TransitionScape

AN ECOLOGICAL PLANNING APPROACH TO COMMUNITY BASED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

TransitionScape is a method of participatory community planning that was undertaken with the aims of:

1. **providing the facts** about Peak Oil, Global Climate Change, Electric Power System,

2. help people explore their individual and group **responses** and

3. provide a forum to **generate projects** in the community for sustainable value, resilience and adaptation.

4. stimulate increased **community connectivity** and the creation of **organisational structures** appropriate to these challenges

This method was trialled at the "Climate Disruption. Transition Towns. One Response" weekend forum organised by the Natural Heritage Society Oamaru.

Future Energy Environment

The environmental and resource problems facing human society are well documented:

- Global Climate Change

- Peak Oil

- Peak Everything!?!

…but what do we do about them?

Eco-Municipalities

- Started in Scandinavia in the 1980's with over 70 eco-municipalities now in existence in Sweden alone

- Originally started as economic redevelopment of the Finnish town Suomussalmi

- Became the model for Agenda 21, the Guide for Local Sustainable Development that emerged from the 1992 Rio Summit

- The movement has since spread into Europe and North America

Transition Towns Movement

- The movement began in Kinsale, Ireland in 2005 with a group of Permaculture students devising an Energy Descent Action Plan for the local community.

- This plan was then adopted by the townspeople.

- Focussed around preparation of an community-based **Energy Descent Action Plan**

- Now spread into UK, North America, Australia and New Zealand

TransitionScape

- To facilitate these processes we are designing *TransitionScape* – a series of workshop sessions tailored to the different needs of the community at different stages within the transition journey

Background – Oamaru

- Situated near the Waitaki River in North Otago
- First settled by Europeans in the 1850s
- Town soon became a major port acting as both a commercial and fishing harbour
- Historic town centre built from Oamaru Whitestone.
- Large historic arts and craft centre

Background – Natural Heritage Society

Set up to promote and support sustainable initiatives in North Otago, the society has a particular focus on:

- Organic farming and appropriate technology

- Produce market and cottage industry

- Preservation and conservation of natural and cultural resources

- Environmental and socially sustainable employment

- Education based training programmes

TransitionScape

Steps to Transition

Problem Identification:

- **Raise awareness** of upcoming socio-economic and environmental challenges
- **Map out the landscape** to which they must adapt and evolve
- **Offer support** for dealing with "post-petroleum stress disorder" (Hopkins 2008)
- **Engender a positive attitude** that the appropriate action can be undertaken

1. **Assessing the Current Situation:**

- **Generate an understanding** of the community structures that need changing
- **Raise awareness** of current activities within the town or wider community being undertaken directed towards the same ends (i.e. building a sustainable and resilient community)
- Enable a **recognition** of the wealth of **local resources**

3. **Visioning Solutions:**

- **Facilitate creative thinking** directed toward adaptive responses to the challenges of the new environment
- **Focus thinking** from general esoteric matters onto specific tasks

4. **Planning Solutions:**

- Engender a **sense of belief** that the necessary changes can be made
- Facilitate **formation** of the new **organisational structures**
- Enable learning of **problem-solving skills** necessary for completion of the specified tasks
- Foster a sense within the township of **support from the wider community**

TransitionScape – Problem Identification 'Laying out the facts'

- Information delivered via conventional lecture format

Content:

- Analysis of future fossil fuel availability

- Projections of renewable energy generating capacity and their inability to cover 'shortfall' in oil production

- Projections of environmental disruption due to changing climate

TransitionScape – Problem Identification 'Pop mythology to move thinking'

- Incorporate a sense of empowerment via the use of metaphor

Content:

- Comparison of the transition journey with "Lord of the Rings" – the struggle of a small band to rid the world of a corrupting, dark force

TransitionScape – Problem Identification
'Preparing to move on'

Stages of Grief:

1. Shock
2. Denial
3. Anger
4. Bargaining

5. Depression
6. Testing
7. Acceptance
8. Moving on

TransitionScape – Asset Mapping

Participants asked to identify:

- Natural resources

- Positive community assets

- Negative community aspects

- Critical infrastructures

- Skills

- Barriers to change

TransitionScape – Support & Empowerment

- **Raise awareness** of other initiatives both in local area and further afield
- **Fortifies participants resolve** and **strengthens connections** to a wider community
- Source of future **support** and **guidance**
- Members of the Hampden Energy Group spoke on a number of topics

TransitionScape – Scenarios

- Move mindset and enhance creative responses

4 'Collapse'Scenarios:

- Disruption to **oil supply**
- Intermittent **electric grid failure**
- Degradation of the **natural environment**
- Disintegration of **social cohesion**

TransitionScape – Transition Space

- Participants asked to place their responses within a three dimensional space

TransitionScape
Participants' Responses

TransitionScape – Transition Space (a reprise)

Adaptation responses collated into project themes:

- **Demand Management**
  - Ride sharing
  - Cars only for essential trips
  - Work from home
- **Restoration & Reclamation**
  - Environmental conservation
  - Drought resistant plants
  - Bio-diversity
- **Knowledge, Skills & Education**
  - Foster traditional crafts
  - Re-skill – teach carpentry, etc.
  - Teaching horticulture
- **Community Networks**
  - Shared use of community resources
  - Communal shopping
  - Community meals

- **Infrastructure & Technology**
  - Build up rail network
  - Solar heating
  - Housing insulation
- **Local Produce & Markets**
  - Farmers market
  - Community garden
  - Use local resources locally
- **Re-localised Economy**
  - Reduce debt, eliminate debt
  - Barter, local currency
  - Foster traditional crafts
- **Governance & Regulation**
  - Prioritise/Restrict fuel use
  - Limited population size
  - Prioritize water use

TransitionScape – Transition Space (a reprise)

- Space marked out on floor – Transition Space
- Topic themes arranged within this transition space
- Participants choose 'resonant' topic and then step into the transition space
- Meet (perhaps unknown) like-minded community members who have chosen same topic
- Work through planning exercises on various projects
- Groups encouraged to schedule regular meeting times

TransitionScape – Assessment

Assessment carried out via feedback forms and video interviews

- Generally very well received
- Most people left feeling more positive and empowered about the future
- Planning groups have been meeting regularly to discuss projects and actions

So what now?

- Development of more workshops appropriate to communities at different stages on the transition journey

- Collaboration with the Transition Community group in Christchurch to roll out the process with local communities

Acknowledgements

- I would like to thank my supervisors Associate Professor Susan Krumdieck and Dr. Keith Morrison for their help and support in accomplishing this trial of the *TransitionScape* methodology

- Thank you to the members of the Natural Heritage Society Oamaru for organising the event and having the faith to 'put themselves in our hands'.

- Thanks also to the Keith Laugesen Charitable Trust and the Department of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Canterbury for their financial assistance

- Thank you for listening…