbook (which presents steps, not ingredients) contains no such thing. While this may seem like a contradiction, I argue that modularity is essential to the creation of a good EDAP – the Town must look closely at the unique conditions of its environment and craft a plan based on this, not on some established criteria in a book. EDAPs are a flexible method to creating a more structured plan, tailored to the needs and desires of individual communities.
allow them to focus their energy on improving and innovating, while American Towns are still in the implementing stage.\footnote{22 It may be that manifest destiny and American spatial imaginaries of expansion also account for the difficulty some American Towns have in implementing these very British ideals or relocalisation.}

Another thing frequently associated with Totnes is philosophical cohesion and a quirky collective identity, which allows it to spend less time creating this cohesion and social capital and more time getting things done. Furthermore, Totnes understands the importance of using incentives and entailment when reaching out to new and different populations (for instance, Transition Streets). Judging from conversations with TTM coordinators, Media residents are fairly like-minded but in no way experience the same degree of cohesion present in Totnes, nor has Media created clear incentives or entailment strategies to make up for this lack of a cohesive, collected identity. Media has a character and strengths of its own, and the initiatives that have been most successful for TTM are the initiatives that do not come directly from the Handbook or other Towns, in particular the FreeMarkets and the TimeBank.

Going forward, it is clear that, as Transition spread even further, adaptation will be essential to its success in a variety of cultural contexts and provides an interesting avenue for future research. By virtue of its exponential growth alone, Transition demonstrates the ability of an idea conceived for a tiny British town to attract the attention of communities worldwide. In a time of doomsday environmental, social and economic thinking, Transition offers a joyful, comprehensive and collaborative approach to manage the combined and increasing threats of climate change, carbon-dependence and capitalism. While the movement struggles with the diversity of its membership and demonstrating the results of its programs, it nonetheless provides a supportive space for participants to find their voices within the environmental movement, even in areas where concrete changes in resilience are hard to identify. The movement has survived and even blossomed in the UK, but the challenging days may be yet to come as the movement spreads outside the UK and climate, carbon and capitalism escalate.

In order for Transition to be truly transformative, it must confront the difficult questions as they arise—even if that means challenging the status quo and taking a firmer stance on issues like diversity and political stance—and be adaptable to a multitude of conditions and resilient to any number of setbacks. This is a tall order, but judging from the movement’s evolutions from the concepts in the Handbook, to those in the Companion, Transition has demonstrated a capacity for change and adaptation that hints at its potential for future growth.
References


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