



RESILIENCE, COMMUNITY ACTION AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

People, Place,
Practice, Power, Politics
and Possibility in Transition



Edited by
Thomas Henfrey
Gesa Maschkowski
and Gil Penha-Lopes

1.0. Introduction: A Community-led and Knowledge-led Transition

EAMON O'HARA AND MAY EAST

As discussions continue on global and national responses to issues around climate change and sustainability, local communities around the world are busy taking action, leading the way towards what could be a revolutionary, community-led societal transformation. Weary of waiting for top-down solutions, and determined to be active participants in shaping the future, citizens are taking the initiative and launching transformative processes in their own neighbourhoods and villages.

A study carried out by the European Association for Information on Local development (AEIDL) in 2013 identified in excess of 2,000 community-led initiatives on climate change, resilience and sustainability operating across 13 EU Member States.¹ This number — probably a massive underestimate — is growing rapidly, spearheading a movement that has the potential to transform society, building local resilience and establishing new norms and behaviours that support the shift to a post-carbon society.

In many cases, these local initiatives are aligned with wider movements, in particular the Transition Towns network,² the Ecovillage movement³ and the Permaculture movement.⁴ Mostly, such initiatives adopt a systemic/holistic approach, operating across many different sectors and themes.

There are also many community-led initiatives that have a greater sectoral focus – for example on community-supported agriculture, community energy or community mobility - leading to the flowering of a diversity of practical projects. In all cases, however, the focus is on

1 <http://www.aeidl.eu/images/stories/pdf/transition-final.pdf>

2 <http://www.transitionnetwork.org>

3 See <http://gen.ecovillage.org> and <http://gen-europe.org>

4 e.g. see <http://permaculturenews.org> and <http://www.permaculture.org.uk>

experimentation, innovation, and on finding practical and viable ways of strengthening local resilience and sustainability.

In Europe, a number of these movements and initiatives have recently come together to establish a platform to support closer cooperation. This European meta-network for community-led action on climate change and sustainable development, known as ECOLISE, aims to raise the profile of community-led action, among policy-makers and the general public, with a view to promoting a wider mainstreaming of such action across Europe.⁵

Three key concepts inform the growing number of citizen-led initiatives: localisation, resilience and inventiveness. Localisation invites us to rethink methods of production and patterns of consumption, arguing that meeting more needs locally while plugging the leaks in our local economies will be one of the critical strategies for improving the resilience of our communities. On the task of strengthening resilience within and across systems, we observe the adaptability and transformative potential of community-led initiatives as we notice the richness and complexity of the socio-economic webs that unfold, suggesting that innovation happens in the intersections between the 'movements'. Working in isolated enclaves may work if the world around you is not changing. ECOLISE's intention of bridging 'clusters' of practical post-carbon experimentation is already creating cross-fertilisation; inventiveness will certainly follow.

The link between researchers and practitioners is key in this respect. An established body of knowledge now exists, providing a wealth of good practices and processes that can be transferred to mainstream society, helping to fast-track a community-led societal transformation. However, to be truly successful, this mainstreaming requires a thorough understanding of the underlying processes at play within active communities and their interaction with social, economic and political factors at higher levels.

To develop the right policies and to promote the most effective approaches, it is imperative that we understand what works best in what context and why. Close working relationships between researchers and practitioners are essential to achieving this. Through this kind of cooperation, a more scientific approach is possible, facilitating ongoing two-way processes of learning and improvement and creating a framework through which experience can be capitalised and shared.

In this context, the mission of ECOLISE has two important components. Firstly, to map and investigate what's currently happening in terms of community-led action on climate change and sustainability in Europe, what works and what doesn't, and to share this knowledge throughout the network. Secondly, to raise the profile of community-based action on climate change and sustainability in Europe and promote wider sharing and uptake of the best ideas and experiences emerging from the network.

5 <http://www.ecolise.eu>

We all recognise the need for urgent action on climate change and sustainability. Time is of the essence in terms of avoiding the worst effects of climate change, halting the loss of biodiversity and protecting finite resources. This is why it is so important that we acknowledge and support community initiatives, and encourage more local communities to take action. However, to facilitate this we must also push for a more supportive policy environment, and encourage policymakers, especially at the European and national levels, to bring forward policies and programmes that support community-based action. We already know there are politicians and bureaucrats who support such efforts but we must work together to present a more coherent and science-based proposition in order to bring about real change.



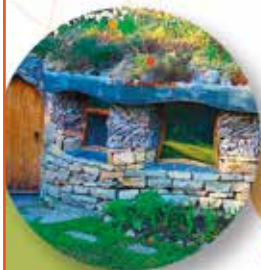
ECOLISE

META NETWORK

A shared platform for learning, action and advocacy,
by and for community-led initiatives on climate change
and sustainability in Europe



**The time has come to work closer together to support
community-led local action for significant change**



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Resilience has become a familiar buzz word in mainstream politics, most commonly as an excuse for 'business as usual'. Both resilience science and practical experience of community-led action for social change suggest an alternative view, in which resilience implies deep and far-reaching transformation of society.

This collection helps bring that vision into focus through a compelling blend of insights, ideas and action points from community activists, activist-scholars and leading resilience scientists. It includes direct accounts of practical efforts to build resilience at community level, theoretical reflections from a range of academic fields, and calls for collaboration among diverse efforts to create and defend community resilience worldwide.



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