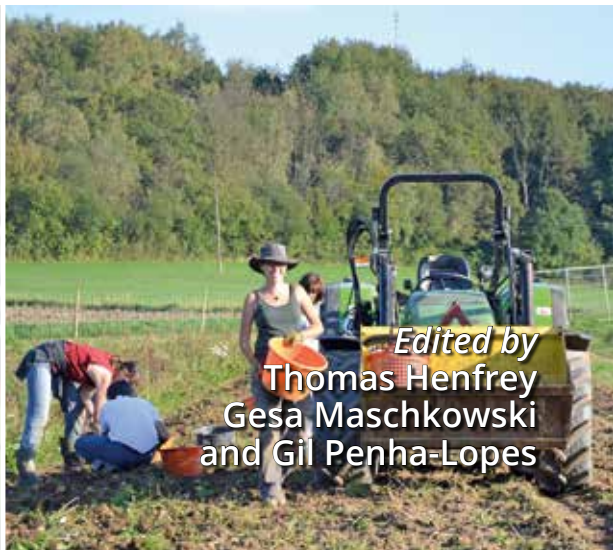
RESILIENCE, COMMUNITY ACTION AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

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



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4.2. Climate, Commons and Hope: The Transition Movement in Global Perspective.

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The climate crisis has revealed a paradox at the heart of global governance:[228] those who hold the power in the current system present as the solution to ecological destruction and social dislocation the very paradigm and power relations that are driving them. This chapter puts forward an alternative point of view and course of action.

Several widely held myths need to be challenged to bring about a just transition:

- The illusion of humanity and human economic activity as somehow separate from nature and broader ecological processes;[229]
- The assertion that competitiveness – whether among individuals, groups, nations or groups of nations – is an inevitable and/or desirable aspect of human nature; and
- The idea of a uniform, linear pattern of development through which all societies must pass in order to better their condition.[230]

Above all, the global climate crisis has shattered the idea that economic growth can be perpetuated indefinitely on a finite resource base.[231] The number of people materially benefiting from the economic and political system driven by these assumptions has grown over time, with the global financial crisis of 2008 either a brief interruption or sign of things to come.

228 Hulme, M., 2009. *Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity.* Cambridge University Press.

229 E.g. Wollock, J., 2001. Linguistic diversity and biodiversity: some implications for the language sciences. Pp. 248-262 in Maffi, L. (ed.) *On Biocultural Diversity.* Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press. Kidner, D.W., 2001. *Nature and Psyche.* Albany: SUNY Press.

230 Escobar, A. 1995. *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World.* Princeton University Press, Chichester.

231 Jackson, T., 2009. *Prosperity Without Growth.* London: Earthscan. Heinberg, R., 2011. *The End of Growth.* Forest Row: Clairview.

However, this expansion has been at the expense of all who are still outside the circle of material beneficiaries – whether oceans, soils, forests, and atmosphere; people being torn from their lands and working long hours for a pittance or unemployed and desperate; or the future for our own and other species on this planet.

The consequences have become clear of attempts to mitigate and adapt to this crisis which do not question the basic premises of these models: when they neither accept the depth and extent of the linked technological, social, political and economic changes that will be required,[232] nor seek to enable the shifts in power relations necessary to allow solutions from the margins of the present system.[233] The appropriation of the climate challenge by neoliberalism,[234] in particular the climate security agenda, is already having disturbing effects.[235] Its wider implications are terrifying, especially in the light of the abject failure of global political processes to make any meaningful progress towards genuine solutions.

In cheering – and often cheerful - contrast, numerous and uncounted experiments in community-based action towards constructive, enduring solutions offer significant glimmers of hope. Increasingly sophisticated in their philosophies, goals, practical approaches, decision-making processes and organisational structures, these emerging networks for collective action, information exchange and mutual support are growing into credible alternatives to a mainstream whose inability to address contemporary problems is ever more apparent.[236] At base the climate security agenda relies on people feeling fearful – preferably of some purported enemy, but if not then of the agenda drivers themselves. One crucial act of resistance is to refuse to enter that game, and to instead create our own. That is what these initiatives and social movements seek to do. In the process they are linking with and learning from enduring ways of improvising and sustaining effective and sustainable social and ecological relations among peoples on the margins of the global economy.

This chapter explores one of the largest and fastest growing (but still embryonic) of these movements, the Transition movement of grassroots efforts to cultivate community resilience to climate change and other symptoms of terminal dysfunction in the global economy. It seeks to place it in the broader context of commons-based ways of organising human experience and society. In the process, it describes how Transition groups are actively visualising and realising economic alternatives within their own communities. Although their actions are as varied as the places themselves and people within them, they have in common that they seek to place the organisations and infrastructures that provide basic needs (food, energy and shelter) under the control of the people who depend on them. The realisation of this goal

232 Unruh, G., 2000. Understanding carbon lock-in. *Energy Policy* 28(12): 817-830.

233 Unruh, G., 2002. Escaping carbon lock-in. *Energy Policy* 30(4): 317-325.

234 Noble, D., 2007. *The Corporate Climate Coup.* http://www.zcommunications.org/the-corporate-climate-coup-by-david-f-noble. Accessed October 15 2012.

235 Buxton, N. & B. Hayes, 2015. *The Secure and the Dispossessed*. London: Pluto Press.

236 Hopkins, R., 2013. *The Power of Just Doing Stuff*. Cambridge: UIT/Green Books.

makes Transition and other similar efforts a powerful countermovement to responses that seek to entrench rather than transform the causes of crisis.

In this chapter, we examine Transition through the lens of commons: flexible and evolving institutional structures, often informal and/or customary in nature, through which the co-users of a shared resource experience, recognise and allocate rights and responsibilities. The neo-liberal appropriation of climate change has created new threats to these commons, including the enclosure of community forests under the REDD mechanism. We describe the efforts in North and South to reverse this enclosure and privatisation of resources by protecting existing commons regimes and creating new ones, as the basis for economic independence and communities' interdependence, and hence for community resilience cultural self-determination and mutual survival.

4.2.1. Transition: Building Resilience by Creating Economic Alternatives

The story the Transition movement often tells is that it started in 2006 as an informal cluster of volunteers in Totnes, a small market town in Devon, South West England, and that it has grown from this into an international movement that British green economist Tim Jackson has described as "the most vital social experiment of our time".[237] However, in reality, this work echoed and amplified movements that were already afoot in the Global North and South. For example, one of the first Transition initiatives in Scotland, in Portobello, Edinburgh, formed in 2005, when the label 'Transition' didn't exist. The group called itself Portobello Energy Descent and Land Reform Group (PEDAL) alluding to both the emphasis on building resilient communities that move away from oil addiction[238] and to the Scottish land reform movement's focus on reclaiming land (the fundamental source of our wealth and wellbeing) from the powers that be. Perhaps most crucially, Transition draws heavily on – and extends – theory and methods in permaculture, a design system for low-entropy human habitats that has spread worldwide since its origins in Australia in the 1970s and which mirrors many indigenous peoples ways of 'living with', rather than seeking to dominate, the environment on which they depend.[239]

People across the world have picked up on 'Transition' from their own historical contexts and for their own strategic reasons, partly because it offers a positive vision of the future and ways of acting in the here and now to bring that vision into being, in place of the dystopia being enacted in our name. When it works, it does so not as a blueprint imposed by those in the know, but as an adapting process of building resilience and connecting and learning from similar commons initiatives locally, regionally and internationally.

237 Hopkins, R., 2011. *The Transition Companion*. Totnes: Green Books.

238 This was picked up from Rob Hopkins' work with students at Kinsale in Ireland that led him to the idea of Transition *http://transitionculture.org/2005/11/24/kinsale-energy-descent-action-plan/* Accessed November 13th 2013.

239 Henfrey, T., & G. Penha-Lopes, 2015. *Permaculture and Climate Change Adaptation. Inspiring Ecological, Social, Economic and Cultural Responses for Resilience and Transformation*. East Meon: Permanent Publications. Pp. 27-29; 77-79.

The part of this commons movement we are identifying as Transition originated at Kinsale Further Education College in Ireland in 2005, when a lecture on peak oil inspired a group of permaculture students taught by Rob Hopkins to design a strategy for local independence from fossil fuels.[240] Impressed by the potential of this approach, in 2006 Hopkins relocated to Totnes, a South Devon market town with a longstanding reputation for countercultural action and co-founded Transition Town Totnes, extending the Kinsale approach and adding climate change as a second key concern.[241] Subsequently, in 2007, Transition Network came into being as a support and coordination body for a burgeoning number of Transition initiatives in other locations. As of September 2013, Transition Network reported the existence of 1130 local initiatives in 43 countries.[242]

Transition Network's website, like many of its other media, carries a 'cheerful disclaimer', which states:

> *"Just in case you were under the impression that Transition is a process defined by people who have all the answers, you need to be aware of a key fact.*
> *We truly don't know if this will work. Transition is a social experiment on a massive scale.*
> *What we are convinced of is this:*
> *› if we wait for the governments, it'll be too little, too late*
> *› if we act as individuals, it'll be too little*
> *› but if we act as communities, it might just be enough, just in time."*[243]

Transition is thus based on explicit scepticism about what top-down processes might achieve. It also acknowledges the limitations of acting solely as individuals, and instead focuses on the transformative potential of community action.

Transition's rapid growth in profile and popularity in large part resulted from its association with climate change at a time when the publication of the Stern Review put it at the heart of political agendas, both in the UK and internationally. At the time, peak oil received relatively little mainstream attention.[244] By explicitly linking the two, Transition approached climate change with a broader perspective that transcends the adaptation-mitigation distinction. Decarbonisation is viewed, not as an end in itself, but as a necessary condition for building

240 *http://transitionculture.org/2005/11/24/kinsale-energy-descent-action-plan/.* Accessed May 2nd 2014.

241 Hopkins, R., 2010. What Can Communities Do? In Heinberg & Lerch (eds.) *The Post Carbon Reader.* Santa Rosa: Post Carbon Institute.

242 *http://www.transitionnetwork.org/initiatives/.* Accessed November 13th 2013. A more recent blog post by Hopkins suggests this underestimates the numbers of non-UK initiatives, known nationally but not registered with Transition Network. *http://www.transitionnetwork.org/blogs/rob-hopkins/2014-04/impact-transition-numbers.* Accessed May 2nd 2014.

243 *http://www.transitionnetwork.org/support/what-transition-initiative.* Accessed October 15th 2012. Also see *http://transitionculture.org/2008/11/20/responding-to-greers-thoughts-on-premature-triumphalism/.* Accessed October 15th 2012.

244 An insider history of peak oil denial in the early 20th century can be found in Legget, J., 2013. *The Energy of Nations.* London: Earthscan.

Figure 4.2.1 – *Access to Land as a Prerequisite of Collective Action. Credit: Gesa Maschkowski.*

resilience, seen broadly as the capacity to negotiate change[245] and specifically as the ability to sustain provision of basic human needs in to the face of: shrinking supplies of cheap energy, the direct impacts of climate change, the consequences of necessary constraints on carbon emissions, and the economic instability to which all of these contribute.

The focus on resilience does not look at issues such as climate change mitigation, or energy security, in isolation, nor pretend they are well-defined problems amenable to simple solutions.[246] It highlights how, despite the immediate hardships and dangers they entail for many, these immediate issues are symptoms of deeper dysfunction in the economic system. This transforms the immediate need to address them into a longer-term opportunity to build resilience to future crises and in doing so address broader patterns of unsustainable resource use and inequalities of wealth and power.

245 Walker, B. and D. Salt, 2006. *Resilience Thinking: sustaining ecosystems and people in a changing world.* Washington DC: Island Press.

246 Prins, G. and S. Rayner, 2007. *The wrong trousers: radically rethinking climate policy.* Oxford: James Martin Institute for Science and Civilization. Prins, G. et al, 2010. *The Hartwell Paper: a new direction for climate policy after the crash of 2009.* http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/27939/

BOX 1: TRANSITION AND RESILIENCE

There is a great deal of inconsistency and confusion about the usage and meaning of the term 'resilience' in both academic and non-academic settings. In particular, the meaning and implications of the term in Transition are very different from those in prominent policy discourses associated with securitisation.

Transition draws on insights originating in ecology[247] that treat resilience (and hence sustainability) as dynamic conditions depending as much on flexibility as stability: on adapt to rather than resisting change.[248] Nick Wilding observes that community resilience, in this framing, is an ongoing condition: while it may be most apparent at times of crisis, it is built and maintained by the ongoing development of relationships, social and environmental knowledge, and capacities for collective action.[249]

This contrasts with uses of the term in risk management and disaster response literatures, which emphasise the need to maintain or to return to some pre-existing, presumably desirable state following disturbance. Their framing engages only superficially, if at all, with established technical definitions of social-ecological resilience.[250] As some critical commentators have observed, this usage has passed uncritically into popular and policy discourses that treat personal and community resilience as panaceas for the corrosive effects of predatory capitalism.[251]

Ignoring political, ecological and dynamic dimensions of the definition and deployment of resilience invites confusion between its meanings within Transition and its use as a tool for normalising the effects of politically conservative agendas.[252] For Transition, it is a transformative concept, founded on the understanding that our economic system is already operating beyond finite ecological boundaries and that resilience must embrace transformation: approached through a combination of practical and inner work that subverts the addiction to commodities as a substitute for meaningful relationships and replaces it with creative systems that renew social, cultural and material relations.[253]

247 Haxeltine, A., & G. Seyfang, 2009. *Transitions for the People: theory and practice of 'Transition' and 'Resilience' in the UK's Transition movement.* Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research Working Paper 134. Hopkins, R., 2010. *Localisation and Resilience at the Local Level: the Case of Transition Town Totnes (Devon, UK).* Ph.D. thesis, Plymouth University.

248 Leach, M., I. Scoones & A. Stirling, 2010. *Dynamic Sustainabilities*. London: Earthscan.

249 Wilding, N., 2011. *Exploring Community Resilience in times of Rapid Change.* Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust. http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk

250 Alexander, D. E., 2013. Resilience and disaster risk reduction: an etymological journey. *Natural Hazards and Earth Systems Science* 13: 2707–2716.

251 Neocleous, M., 2013. Resisting Resilience. *Radical Philosophy 178.* http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/resisting-resilience. Accessed November 27th 2013.

Following the economic crisis of 2008, Transition adopted the imperative of a post-growth economy as its 'third driver'. New audiences have become receptive to arguments that highlight the non-viability of the global economy, and links with organisations like the New Economics Foundation - an important influence on Transition since its earliest days - have been consolidated. Practically, it has led to an emphasis on social enterprise as a tool for provision of basic needs and livelihood creation not reliant on the fossil fuel economy[254]. This entrepreneurial approach to sustaining Transition projects could be viewed as a partial sell-out - working within, and therefore perpetuating, the existing system rather than challenging its basic values – or as a deeply subversive form of head-on confrontation. Either way, the embedding – or making explicit – of an economic critique within the central tenets of Transition is perhaps a sign of new maturity.

For many in Transition, the fundamental weaknesses of our global economy have also been challenging to accept. In a workshop at the 2010 Transition Network conference, Stoneleigh, an influential blogger on economic crisis, presented a powerful vision of imminent collapse in the global economic system and the consequences of this. Many participants found this message profoundly disturbing – to the extent that organisers changed the planned programme to include a public airing of views and concerns over the issue. Stoneleigh's specific predictions have not borne out: through mechanisms like quantitative easing, the global financial system has shown remarkably obduracy, at least in the short term (and notwithstanding the prospect that such 'band-aid' measures will worsen the long-term consequences). But the effect of this information on an audience of committed, seasoned, well-informed climate activists shows the depth of our psychological and cultural attachments to the conditions associated with constant economic growth.

Janis Dickinson has written about climate change denial as an immortality project: the truth about climate change, she argues, is so shocking, so unthinkable, that to accept it implies a shattering of identity too difficult for many to bear.[255] Transition's emphasis on 'Heart and Soul': the 'Inner Transition' demanded by the needs to accept the loss of the familiar, to assume personal responsibility to take action, and for ongoing emotional support when experiencing these, is in great part based on recognition of this. Perhaps even greater trauma lies in acknowledging the need for radical transformation in our economic system since this

252 MacKinnon, D., & K. D. Derickson, 2012. From resilience to resourcefulness: A critique of resilience policy and activism. *Progress in Human Geography* 37(2): 253-270. Cote, M., & A. J. Nightingale, 2012. Resilience thinking meets social theory: Situating social change in socio-ecological systems (SES) research. *Progress in Human Geography* 36(4): 475-489.

253 Bailey, I., R. Hopkins & G. Wilson, 2010. Some things old, some things new: The spatial representations and politics of change of the peak oil relocalisation movement. *Geoforum* 41(4): 595-605. Brangwyn, B., pers. comm., Nov 28th 2013. Henfrey & Giangrande, this volume.

254 *http://www.reconomyproject.org/*

255 Dickinson, J. L. 2009. The people paradox: self-esteem striving, immortality ideologies, and human response to climate change. *Ecology and Society* 14(1): 34. [online] URL: *http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss1/art34/* Accessed October 15 2012. Also see Norgaard, K.M., 2011. *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

requires not just acceptance of the possibility of drastic (but for now and for those in the affluent global north, still perceived as somehow distant and delayed) changes in the future, but of change in our material conditions of existence right now.

Translated to the stage of international politics, this immortality project manifests itself in programmes that, despite the evidence to the contrary, present economic growth as the solution to climate change rather than as an underlying cause of it. In part this is due to perceived vested interests, whether of us as individuals, of the majority in Western society, or of the wealthiest one percent in it. For while increased inequality is to everyone's disadvantage,[256] only in a growing economy can the rich and powerful increase their wealth while simultaneously increasing others' access to materials goods, or increasing spending on social control, in sufficient measure to diffuse or control dissent.[257] Such denial also reflects macro-economic constraints. Economies in which money is created largely through debt are only stable under conditions of growth.[258] More fundamentally, it reflects crises of belief and imagination: a world without economic growth has been made quite literally unthinkable not just to economic elites, but to the majority of ordinary people whose livelihoods depend on participation in that economic system.[259]

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Carbon lock-in, as Gregory Unruh termed our systemic addiction to fossil fuels, is more than the set of linked technical, institutional and political interdependencies he described. It is a cultural phenomenon - an incredibly deep-rooted one - resting upon a political economy that has achieved a status equivalent to religion, in terms of the dogmatic faith of its protagonists, and in its material necessity for followers who are rendered uncritical through 'education', repetition, and (effectively) indoctrination.[260] These linked conceptual and structural depend-

256 Wilkinson, R. & K. Pickett, 2009. *The Spirit Level.* London: Penguin.

257 Douthwaite, R., 1999. *The Growth Illusion.* Second edition, revised. Totnes: Green Books.

258 Jackson, T., 2009. *Prosperity Without Growth.* London: Earthscan.

259 Eisenstein, C., 2011. *Sacred Economics.* Berkeley: Evolver Editions.

260 Jackson, T., 2006. Consuming Paradise? Towards a socio-cultural psychology of Sustainable Consumption. In Jackson, T. (ed.), *Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption.* London: Earthscan. Filk, R., 2009. Consuming ourselves to death: the anthropology of consumer culture and climate change. *In* Crate, S.A. & M. Nuttall, 2009. *Anthropology and Climate Change: from Encounters to Actions.* Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

encies on growth are an example of what Anne Wilson Schaef has characterised as process addictions, manifest at the level of society as a whole.[261] In her analysis, everyone within this society to some degree displays and suffers from personal symptoms of this addiction: including the recovering addicts who recognise and oppose the current state of affairs. Transition has adopted this language of addiction and recovery as a central concept, and the need for inner change - both individual/psychological and collective/cultural - as a core principle.

Inner transition is perhaps what more than anything sets Transition aside from other forms of environmental and social activism with a more single-minded emphasis on the material and practical aspects of change. Transition makes the use of the imagination central to its practical method, particularly through the use of backcasting.[262] This invites participants to imagine a more positive future for their community, free of dependency upon fossil fuels, and work back from there to identify the immediate steps necessary to realise it. This is a powerful antidote to capitalism's control over the imagination. It frees the imagination to set goals and measures that inevitably prove incompatible with capitalism's basic premises: community-scale projects of a variety of forms, institutionalised in inclusive and democratic structures of ownership and decision-making.

In practical terms, the projects, organisational forms and internal cultures of Transition initiatives represent an exercise in creating new commons. While the creation of commons is innovative in this context, it is also the rediscovery of a set of principles that have been in active use for millennia, and in direct opposition to the expansion of capitalism since its very origins. It thus links Transition and other movements for building economic and social alternatives with the struggles of peoples marginal to the global economy who are already organising their economic lives around common property regimes. This emergent global commons movement represents a collective grassroots response to climate change incompatible, both ideologically and materially, with the climate securitisation agenda.

4.2.2. Climate and the Defence of Commons

One way of understanding commons is as the relationships that constitute place, and the care we need to take to ensure that all (human and non- human) aspects of this place flourish. People in the Global North may understand this approach best as the attitude we bring to being at home. One Ogiek man from Mt Elgon in Kenya managed to communicate this depth of relationship to place by describing how when their community was forced off their common lands and forced to live elsewhere it felt to him like being forced to leave his wife and children and being given a different family.

A more technical understanding of commons is that they are land or other resources under the effective ownership of groups of co-users, who manage them collectively by creating and implementing agreed rules of access and appropriate usage, monitoring actual behaviour

261 Wilson Schaef, A., 1987. *When Society Becomes an Addict*. San Fransisco: Harper Row.

262 *http://www.thenaturalstep.org/backcasting.* Accessed October 15th 2012.

for conformity with these rules, enforcing appropriate sanctions when they are broken, and changing them in the light of experience.[263]

Globally, the scale of common land is vast despite successive waves of privatisation and dispossession, states often seeing commons as public lands for the government to dispose of as it wishes. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa communities hold around 1.6 billion hectares under customary laws, around 75 percent of the total land area.[264] These global commons embrace a vast range of land management regimes, based on complex collective decision-making processes subtly adapted to specific local ecological, social and cultural conditions.[265] This matching of institutional and ecological diversity, known as biocultural diversity, is a vital aspect of human adaptation to different habitats.[266] Common property regimes are in every documented case a key element of sustainability and resilience in resource use.[267]

Many indigenous populations have historical experience of climatic change[268] and the negotiation of extreme weather events.[269] The decision-making procedures associated with their common property institutions both enable and reflect collective learning from these events. The flexibility of these regimes in the face of changing or unpredictable conditions is an essential aspect of the people's adaptability, and hence the resilience of the social-ecological systems of which they are a part.[270] Each is a set of rules and procedures fine-tuned to the details of its social, cultural and environmental context that incorporates mechanisms for self-evaluation and adjustment in responses to changes in this local context. These localised commons and the global biocultural diversity they support represent a collective cultural commons that will be humanity's main source of ideas and knowledge serving to help us negotiate climate change and other major environmental disturbances.

263 Ostrom, E., 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge University Press. Bromley, D.W. (ed.), 1992. *Making the Commons Work.* San Fransisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies.

264 Alden Wily, L., 2011. 'The Law is to Blame' Taking a Hard Look at the Vulnerable Status of Customary Land Rights in Africa. *Development and Change* 42(3).

265 Ostrom, E., 2005. *Understanding Institutional Diversity.* Princeton University Press.

266 Maffi, L. (ed.) 2001. *On Biocultural Diversity.* Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

267 Berkes, F. (ed.), 1990. *Common Property Resources.* Berkes, F. & C. Folke (eds.), 1998. *Linking Social and Ecological Systems. Management practices and social mechanisms for building resilience.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

268 Grove, R.H., 1997. *Ecology, Climate and Empire.* Cambridge: White Horse Press.

269 Firth, R., 1959. Critical Pressures on Food Supply and their Economic Effects. *In Social Change in Tikopia.* London: Allen and Unwin. Waddell, E., 1975. How the Enga Cope with Frost: Climatic Perturbations in the Central Highlands of New Guinea. *Human Ecology* 3(4): 249-273. Both reprinted in Dove, M.R., and C. Carpenter (eds.), 2008. *Environmental Anthropology: a Historical Reader.* Oxford: Blackwell.

270 Berkes, F. 2008. *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management.* Second edition, revised. London: Routledge. Salick, J., & A. Byg, 2007. *Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change.* Oxford: Tyndall Centre.

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Mainstream responses to climate change that perpetuate capitalism's onslaught against both specific commons and the global cultural commons emergent upon them, systematically undermine our capacity as a species to respond in other, more constructive and effective ways. An instructive example is Aboriginal Australian fire burning regimes. These create highly ecologically variegated landscapes that support higher biodiversity and reduce the likelihood of large-scale fires. When they were banned by the authorities, biodiversity plummeted as landscape matured to a uniform condition, which also allowed fires to spread unabated. In 2009, corporations began paying Aboriginal rangers millions of dollars to re-establish their fire regime practices, through the West Arnhem Land Fire Abatement Project. In its first year the areas susceptible to burning reduced from a previous average of 37 percent to only 16 percent of forest. Over the first four years this generated what the project described as a saving of 488,000 tons of carbon dioxide.[271] Of course people in commons regimes would simply never abstract out singular benefits like this; for it is this very pattern of treating elements in isolation (as markets are prone to do) that has led to the social and ecological disasters generated by the enclosure and destruction of commons-based regimes.

Current scientific understanding of the role of commons is markedly at odds with historical and even contemporary attitudes prevalent in capitalist societies. The latter often refer to Hardin's notorious 'tragedy of the commons',[272] although Hardin himself is reported later to have acknowledged that he had confused commons with open-access regimes, or unregulated commons.[273] In reality, whether in relation to a stretch of river or coast for fishing, or to an area of forest or grazing land, a prerequisite for the development of a common property regime is very clear ***demarcation*** of who can and cannot use the resource, and on what terms. On this basis, intricate and flexible systems of rights and responsibilities evolve, including mechanisms for ***incorporating*** new co-users of the common pool resource who are willing to abide by the ***reciprocal rules*** required to maintain it.[274]

271 *http://savanna.cdu.edu.au/information/arnhem_fire_project.html.* Accessed May 3rd 2014.

272 Hardin, G., 1968. The Tragedy of the Commons. *Science* 280: 682-683.

273 Kirkby, J., P. O'Keefe & L. Timberlake (eds.), 1995 'The Commons: where the community has authority' in *The Earthscan eader in sustainable development.* London: Earthscan.

274 Ostrom, E., 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action.* Cambridge University Press. Kenrick, J., 2006. 'Equalising Processes, Processes of Discrimination and the Forest People of Central Africa', in Widlock, T. & W Tadesse (eds.) *Property and Equality: Vol. 2 Encapsulation, Commercialization, Discrimination.* Oxford: Berghahn.

The self-organising nature of commons, and their consequent need for non-interference by external authorities, has often led states and other powerful actors to undermine them: sometime purposefully, sometimes through ignorance.[275] Removal of commons regimes serves several purposes. Denial of the existence of other ways of organising bolsters the ideological power of states and markets. Appropriation of land for other (profit-generating) purposes and the people on it as sources of cheap labour both boosts industrial systems and makes land and people more tractable to central regulation and control.

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This transfer of people, goods and services from the common pool into the monetary realm, initially via enclosures and land clearances in seventeenth century Britain, was central to capitalism's early establishment and subsequent, ongoing, worldwide expansion.[276] A Yarralin Aboriginal man, Hobbles, described how following the massacre of over 95 percent of Yarralin people in the Victoria River Delta between 1883 and 1939, the survivors were forced into slave labour at the cattle stations established on their land.[277] It continues apace as corporations supported by states take land and other resources from those whose commons regimes still sustain livelihoods based on farming, hunting, fishing and/or foraging.[278]

However, commons systems rarely completely disappear, and can often be revived or enhanced. Box 2 describes how Ogiek people in Kenya are resisting eviction from their ancestral lands by documenting and formalising customary laws and practices, and making these the basis of cooperation with state authorities who share their concern for protection of the resource base.

275 Scott, J.C., 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Omprove the Human Condition have Failed.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press. Graeber, D., 2004. *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology.* Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.

276 Fairlie, S., 2009. A short history of enclosure in Britain. *The Land* 7: 16-31. Tate, W.E., 1967. *The English Village Community and the Enclosure Movements.* London: Victor Gollancz.

277 Rose, D., 2000. *Dingo Makes Us Human.* Cambridge University Press.

278 Geary, K., 2012. *Our Land: Our Lives.* Oxfam Briefing Note. Oxford: Oxfam International.

BOX 2: COMMONS REGIMES AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IN KENYA

The Ogiek of Mount Elgon in Kenya have been evicted many times from their ancestral lands at Chepkitale. They have recently put into writing the bye-laws which govern their commons, among other reasons to explain to conservationists who have sought to expropriate their land that the Ogiek themselves are best placed to ensure the land's well-being. They explain that:

> *"We have never conserved. It is the way we live that conserves. These customary bye-laws we have had forever, but we have not written them down until now."*

The bye-laws were finalised in an intense community process of mapping and dialogue. In a sense, they simply document how the Ogiek have organised themselves and managed their lands since time immemorial, but as one community member pointed out, "When you write things to say this is what we should do then you get community members who disagree and you have to decide what to do."

For example, the bye-laws banned charcoal burning, prompting passionate debate: especially by those who hadn't attended meetings. Several people asked, "Why should we protect the forest when others are expanding their fields into it and burning it to sell as charcoal? Why shouldn't we also benefit from forest destruction?" In subsequent dialogue the overwhelming majority agreed the forests are vital as cattle pastures and for beekeeping. Their conservation depended on majority agreement not to destroy a common resource for short-term advantage and requiring dissenters to abide by the consensus or face sanctions.

The Ogiek next sought to inform various authorities of these bye-laws and to seek their support in implementing them. The District Commissioner applauded the community for being stronger on conservation matters than any other authority. When Ogiek community scouts began to arrest illegal charcoal burners, this prompted the Kenya Forest Service to do the same.

Unfortunately, this insightful community is simultaneously involved in an ongoing legal struggle to reclaim lands gazetted by the Government in 2000, making the Ogiek living there 'illegal trespassers'.[279] The Ogiek are hoping the Government will settle out of court: acknowledge Ogiek ownership of their commons and work hand in hand with the community to demonstrate that human rights based conservation is a new way of explaining an age old idea that if you look after the land it will look after you.

279 *http://whakatane-mechanism.org/kenya.* Accessed May 1st 2014.

With dark irony, excuses for these land thefts are often framed in terms of poverty alleviation. Proponents draw attention to rises in monetary income, often from close to zero, for the dispossessed - who have had no other recourse for survival than to seek poorly paid wage labour. However, purely fiscal analysis obscures the destruction of their real wealth, which was the ability to provide for their families sustainably while having the option to engage in monetary transactions to cover essential costs such as school fees. Speaking in September 2012 to Vai communities whose farmlands, rice swamps, fishing creeks and sacred forests had been bulldozed by a Malaysian palm oil company, the President of the Liberian Senate said, "Our actual intention is to change your lifestyle from farmers to workers so you no longer grow cassava or rice but work for money to buy rice and cassava that has been grown by someone else... We say to you: no longer will you have land to grow rice, cassava and peppers."

4.2.3. Community Ownership or REDD? Contrasting Commons and Commodity Solutions to Deforestation

Another clear example of the contrasts between attempts to solve global problems that seek respectively to protect/extend commons and to enclose them is evident in approaches to protecting the forests of the Global South. A commons approach would protect forests through ensuring protection of the rights of local communities, and hence through protecting their management practices and their stake in the forest as not just a resource but also as home. The politically dominant approach is based on the assumption that the best way to reduce rates of deforestation is through putting forests under the control of large conservation bodies, corporations and governments, for example through REDD projects that seek to make the carbon in those forests a tradable commodity.

The quantitative evidence points to the efficacy of a commons-based approach. Comparison of 40 protected areas and 33 community-managed forests in 16 countries across Latin America, Africa and Asia showed average annual deforestation rates in protected areas were six times higher than in forest managed by local communities.[280] Research for the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group found that: "In Latin America, where indigenous areas can be identified, they are found to have extremely large impacts on reducing deforestation".[281] For example, Brazil has a large network of indigenous territories representing 20 percent of the legal Amazon. Only 1.3 percent of total deforestation in the Amazon occurs inside these territories, which are 98.4 percent preserved. In contrast, government ownership of forests is associated with unsustainable forest use. This is because when local users perceive insecurity in their rights (because the central government owns the forest land), they seek to maximise short-term livelihood benefits through fear they will lose these benefits to others.

Part of the reason why REDD was thought to be a cheap option in the fight against climate chaos,

280 *http://www.cifor.org/online-library/browse/view-publication/publication/3461.html.* Accessed October 15th 2012.

281 Nelson A. & K.M. Chomitz, 2011. Effectiveness of Strict vs. Multiple Use Protected Areas in Reducing Tropical Forest Fires: A Global Analysis Using Matching Methods. *PLoS ONE* 6(8): e22722. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0022722.

was because it was seen as – in effect – being about controlling poor people's behaviour. If the drivers of deforestation are recognised as being the large players then there is a very different economics. Swedish research has shown that payments for abstaining from converting forests to – for example – oil palm plantations simply cannot reach a level that would make this alternative more profitable than the plantation. Clearly, the cheapest, most efficient and most reliable way to protect forests is to support the recognition of customary land tenure and the protection of sustainable land use in the forests of the Global South.

Depending on how it is implemented, REDD+ therefore presents a real danger of promoting a 'fortress conservation' approach that further destroys commons by excluding and marginalising forest peoples, at the same time as it can potentially provide opportunities for the recognition of rights, and securing of community forests, through international scrutiny and national tenure reform.

Marginal peoples have not been passive in the face of threats of this type. Wapichan people in southern Guyana, awarded title to only part of the land area claimed in a petition to the national Amerindian Lands Commission in 1969,[282] recently released a comprehensive survey of their use of the area, reasserting their original claim on the grounds of forest stewardship and UN recognition of people's right to self-determination.[283]

4.2.4. Transition, Tradition, and Rediscovery of the Commons

As touched upon above, the term 'the commons' can refer to a far broader range of resources and associated activities than just use of land and natural resources. Kenrick has previously distinguished ***community commons*** including natural resources and shared community institutions (such as those for resource allocation and dispute settlement, child care and care for the elderly, health care and community provided education) from ***cultural commons*** such as literature, music, arts, design, film, video, television, radio, information, open source software and collectively created and maintained internet resources such as Wikipedia.[284] Far more so than community commons, cultural commons co-exist with capitalism in a range of complicated interrelationships, perhaps because the industries involved are more sharply aware that they are sources of flexibility and creativity that the corporate world itself can not match, but that are essential for its survival in a fast-changing world.[285] One of the fatal contradictions at the heart of capitalism is that it is reliant on both community commons and cultural commons. Many of its costs are externalised upon environments that consist entirely of communities of relationships, others onto people's home lives, non-monetary exchanges,

282 Henfrey, T., 1999. Land Conflicts and Cultural Change in Southern Guyana. Pp. 328-333 in Grenand, P. & F. Grenand (eds.), 1999. *Les Peuples des Forêts Tropicales Aujord'hui. Volume IV: Volume Regional Caraibes*. Brussels: EC DG8.

283 *http://www.forestpeoples.org/topics/customary-sustainable-use/publication/2012/wapichan-people-guyana-make-community-based-agreem.* Access October 15th 2012.

284 Kenrick, J., 2012. The Climate and the Commons. In Davey, B. (ed.), *Sharing for Survival*. Cloughjordan: FEASTA. *http://www.sharingforsurvival.org/index.php/chapter-2-the-climate-and-the-commons/.*

285 Leadbeater, C., 2008. *We-Think.* London: Profile Books.

and the emotional support that enables people to continue operating in hierarchical work places.

The importance to Transition of both community and cultural commons is deep-seated. It builds upon long-standing recognition of the importance of cultural creativity in radical social movements,[286] and radical environmentalism in particular.[287] It also draws upon Transition's roots in permaculture, which emphasises the importance of designing productive habitats and associated management regimes in ways that reflect the unique details of the local ecology.[288] This place-specificity naturally extends to human dimensions such as social institutions, cultural practices, and personal histories,[289] and how these are reflected in the built and residential environment.[290] Permaculture's growth as a movement can thus be considered a global grassroots experiment in the deliberate creation of biocultural diversity.

Permaculture's growth as a movement can thus be considered a global grassroots experiment in the deliberate creation of biocultural diversity.

As a 'feral ecology',[291] permaculture democratises the interpretation and application of ecology far beyond the conventional limits of science. It does this largely through the creation of cultural commons that reflect the movement's collective understanding about how to organise society along ecological principles in ways that reflect its basic ethical commitments to environmental and social justice[292]. These cultural commons include literature (much of it distributed freely as electronic media, regardless of its copyright status), formal and informal organisational structures, pedagogy, customs, social networks, and practitioners' knowledge. To the extent that it makes sense to differentiate Transition from permaculture, it is perhaps in

286 McKay, G., 1996. *Senseless Acts of Beauty: Cultures of Resistance Since the Sixties.* London: Verso.

287 Butler, B., 1996. The tree, the tower, and the shaman: the material culture of resistance of the No M11 Link Roads Protest of Wanstead and Leytonstone. *Journal of Material Culture* 1(3): 337-363. Guattari, F., 2000 (1989). *The Three Ecologies.* Translated by I. Pindar and P. Sutton. London: Athlone.

288 Mollison, B., 1988. *Permaculture: a Designer's Manual.* Tagari Publications. Whitefield, P., 2009. *The Living Landscape.* East Meon: Permanent Publications.

289 Macnamara, L., 2012. *People and Permaculture.* East Meon: Permanent Publications.

290 Alexander, C., 1978. *A Pattern Language.* Berkeley: Center for Environmental Structure. Pickerill, J., 2013. Permaculture in practice: low impact development in Britain. In Lockyer, J., & J. Veteto (eds.), *Localizing Environmental Anthropology: Bioregionalism, Permaculture, and Ecovillage Design for a Sustainable Future* New York: Berghahn Books.

291 Morris, F.A., 2012. When Ecology Goes Feral. *Wageningen Journal of Life Sciences* 59: 7-9.

292 The three core ethics of permaculture are most commonly referred to as 'Earth Care', 'People Care', and Fair Shares. E.g. see Macnamara, L., 2012. *People and Permaculture.* East Meon: Permanent Publications. Pp. 4-7.

how Transition stresses how peak oil and climate change give this project increased urgency and impetus. The main practical consequence – aside from perhaps more emphasis on urban as well as rural action[293] - is more systematic attention to the creation of new cultural and community com mons as a core method and goal.

Transition initiatives are as distinctive and varied as the communities in which they are based, but their development tends to exhibit a number of common 'patterns' or 'ingredients'.[294] A typical initial focus is on creating common pools: of shared understanding and knowledge through awareness-raising; of basic infrastructure for communication through harvesting email addresses and setting up mailing lists and websites (themselves usually based on open source platforms, among the most important recent cultural commons), identifying suitable meeting and event spaces, and agreeing processes for organising meetings, reaching decisions, allocating responsibilities, and welcoming new members to the group. A group may later formalise these (although many choose not to), when it adopts a written constitution or legally registers as an organisation. Other early activity – which may have preceded organisational development, or follow or run alongside it - often focuses on creating or improving physical community commons through visible manifestations such as gardens, orchards, renewable energy projects, community bakeries and other enterprises, which add value to existing community spaces or bring new ones into being. Further activity – at present representing Transition's cutting edge - extends and deepens this physical common pool, for example by creating complementary currencies; establishing renewable energy co-ops with membership open to everyone in the community; initiating new community-based social enterprises; and securing access to land for alternative forms of food production rooted in permaculture and agroecology, housing, business premises and other forms of new low carbon community infrastructure.

Innovation may take place anywhere in the network. As might be expected, Transition Town Totnes has pioneered much activity, and along with Hereford and Brixton coordinates national work on the economic implications of localisation. Portobello Energy Descent and Land Reform Group, in addition to its work on land reform, has developed a community market, an orchard and community renewables. Community arts are central in the activities of Transition Town Tooting in South London, a source of inspiration to Transition initiatives elsewhere. Transition Norwich has pioneered work on low carbon lifestyles – connecting people who are committed to making the changes immediately in their own lives, for example by committing to not buying anything new or not owning a private car. Members of Transition Liverpool and Transition Durham with professional backgrounds in academic research set up mechanisms to improve connections with academic researchers.[295] Involvement of Transition

293 Lockyer, J., 2010. Intentional community carbon reduction and climate change action: from ecovillages to transition towns. In M. Peters, S. Fudge, T. Jackson (eds.) *Low Carbon Communities: Imaginative Approaches to Combating Climate Change Locally.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

294 Hopkins, R., 2011. *The Transition Companion.* Totnes: Green Books.

295 *http://www.transitionresearchnetwork.org*

Figure 4.2.2 – *Celebration as an Integral Part of Community Building. Credit: Gesa Maschkowski.*

groups in community energy, with Bath, Brixton and Lewes particularly prominent, has often drawn on resources developed outside the movement itself.

As Transition has grown into an international movement, local responses to the very different conditions experienced outside the UK have taken very different shapes (Box 3). This diversity increases the range of responses available to all Transition groups to the likely consequences of climate change and further economic crisis. Transition Network, along with various national and regional hubs, coordinates the exchange of news and information about these activities via its website and other communications mechanisms, and organises collaborative events and projects such as Reconomy, which involves several initiatives, projects and organisations in the UK and internationally and examines relationships between transition and business.

BOX 3: INTERNATIONAL DIVERSITY OF TRANSITION

Transition has become an international movement, and very different approaches have emerged to reflect local and regional circumstances. In Portugal, for example, many people and organisations have experienced the effects of the financial crisis as a situation of 'peak money'.[296] The scarcity of money is regarded as both a situation to which it is necessary to adapt and an opportunity for innovation.

Filipa Pimentel of Transition Network has described how Portuguese Transition groups enact the idea of the 'gift economy',[297] organising events on zero financial budgets and without requiring either cash donations from participants or external funding. This approach obliges groups to rely on their existing skills, knowledge and resources, highlights and helps strengthen these, and additionally ensures local provisioning of both material goods and non-material assets. Practical activities include the regeneration of neglected sites owned by public bodies such as universities and local authorities as community spaces for leisure and food production. The DIY, participatory approach is creating new knowledge commons, for example at the Ajudada event in June 2013, which assembled over 450 people from all walks of life to discuss what a people-centred economy would look like and how to make it happen.[298]

In Brazil, Transition first took root in favelas, slum areas on the margins of major cities such as Brasilandia in Brasilia. In these cash-poor communities, issues such as food security and diet-related nutritional deficiencies, violence, and access to basic health and educational services are current and major concerns. Solutions include mapping open spaces in the city and turning them into community gardens where fruit and vegetables are grown for consumption within the neighbourhood, barter markets, a community bakery, and 'upcycling' businesses making bags out of old advertising banners.[299]

One might wonder what all these initiatives have to do with anticipating and helping plan for times of climate crisis? The key is that they are focused on building relationships of place in the present. The climate is rarely the central focus: such a focus on a devastating problem tends to paralyse. Rather the focus is on how the community can restore the commons. Put another way: how can the community kick the habit of consumption and competition that is promoted as the only game in town?

296 *http://transitionculture.org/2012/04/27/a-report-on-peak-money-and-economic-resilience-a-transition-network-one-day-conversation/.* Accessed November 27th 2013.

297 *http://transitionculture.org/2012/05/08/filipa-pimentel-on-transition-in-portugal-we-try-to-reduce-money-exchange-in-everything-we-do/.* Accessed November 27th 2013.

298 *http://www.ajudada.org.* Accessed November 27th 2013.

299 *http://transitionculture.org/2013/02/07/what-transition-looks-like-in-brazil/.* Accessed November 27th 2013. Hopkins, R., 2013, *The Power of Just Doing Stuff*, pp. 113-4.

Experiences of Transition initiatives show the links between the creation of new commons and long-term projects of building resilience. This is sometimes true even where local groups have apparently lost momentum or subsided, and particularly common in places where economic contraction has significantly affected local livelihoods. One Transition initiative in mid-Wales set up a market stall for domestic vegetable growers with excess produce, which acts as a common pool trading point. The quantity of trade grew greatly after 2009, when increasing numbers of people began selling produce to compensate for unemployment or reduced incomes, and buyers experienced more reliable supplies and stable prices. At the same time, a garden share scheme transformed private gardens into common growing spaces, allowing greater numbers of people to produce for both home use and sale.

The creation, extension and cultivation of community and cultural commons also provides a link between Transition's focus on local action and activity at broader scales.

Elsewhere, car share schemes – transferring vehicles from private to semi-public status – have proven vital in maintaining acceptable levels of mobility in rural areas with limited public transport provision. Energy efficiency measures and switching from oil heating to locally sourced woodfuel have insulated people from the effects of rising oil prices, based on a cultural commons of knowledge about technologies and their uses.[300] All of these are examples where people have created new commons in order to build resilience to peak oil; all have later proven sources of resilience against economic instability.

4.2.5. Beyond Localisation: Transition and Global Climate Justice

The creation, extension and cultivation of community and cultural commons also provides a link between Transition's focus on local action and activity at broader scales. Although much Transition-related discourse equates resilience with localisation,[301] true resilience is a product of interactions among functioning structures at multiple scales:[302] at broad scales emergent

300 Examples in this paragraph were reported by participants in an open space session entitled, 'Are small and slow solutions resilient in extraordinary times' at the Transition Network conference, Battersea Arts Centre, London, on 15th September 2012 – thanks to them for sharing and giving permission to report on them here.

301 Haxeltine, A., & G. Seyfang, 2009. *Transitions for the People: theory and practice of 'Transition' and 'Resilience' in the UK's Transition movement.* Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research Working Paper 134.

302 Gunderson, L. & C.S. Holling (eds.), 2002. Sustainability and panarchies. Pp. 63-102 in Gunderson and Holling (eds.) *Panarchy.* Washington DC: Island Press.

upon diverse local situations,[303] and at local levels reliant on larger scales providing suitable contexts for adaptation to change.[304] If the prosperity of one locality is predicated on undermining resilience elsewhere, it is not in fact resilient to changes in the conditions of political economy, and indeed ecology, that allow such exploitation.

Transition's hopeful view of possible futures thus depends on the belief that we can only achieve them if we move towards them together. It is increasingly obvious that we also need to know what we are up against: that in some sense we are trying to create islands of cooperation in a viciously competitive system. Hope and political awareness are thus in synergy: the best way to motivate people to work together to create new commons is to focus on the positive and immediate benefits of this collective action: both within communities of place and through networks of solidarity and cooperation at broader scales.

The global economic system's current fragility due to its dependence on fiscal growth and externalised environmental and social costs is becoming ever more apparent as global limits are reached. For this reason, the current emphasis within Transition on localisation makes more sense viewed as a necessary corrective to excess globalisation than an end in itself. Transitioned communities could not long survive against broader backgrounds of climate chaos and conflicts arising from uneven distribution of resources and the human capacities to make use of them. Their resilience depends not only on the properties of localised production systems, but on emergent capacities to buffer variation in these through material, intellectual and cultural interchange and other forms of mutual aid. A community of any size is only as resilient as its nearest neighbour, which is one reason Transition was conceived as a replicable model. The Transition vision is not, and never has been, one of gated eco-communities isolated from the wider world, but is one of maximum local self-reliance as a basis for solidarity and cooperation, and identifying the appropriate scales for productive activities not feasible at local levels.[305] As a movement, it is neither discrete nor well-defined, but overlaps, intersects and links with numerous others. It contributes to creating and strengthening cultural and community commons far greater in significance and extent than its own efforts could achieve in isolation.

For example, PEDAL Portobello Transition Town's focus on land reform partly derives from the same basic considerations of equity that have motivated UK-based campaigns on land access for several centuries.[306] It is further inspired by the broader Scottish movement for community land buyouts, which have positive benefits for community resilience,[307] and those

303 Berkes, F. & C. Folke. 2002. Back to the future: ecosystem dynamics and local knowledge. Pp. 121-146 in Gunderson, L. & C.S. Holling (eds.), *Panarchy.* Washington DC: Island Press.

304 Berkes, F., J. Colding & C. Folke (eds.), 2003. *Navigating Social and Ecological Systems. Building resilience for complexity and change.* Cambridge University Press.

305 Hopkins, R., 2010. *Localisation and Resilience at the Local level: the Case of Transition Town Totnes (Devon, UK).* Ph.D. thesis, Plymouth University.

306 Shoard, M., 1997. *This Land is Our Land: the Struggle for Britain's Countryside.* London: Gaia Books.

307 Skerrat, S., 2011. *Community Land Ownership and Community Resilience.* Edinburgh: Scottish Agricultural College.

of indigenous groups and other users seeking self-determination through legally sanctioned rights to operate common property regimes. The protection of existing land-based commons, and creation of new ones, and the consequent resistance to increasing consolidation of land ownership and hence access to productive resources, is perhaps the most fundamental of all the outward-facing tasks that Transition and other social justice movements are currently undertaking.

Another way in which Transition practice is moving beyond localism is that around community ownership and management of energy-generating infrastructure. This at one point received significant state support in the UK,[308] where it was initially viewed largely as a means to promote public acceptance of renewable energy technologies,[309] and more recently as a remedy for the contraction of state services associated with the 'localism' agenda of the coalition government that came to power in 2010.[310] More important is the extent to which it increases the potential for active dissent against dominant energy security and climate security agendas.[311] An emerging 'energy commons' allows co-users to express, in their choices of generation technologies and allocation of energy, revenues and other benefits, their own values rather than those of powerful corporate actors.[312] Its existence has demonstrated positive consequences in terms of both empowerment[313] and resilience.[314] Much of the new cultural commons of documentation, experience, knowledge and expertise that supports this arose outside the Transition movement itself: in community renewable energy movements in Denmark,[315] Sweden[316] and Austria,[317] and further back the energy co-operatives responsible for

308 *https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-energy-strategy.* Accessed May 3rd 2014.

309 Walker, G., Hunter, S., Devine-Wright, P. and Evans, B., Fay, H., 2007. Harnessing Community Energies: Explaining and Evaluating Community-Based Localism in Renewable Energy in the UK. *Global Environmental Politics* 7(2): 64-82.

310 Dawson, W., McCallum, N., Chapple, A., Unwin, E., Lloyd, S. and Fletcher, L., 2011. *Funding Revolution: A guide to establishing and running low carbon community revolving funds.* London: Forum for the Future and Bates, Wells & Braithwaite Solicitors.

311 Abramsky, K., 2007. Accelerated and far-reaching transition to renewable energies. Why, what, how and by whom? Building New Alliances. World Council for Renewable Energy. Available at: *http://www.wcre.de/en/images/stories/pdf/Abramsky_Accelerated_Transition_apr07.pdf.* Walker, G. & N. Cass, 2008. Carbon reduction, 'the public' and renewable energy: engaging with socio-technical configurations. *Area* 39(4): 458-469. Butler, C., S. Darby, T. Henfrey, R. Hoggett & N. Hole, 2012. People and Communities in Energy Security in Butler, C. & J. Watson (eds.) *New Challenges in Energy Security – the UK in a Multipolar World.* London: Palgrave MacMillan.

312 Wolsink, M., 2011. The research agenda on social acceptance of distributed generation in smartgrids: Renewable as common pool resources. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 16(1): 822-836.

313 Hathaway, K., 2010. Community Power Empowers. Making Community, Co-operative and Municipal Renewable Energy Happen – lessons from across Europe. London: Urban Forum.

314 Gubbins, N., 2010. The Role of Community Energy Schemes in Supporting Community Resilience. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Harnmeijer, A., J. Harnmeijer, N. McEwen & V. Bhopal, 2012. 'A report on community renewable energy in Scotland', Sustainable Community Energy Network, *http://bit.ly/2gTJSzP*.

315 Van Est, R., 1999. *Winds of Change. A comparative study of the politics of wind energy innovation in California and Denmark.* Utrecht: International Books.

316 Henning A., 2000. *Ambiguous artefacts. Solar collectors in Swedish contexts. On processes of cultural modification.* Stockholm University: Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology 44.

317 Ornetzeder, M. & H. Rohracher, 2006. User-led Innovations and Participation Processes: Lessons from sustainable energy technologies. *Energy Policy* 34(2): 138-150.

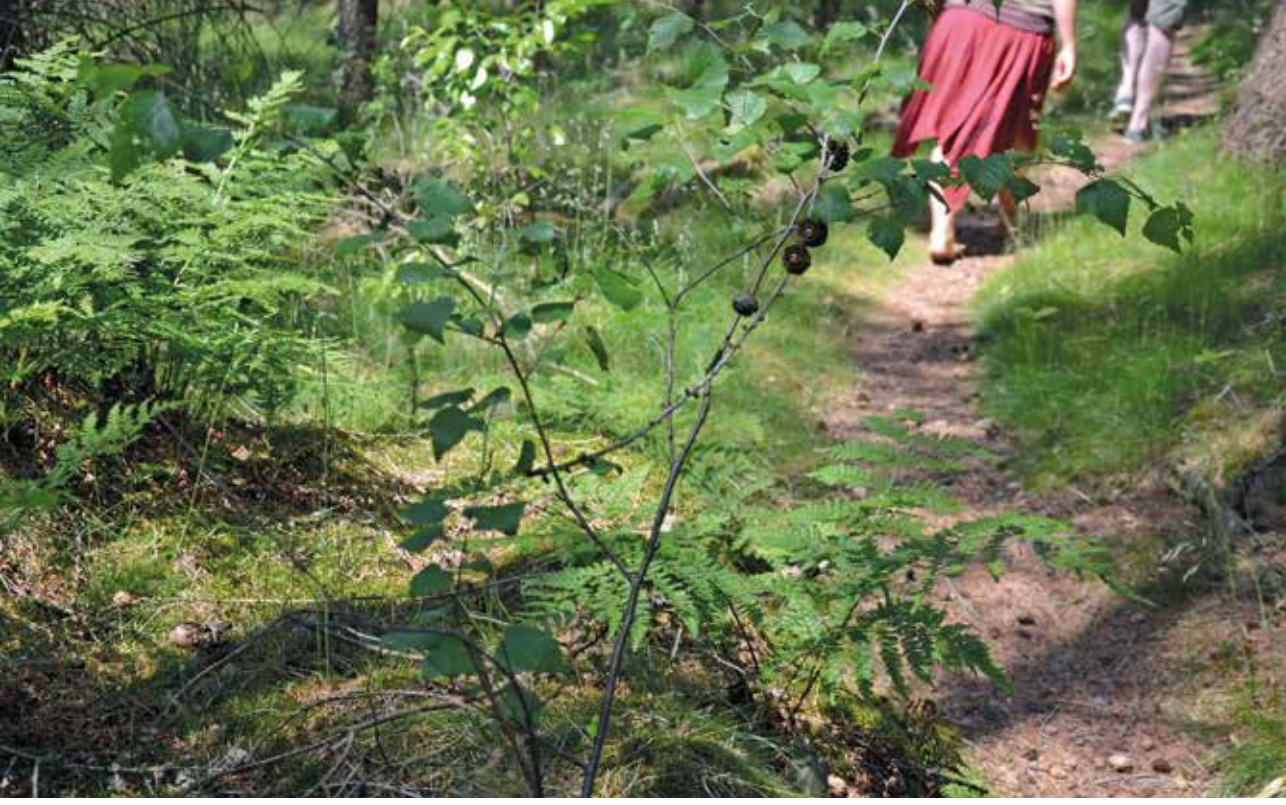

Figure 4.2.3 – *Community Forest, Lebensgarten, Steyerberg. Credit: Gesa Maschkowski.*

electrification of rural areas across much of the US. Across Europe, key pioneers adapted this knowledge to their national and local contexts.[318] For example, in England and Wales projects such as Baywind Energy Cooperative, Awel Amen Tawe, and West Oxford Community Energy created a common pool of nationally relevant knowledge on which similar projects, many originating in Transition initiatives, have drawn upon this and in turn enriched it as they break new ground and share their learning.[319] The effectiveness of this cultural commons in supporting the establishment and growth of new physical commons (in the form of energy-generating capacity) depends on critical interactions across scales.[320] Particularly important are the existence of suitable financing mechanisms, legal conditions and revenue structures.[321]

318 Hathaway, K., 2010. *Community Power Empowers. Making Community, Co-operative and Municipal Renewable Energy Happen – lessons from across Europe.* London: Urban Forum.

319 For example see *http://www.bristolenergynetwork.org/strategy.* Accessed May 3rd 2014.

320 Avelino, F., Bosman, R. , Frantzeskaki, N., Akerboom, S., Boontje, P., Hoffman, J., Paradies, G., Pel, B. Scholten, D., and Wittmayer, J., 2014. *The (Self-)Governance of Community Energy: Challenges & Prospects*. DRIFT PRACTICE BRIEF nr. E 2014.01, Rotterdam: DRIFT.

321 Hoggett, R., 2010. *The Opportunities and Barriers for Communities to secure at-risk Finance for the Development of Revenue-generating Renewable Energy Projects.* M.Sc. dissertation, Exeter University.

Reclaiming public control over the production of money is another significant step taken by transition communities that heralds broader change given its challenge to the banks' monopoly of money that caused the financial crisis.[322] Alternative financial systems in which money operates as a public good are able to reflect very different values, and have very different consequences,[323] and could be systematically linked to the creation, preservation and nurturing of both community and cultural commons. Several Transition groups have issued complementary currencies, drawing upon, and enhancing, broader pre-existing knowledge commons.[324] In 2010 Transition Bristol (supported by Transition Network, the New Economics Foundation, the Tudor Trust, and others with experience of complementary currencies, including within Transition groups) helped establish a broad alliance of people in Bristol who wanted to set up a complementary currency at the scale of this major city and its surrounding bioregion. They formed a Community Interest Company and in 2012 the Bristol Pound was launched in partnership with Bristol Credit Union.[325] The scheme, which is owned by its members, explicitly seeks to democratise the creation and use of money.[326] Ambitious economic projects of this type force engagement with the public and institutions far beyond the movement itself. A related example is Occupy Wall Street's 'Rolling Jubilee' campaign that buys people's medical debts for five percent of their value and then cancels them.

The commons-building project associated with Transition is still in its infancy, and far from complete. It also has many gaps. For example, very few Transition groups are actively working on water issues (the Netherlands national Transition hub is one notable exception), despite its basic importance as a resource and potential vulnerability to climate change, and the global prominence of struggles over privatisation of water supplies.[327] Elsewhere, the Great Lakes Commons Project[328] is a superb model for linking multiple perspectives on water issues through a commons approach. It does this by promoting a sense of collective responsibility for the ecological health of the Great Lakes among resident communities, and the need to combine protests against profit-seeking by those in power with the assertion of commons-based governance in the face of new threats from fracking, radioactive waste shipments, copper sulphide mining and invasive species.[329]

322 Mellor, M., 2010. *The Future of Money.* London: Pluto Press.

323 Douthwaite, R., 2000. *The Ecology of Money.* Totnes: Green Books. Stokes, P.E., 2009. *Money and Soul: a New Balance Between Finance and Feelings.* Totnes: Green Books. Lietaer, B., C. Arnsperger, S. Goerner & S. Brunnhuber, 2012. *Money and Sustainability: the missing link.* Axminster: Triarchy Press.

324 North, P., 2010. *Local Money: how to make it happen in your community.* Totnes: Green Books.

325 http://bristolpound.org/. Accessed November 27th 2013.

326 http://www.reconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Bristol_Pound.pdf. Accessed November 27th 2013.

327 Brennan, B., O. Hoedeman, P. Terhorst, S. Kishimoto, B. Balanyá, 2005. *Reclaiming Public Water: Achievements, struggles and visions from around the world.* Amsterdam: Transnational Institute and Corporate Europe Observatory.

328 http://www.greatlakescommons.org/. Accessed November 27th 2013.

329 http://bollier.org/blog/beyond-zombie-environmentalism-great-lakes-commons. Accessed May 3rd 2014.

4.2.6. A Politics of Place Versus the Politics of Powerlessness

Transition has been criticised for apparently being apolitical,[330] but this is at best only partly true. The agenda it puts forward is one of far-reaching social, cultural and economic change, based around the ongoing creation and expansion of new commons, and deeply subversive of established political and economic orders. The fact that these goals are not overtly politicised allows Transition to permeate a broad range of activities, groups and social contexts not normally associated with radical politics. Its lack of affiliation with any recognised, or recognisable, political creed, can also allow it to be a Trojan horse:[331] a vehicle for the acceptance in and by mainstream politics of radical ideas, framed in such a way as to appear more compatible with dominant political agendas. Transition's standing in the eyes of the UK's former labour government was unprecedented for a grassroots movement of its type. Following that government's replacement with a Conservative-led coalition in 2010, apparent resonance with that government's 'localism' agenda – and wish to give this agenda credibility and divert attention from its retrogressive aspects - masked the difference between this and practical programmes in localisation that may be deeply and productively subversive of neoliberal orthodoxies.[332]

Not being overtly politicised may not remain an option for Transition as it outgrows its focus on discrete localisation initiatives in particular communities. It currently pays little overt attention to, for example, the climate security agenda, but while Transition groups patiently go about their work, globally powerful actors have already imagined their desired future, and are ruthlessly creating it.[333] The two visions are incompatible: the global economy depends on commons, but commons cannot survive its relentless expansion.

The momentum of Transition in its current direction will depend on its success not only in creating alternatives to the global economic system but also in bolstering them through appropriate forms of political support at national and international scales.[334] The way this is likely to play out will be through Transition becoming ever more engaged in the movement of movements that is seeking to resist economic growth and the capture of resources by the few. However, in the process it will be crucial that Transition doesn't lose its place-based focus, a focus which for Transitioners – as for commoners the world over – is about the assertion of what really matters against the insistence that we are all just a point on the grid of extraction, production, consumption and waste. More fundamentally, Transition maintaining this creative focus helps us to resist the tendency to become defined by that which we oppose.

330 Chatterton, P. & A. Cutler, 2008. *The Rocky Road to a Real Transition: the Transition Towns movement and what it means for social change*. Trapese Collective. http://trapese.clearerchannel.org/resources/rocky-road-a5-web.pdf Accessed October 15th 2012.

331 Leach, M., I. Scoones & A. Stirling, 2010. *Dynamic Sustainabilities.* London: Earthscan. P. 100.

332 http://transitionculture.org/2010/07/30/localism-or-localisation-defining-our-terms/ Accessed Sept 27th 2012.

333 See various chapters in Buxton, N. & B. Hayes, 2015. *The Secure and the Dispossessed*. London: Pluto Press.

334 A current development of this type is the involvement of Transition Network and national Transition hubs in many EU countries in the establishment of a new EU-wide network for cooperation called ECOLISE (European Community-Led Initiatives for a Sustainable Europe). http://www.ecolise.eu

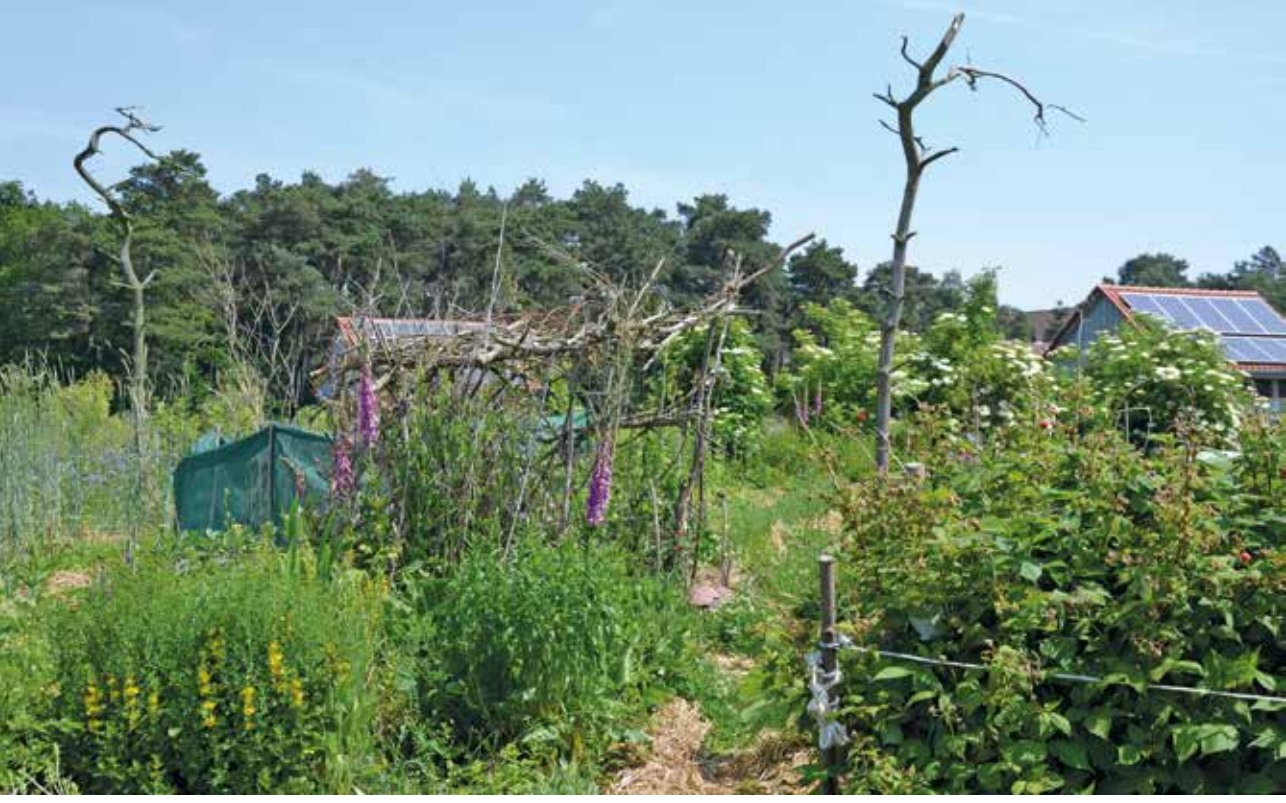

Figure 4.2.4 – *Permaculture Garden, Steyerberg, Germany. Credit: Gesa Maschkowski.*

A key danger for those opposing enclosure-led agendas lies in the fact that such an agenda flourishes not only on secrecy, but on something that appears quite the opposite: the power of appearing to be all-important.

An instructive example of the contrast between the command and control processes of capitalism, backed up by its security agenda, and that of citizen-led movements is evident in their respective proposals for internationally coordinated action to reduce global carbon emissions. The creation of carbon markets perhaps exemplifies the perverse outcomes of applying the same economic logic responsible for climate change to attempts at mitigation. It effectively amounts to enclosure and privatisation of one of the remaining commons, the capacity of the atmosphere and the rest of the biosphere to absorb and buffer disturbances in the carbon cycle.[335] The rationale is that the power of the market will ensure reduction of greenhouse gas emissions proceeds in the most economically efficient way possible, but the reality is very different. In November 2011, Swiss Bank UBS reported that by 2025 the total cost to consumers of the European Emissions Trading Scheme will reach 210 billion euros, with zero or negligible

335 Carbon Trade Watch, 2003. *The Sky is not the Limit.* Carbon Trade Watch Briefing no. 1. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute. www.carbontradewatch.org/downloads/publications/skytexteng.pdf. Accessed October 15th 2012.

impact on emissions reductions but with large increases in energy costs for households and large increases in profits for the most polluting companies. By contrast, citizens have put forward various alternative proposals for the creation of new, equitable and inclusive management regimes for the atmospheric commons. Most are variants of Cap and Share approaches, ways of implementing Contraction and Convergence models that propose global agreement over a timeline for reduction of emissions to acceptable levels, and mechanisms to achieve this in equitable fashion.[336] Cap and Dividend, for example, would place a clear limit on the amount of carbon (fossil fuels) an economy is allowed to ingest, which is rapidly reduced year on year. Companies importing fossil fuels pay increasingly high levies, whose redistribution to all citizens helps them cope with rising costs of carbon-intensive goods and services. This allows the poorest to benefit the most in the transition, and ensures that non-carbon alternatives become more financially attractive as rapidly as carbon based processes disappear – a contraction of carbon occurs alongside a convergence in wealth.

The 'convergence' part of the model is its equity component.[337] It is applicable not only to climate change, but more generally to granting every person on the planet equal rights in relation to access to resources, services and the benefits of resource exploitation, and equal responsibilities in relation to experience of the negative effects of environmental degradation.[338] Convergence is a useful conceptual tool for bringing considerations of distributional justice into debates on sustainability. However, associated with the need for centralised implementation, it carries a risk of imposing conformity.[339] This raises important questions of how intergovernmental mechanisms can reconcile their role in guiding equitable transitions to sustainability with the need to safeguard and promote diversity. Cultural diversity is a key component of social-ecological resilience and a resource for human survival and adaptability in a dynamic, ecologically diverse world.[340] Beyond its utilitarian value, diversity is an inherently necessary and vital part of human existence, without which our existence would be dramatically impoverished, if indeed it were possible at all.[341] This is perhaps the key issue in the relationship between, on the one hand, global mechanisms for sustainability and climate justice of the type the UN or other intergovernmental organisations might seek to implement, and on the other hand, Transition, Occupy, and other grassroots movements rooted in local solutions and distinctive, place-based forms of economic organisation and cultural expression.

336 *http://www.gci.org.uk/.* Accessed September 27th 2012.

337 Meyer, A., 2000. *Contraction and Convergence.* Schumacher Briefing no. 5. Totnes: Green Books.

338 Fortnam, M., Cornell, S. and Parker, J. and the CONVERGE Project Team, 2010. *Convergence: how can it be part of the pathway to sustainability?* CONVERGE Discussion Paper 1. Department of Earth Sciences, University of Bristol.

339 Pontin J. & Roderick, I., 2007. *Converging World: Connecting Communities in Global Change.* Schumacher Briefing 13. Totnes: Green Books.

340 Petty, J., 2002. *Agri-Culture. Reconnecting People, Land and Nature.* London: Earthscan. Berkes, F., J. Colding & C. Folke (eds.), 2003. *Navigating Social and Ecological Systems. Building Resilience for Complexity and Change.* Cambridge University Press.

341 Harmon, D., 2002. *In Light of our Differences: how diversity in nature and culture makes us human.* London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

What all of these movements have in common is that they actively oppose, and provide alternatives to, the homogenising tendencies of a global economic system that systematically eliminates ecological and cultural diversity, and then seeks to recreate diversity in the form of different products that are sold back to us as consumers.[342] At a local scale, movements such as Transition actively and vitally draw upon community diversity: there are no disposable people in a Transition initiative; everyone has a part to play. At regional, national and international scales, there are no communities or places anywhere in the world without distinctive, self-determined roles to play in transitions to sustainability. Localisation can only be an effective tool in resilience building if it values and honours local diversity, and promotes cooperation and solidarity through suitable linkages at all levels.[343] Commons regimes make these possibilities tangible. It is imperative for the success of Transition and other movements for democratic transitions to sustainability that legal and political mechanisms to ensure that a core plank of intergovernmental action on climate change is the perpetuation of existing commons and creation of new ones.

4.2.7. Conclusion: Climate, Commons and Global Community

Alliances between Transition and Global South movements opposing top-down models of development[344] would be most effective if supported by appropriate international mechanisms such as those described in previous sections of this chapter. Such international mechanisms are needed to ensure the legal protection of existing commons, promote the creation of new commons, and manage the atmosphere as a global commons in ways that systematically link decarbonisation to increased equity. The combination of implementing appropriate models of contraction and convergence and enforceable mechanisms in international law to protect and extend commons of all kinds would create new synergies between localisation movements in the Global North and empowerment of subaltern communities in the Global South. However the route to such international mechanisms is far more likely to be through individual countries unilaterally implementing policies such as cap and share in order to combat ecological meltdown, including climate change, in ways that reduce inequality and strengthen solidarity.[345]

In line with this approach, a key international intervention that individual Transition initiatives (primarily in the Global North) could make would be to link with and support particular commons regimes in the Global South. This could expand the current focus on social enterprise in the Transition movement to include a focus on building economic, social, cultural and political connections between particular localities in the Global North and South – a globalisation from

342 Hardt, M. & A. Negri, 2000. *Empire.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Watson, J. L. (ed.), 1997. *Golden Arches East: McDonalds in East Asia.* Stanford University Press.

343 Lewis, M. & P. Conaty, 2012. *The Resilience Imperative.* Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers. Scott Cato, M., 2013. *The Bioregional Economy.* London: Earthscan.

344 A relevant conversation between Transition originator Rob Hopkins and post-colonial scholar Arturo Escobar is recorded at *http://transitionculture.org/2012/09/28/alternatives-to-development-an-interview-with-arturo-escobar/.* Accessed October 15th 2012.

345 For example, the Scottish initiative Holyrood 350. *http://holyrood350.org/.* Accessed May 3rd 2014.

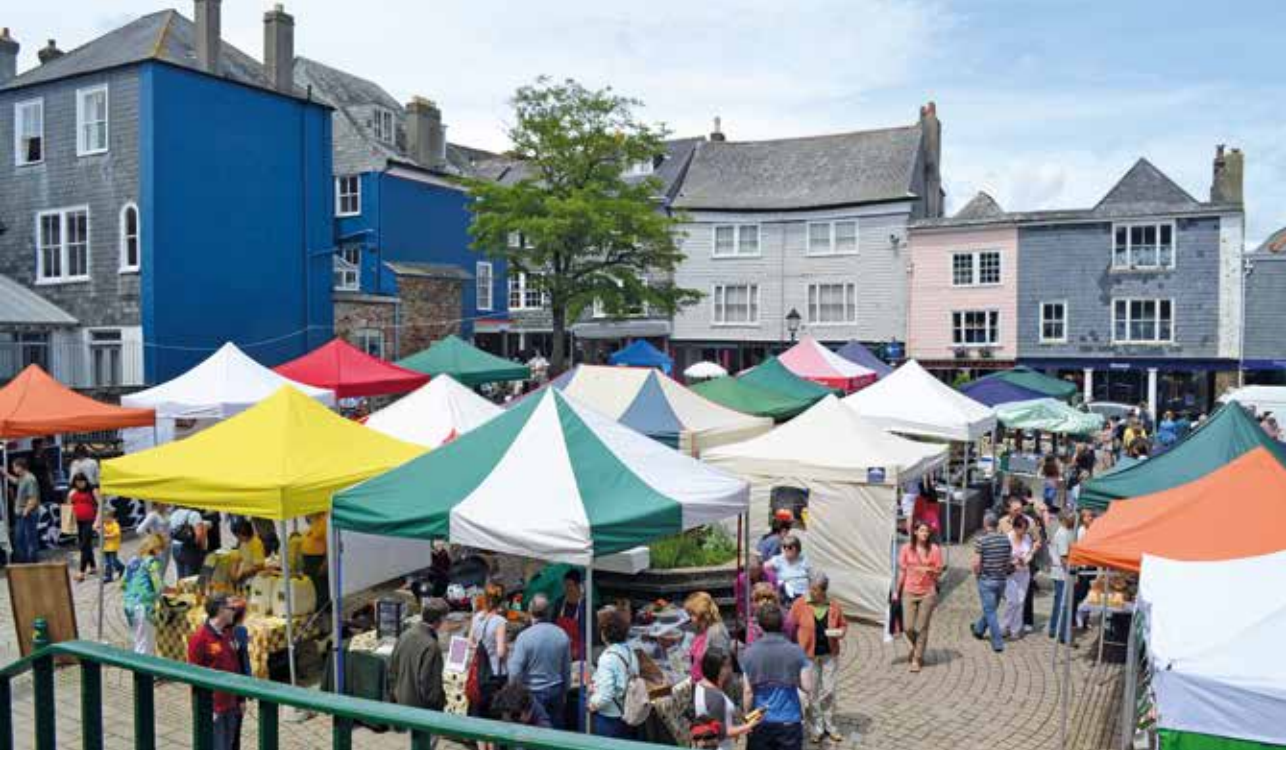

Figure 4.2.5 – *Totnes Market. Credit: Gesa Maschkowski.*

below that is about restoring localities, but also about confronting the bulldozers that are destroying the interlinking localities that constitute our world.

A distinctive perspective that Transition can bring to the struggle against the enclosure agendas is its understanding of our current dilemma in terms of addiction, which goes beyond the idea that it is about an 'us' and a 'them'. The addict does not just tear down the rest of the world to feed his addiction; his addiction also destroys him. This implies a need to alert those wielding power (which to a greater or lesser extent includes those reading and writing this book) to the effects this has on themselves and their children's futures, as much as to the devastation they are causing to others. Chomsky characteristically pointed out that there is no point telling truth to power as power already knows the truth and is busy concealing it from everyone else. But this can easily become a different form of naïveté if it unnecessarily excludes people by saying they are not worth addressing.

From a Transition perspective the key task is twofold:

1. We need to dis-identify from, and oppose, a system we are all to a greater or lesser extent implicated in and addicted to; and
2. We need to build sustainable communities that can both prefigure and help set the direction we need to all take to diminish the climate and related crises, and cultivate networks of cooperation among these.

This combines proactively *reducing* our addiction to oil and the damaging ecological and social impact of our actions, with *adapting* so that we can stand a better chance of helping each other to weather the storm.

Transition combines the belief that we cannot get through unless we are taking everyone with us with the need to know what we are up against. In some senses we are trying to replace relationships of exploitation with relationships of mutual care and support, and the best way of motivating people to work at creating such community gardens, local energy companies, local money, etc., is to focus on the positive and immediate benefits of working with each other now to create a sustainable future. In another sense, we are seeking to transform a whole system not only through resistance but through leadership, example and insistence that there is a far better way of living: one which has always been available to us.

Part of the reason why the news is full of doom and disasters, iced with news of the wealthy and famous, rather than full of the initiatives and care that is happening right now in the world is because there is nothing more threatening to the powers that be, than demonstrating that other more creative, benign, exciting and ancient ways are not only possible but are happening here and now.

Acknowledgements
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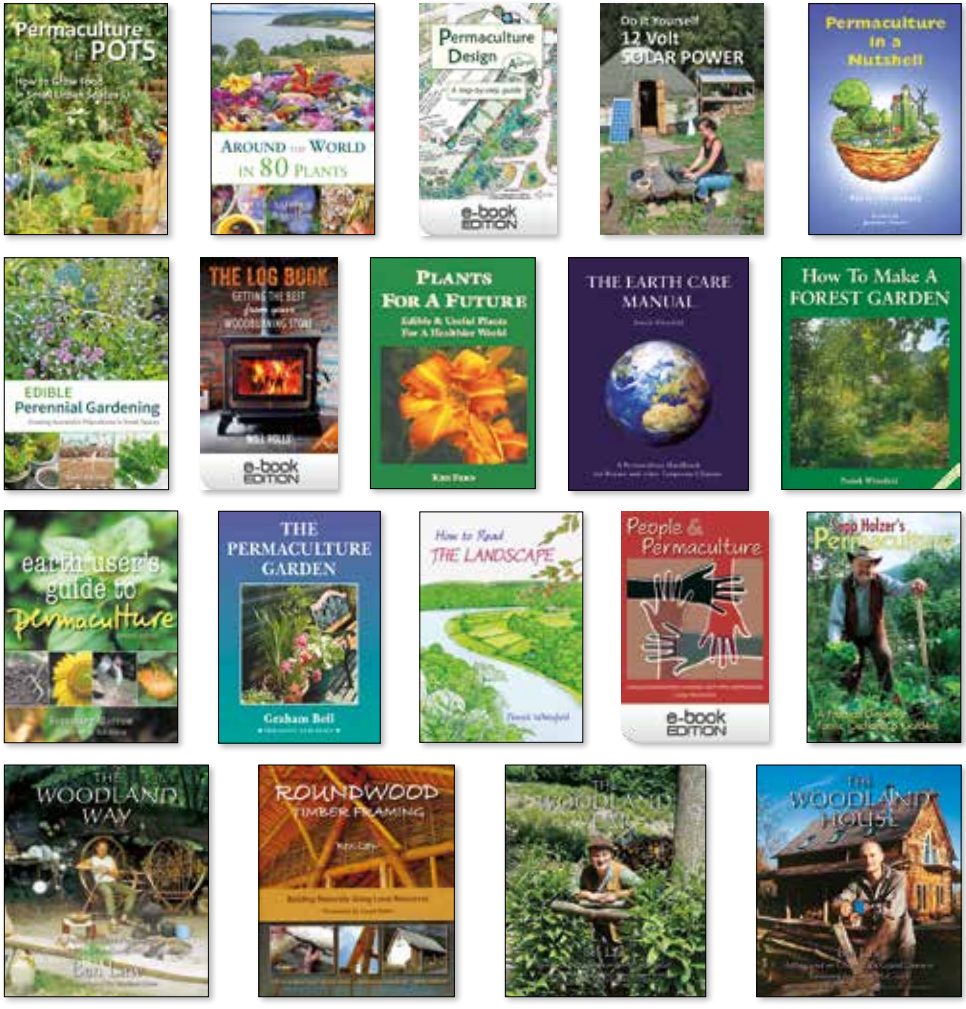

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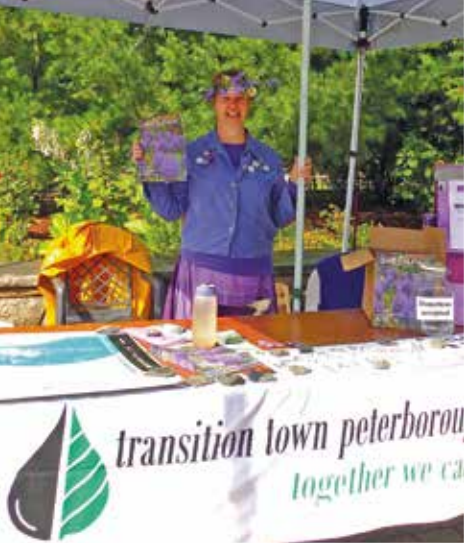

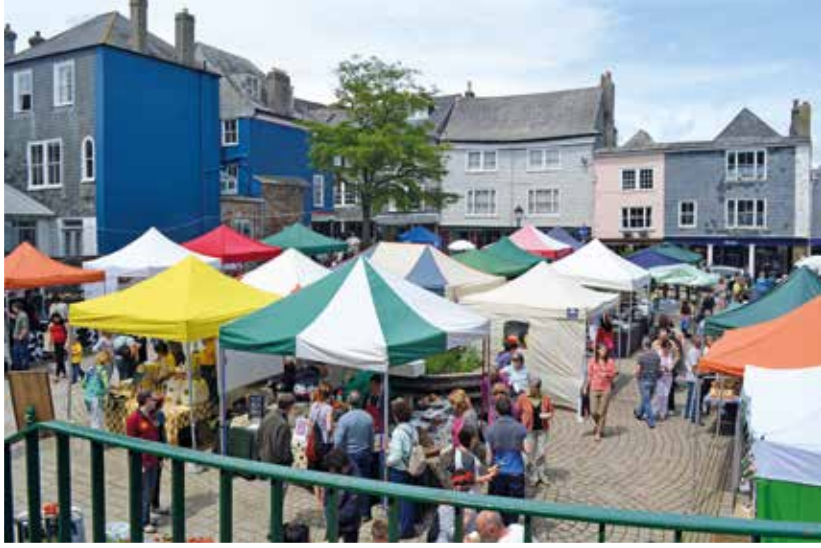

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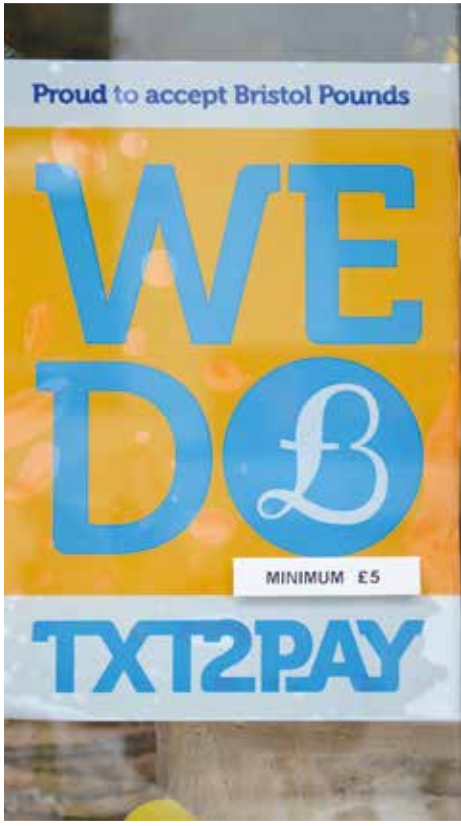
This collection helps bring that vision into focus through a compelling blend of insights, ideas and action points from community activists, activist-scholars and leading resilience scientists. It includes direct accounts of practical efforts to build resilience at community level, theoretical reflections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



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