

# The Purpose, Principles & Guidelines of Transition Initiatives

We are living in an age of unprecedented change, with a number of crises converging. Climate change, global economic instability, overpopulation, erosion of community, declining biodiversity, and resource wars, have all stemmed from the availability of cheap, non-renewable fossil fuels. Global oil, gas and coal production is predicted to irreversibly decline in the next 10 to 20 years, and severe climate changes are already taking effect around the world. The coming shocks are likely to be catastrophic if we do not prepare. As Richard Heinberg states: *“Our central survival task for the decades ahead, as individuals and as a species, must be to make a transition away from the use of fossil fuels – and to do this as peacefully, equitably, and intelligently as possible”*.

The Transition movement represents one of the most promising ways of engaging people and communities to take the far-reaching actions that are required to mitigate the effects of peak oil, climate change and the economic crisis. Furthermore, these relocalization efforts are designed to result in a life that is more fulfilling, more socially connected and more equitable than the one we have today.

The Transition model is based on a loose set of real world principles and practices that have been built up over time through experimentation and observation of communities as they drive forward to reduce carbon emissions and build community resilience.

Underpinning the model is a recognition of the following:

- Peak Oil, Climate Change and the economic crisis require urgent action
- Adaptation to a world with less oil is inevitable
- It is better to plan and be prepared, than be taken by surprise
- Industrial society has lost the resilience to be able to cope with shocks to its systems
- We have to act together and we have to act now
- We must negotiate our way down from the “peak” using all our skill, ingenuity and intelligence
- Using our creativity and cooperation to unleash the collective genius within our local communities will lead to a more abundant, connected and healthier future for all.

The Transition Movement believes that it is up to us in our local communities to step into a leadership position on this situation. We need to start working now to mitigate the interrelated effects of peak oil, climate change, and the economic crisis, before it is too late. Together we can make a difference.

## **The Purpose of Transition**

“To support community led responses to peak oil and climate change, building resilience and happiness”.

## **The 7 Principles of Transition**

### **Positive Visioning**

- Transition Initiatives are based on a dedication to the creation of tangible, clearly expressed and practical visions of the community in question beyond its present day dependence on fossil fuels. Our primary focus is not campaigning against things, but rather on positive, empowering possibilities and opportunities. The generation of new stories and myths are central to this visioning work.

### **Help People Access Good Information and Trust Them to Make Good Decisions**

- Transition initiatives dedicate themselves, through all aspects of their work, to raising awareness of peak oil and climate change and related issues such as critiquing economic growth. In doing so they recognize the responsibility to present this information in ways which are playful, articulate, accessible and engaging, and which enable people to feel enthused and empowered rather than powerless.
- Transition initiatives focus on telling people the closest version of the truth that we know in times when the information available is deeply contradictory.
- The messages are non directive, respecting each person’s ability to make a response that is appropriate to their situation.

### **Inclusion and Openness**

- Successful Transition Initiatives need an unprecedented coming together of the broad diversity of society. They dedicate themselves to ensuring that their decision making processes and their working groups embody principles of openness and inclusion.
- This principle also refers to the principle of each initiative reaching the community in its entirety, and endeavoring, from an early stage, to engage their local business community, the diversity of community groups and local authorities.
- It makes explicit the principle that there is, in the challenge of energy descent, no room for ‘them and us’ thinking.

“Power is shifting from institutions that have always been run top-down, hoarding information at the top, telling us how to run our lives, to a new paradigm of power that is democratically distributed and shared by us all”.

Trippi, J. (2004) *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*. Harper Collins.

## **Enable Sharing and Networking**

- Transition Initiatives dedicate themselves to sharing their successes, failures, insights and connections at the various scales across the Transition network, so as to more widely build up a collective body of experience.

## **Build Resilience**

- This stresses the fundamental importance of building resilience, that is, the capacity of our businesses, communities and settlements to deal as well as possible with shock. Transition initiatives commit to building resilience across a wide range of areas (food, economics, energy etc) and also on a range of scales (from the local to the national) as seems appropriate and to setting them within an overall context of the need to do all we can to ensure general environmental resilience.

## **Inner and Outer Transition**

- The challenges we face are not just caused by a mistake in our technologies but as a direct result of our world view and belief system. The impact of the information about the state of our planet can generate fear and grief which may underlie the state of denial that many people are caught in. Psychological models can help us understand what is really happening and avoid unconscious processes sabotaging change. E.g. addictions models, models for behavioral change. This principle also honors the fact that Transition thrives because it enables and supports people to do what they are passionate about, what they feel called to do.

## **Subsidiarity: self organization and decision making at the appropriate level**

- This final principle enshrines the idea that the intention of the Transition model is not to centralize or control decision making, but rather to work with everyone so that it is practiced at the most appropriate, practical and empowering level, and in such a way that it models the ability of natural systems to self organize.

## **Identifying the Dazzling Array of Transition Initiatives**

Since the emergence of Totnes as the first Transition Initiative in 2006, the concept has been popping up at a wide range of scales. Trying to divide Transition Initiatives into neat bands of groups and categories is somewhat akin to trying to nail jelly to wall. We celebrate this spontaneity and diversity and don't intend to be prescriptive, but rather we are happy to advise and support emerging groups as to the most effective scales on which to operate.

We are seeing a combination of scales which includes some of the following, local Transition initiatives, regional Transition networks, regional 'hubs', national Transition support organizations/networks, temporary groupings of local initiatives to carry out particular projects, as well as other manifestations.

In addition to the 7 general Principles outlined above, there are 6 practical guidelines which we ask initiatives on whichever scale to observe.

## 6 Practical Guidelines for Transition Initiatives

1. **An agreement with the core Purpose and Principles set out above:** this includes an assumption that the group will contribute to the ongoing development and updating of these principles.
2. **Life is Easier if we don't Reinvent the Wheel:** there are now hundreds of initiatives out there who have developed constitutions, projects, websites, structures. Look around, don't be afraid to ask, groups are generally delighted to share what they have learned; learn from their mistakes rather than your own! Transition Training is extremely helpful for this, as is ensuring that your initiative contains, at the earliest possible opportunity, some people who have long been embedded in the local community.
3. **Start with a Initiating Group That Designs Its Demise:** the initiating group exists to navigate the first few steps of the process, but always with an intention of dissolving itself as the project evolves (with the caveat that early experience indicates that this guideline may be more appropriate at the local level than the larger scales).
4. **Interdependence:** Transition initiatives are far stronger where they work supportively with the initiatives around them. Communication is key, as is supporting newer emerging initiatives around them, inspiring and encouraging them where possible.
5. **Openness to Feedback and Learning:** Implicit within an acceptance of these principles is an openness to feedback from others also working in this field. This would generally be feedback which questions whether we are starting to run our Transition initiatives in such a way as it no longer embodies these principles. This kind of feedback is most effective when it emerges from our peers, but an openness to being challenged is vital, as feedback can be highly affirming and can generate confidence.
6. **Start in Your Own Back Yard:** Local Transition Initiatives will identify for themselves the scales that feel most appropriate for them to work at, but this principle encourages them to work at the scale that feels comfortable and over which they can have an influence, rather than leaping straight in to regional scale work. Don't bite off more than you can chew.

“As innovation becomes more central to the way we make our livings and how we tackle pressing challenges we face – from global warming to health pandemics – our well-being will depend more and more on what we share with others and create together”.

Leadbeater, C. (2008)

This paper adapted from the Transition US document “Why Transition” (<http://www.transitionus.org/why-transition>) and the Transition Network's “Who We Are and What We Do,” which can be found at <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/Strategy/TransitionNetwork-WhoWeAreWhatWeDo.pdf>

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