

Embodying Economic Change: De-Growth and Localisation Practices in Totnes, United Kingdom

By Florence Scialom



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Introduction

The increased financial and environmental instability currently facing many peoples across the world encourages questioning of economic 'business as usual'. Many academics – as well as activists, non-governmental organisations and some politicians – are trying to identify what is going wrong in the wider systems governing our society, and what can be done to address the difficulties currently being faced on such a wide scale. What is not always brought to the fore in public discourse is the interconnectedness of the economic and environmental challenges being faced. Yet when these macro-issues are juxtaposed links can be found, and some argue that only by acknowledging this can we begin to take a more holistic - and realistic - approach to solving the dramatic challenges we face (Heinburg, 2011). A key aspect of this argument is based on the fact that one of the most widely recognised signs of societal progress – economic growth – is actually leading us willingly down a path of environmental destruction (Latouche, 2010). To some this is undoubtedly a controversial connection to make, since economic growth continues to be so widely accepted as a desirable measure of success and development (Li, 2013). However, the “[global financial] crisis has opened up new terrain for thinking about the economy” (Hart et al, 2010: 4), and there is, therefore, arguably a growing legitimacy being given to those calling for alternatives to economic growth.

Practical examples of alternative modes of organising the economy are increasingly relevant to these contemporary debates. Among the alternatives posed to economies focused on growth, many scholars are suggesting a move away from economic growth through a transition to localisation; smaller local economies, requiring less production and consumption (Forunier, 2008: 538). My own fieldwork focused on current attempts to implement localisation in the small market town of Totnes, in the United Kingdom. This town is the founding home to the Transition movement, a community activist organisation which promotes practices of economic localisation as one route towards lowering carbon emissions and creating more resilient, self-reliant and environmentally sustainable communities (Hopkins, 2011). Transition argues that ultimately focusing on economic growth is environmentally unsustainable, (ibid: 2), and as an alternative the Transition movement promotes a form of environmentally informed economic localisation which can help build resilience at a local level and equip communities to be able to better deal with the risks of peak oil and climate change (Hopkins 2008, North 2010).

Throughout this thesis I will argue that Transition’s rejection of economic growth as a measure of progress and their adoption of localisation practices shows a re-conceptualization of the economy to be more personally and socially embedded. I will adopt a Foucauldian theoretical framework in order to analyse economic localisation as a *discourse*, meaning “a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how

the world is understood and how things are done in it" (Rose, 2001: 136). Through this interpretation I will demonstrate the significance of the discursive changes the Transition movement is seeking to motivate relating to the economy in Totnes. Transition attempts to re-draw the economic boundaries dictated from above - in the form of neoliberalism and a call for endless economic growth - and reclaim their identities as social beings within the economy. I will show how the Transition approach demonstrates that - in contrast to the neoliberal focus on the dominance of markets and the "idea of an economy based on narrow self-interest" - the economy is in fact always embedded in social relations and people's daily choices and practices (Hart et al, 2010: 2). The localisation promoted by Transition has become a visible alternative economic option for some of the local population in Totnes, and the economic practices which result are more intentionally, overtly and consciously socially embedded.

In the first chapter of this thesis I will explore the ways in which many people in Totnes, especially those involved in the Transition movement, adopt an economic localisation ethos. I will look at what people mean by the term localisation, and will explore how this localisation ethos is embodied in people's behaviour in Totnes, particularly in relation to people's social connection to the local economy. Analysing this behaviour reveals that economic localisation is both a theory and a practice for people in Totnes, and can therefore be helpfully understood as a discourse; "articulated through all sorts visual and verbal images and texts... and also through the practices that those languages permit" (Rose, 2001: 136). I will demonstrate how it is through the practical embodiment of this localisation discourse that people are attempting to re-position the economy into the social realm, away from the Universalist and de-personalised boundaries which have come to be associated with neoliberal, globalised, growth-focused interpretations of the economy. I will explore how people in Totnes who adopt this localisation discourse are seeking to use ideas and actions to build bridges between monetary-based and community-based practices, and are actively reclaiming their identity as social beings within the economy. For many people in Totnes this localisation discourse acts as a key reference point in their lives. "Human subjects are produced through discourses. Our sense of our self is made through the operation of discourse" (Rose, 2001: 137), and in Totnes the localisation discourse which Transition promotes is clearly influencing and shaping some people's daily lives.

In the second chapter I will explore in more detail people's attitudes towards economic growth, and how these attitudes motivate people's daily behaviours. When looking at measures of progress it is clear that many in Totnes, particularly those engaged in Transition, reject the dominance of economic growth as a measure of progress. The second chapter will engage with the academic literature on the concept of 'de-growth', which is a banner under which many scholars argue for a move away from economic growth and towards localisation. I will explore the extent to which de-growth literature relates to my research in Totnes. It is interesting to observe that although there are many similarities between the views of de-growth scholars and Transition activists - in terms of disparaging attitudes towards economic growth as

an appropriate measure of societal progress – there are also some contrasts too. These contrasts form along the lines of different approaches to social change; whereas de-growth scholars prioritise attempts at righting the wrongs in the current economic growth-led system, Transitioners often place more focus on adopting day-to-day practices that make an alternative relationship to the economy viable. In some ways Transition’s approach can be characterised as a prefigurative strategy, similar to that adopted by the alterglobalisation movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Graeber, 2002, Maeckelbergh, 2011), in that their focus is on embodying the changes they seek in wider society. Through emphasising the importance of changing economic practices, over a confrontational stance against economic growth, Transition choose the tactical approach of using daily behaviour as a means through which to create social change. As I will argue in both Chapters 1 and 2, this approach is providing some people in Totnes with a framework through which to embody an alternative economic discourse.

However I do not mean to imply that Totnes’ whole population all share the same economic views and practices. Within Totnes there are a variety of perspectives on economic structures and practices, and in Chapter 3 of this thesis I will explore some of these different perspectives. From an anthropological perspective it is interesting to note how contrasting attitudes and practices can exist in Totnes, in one physical place. Therefore the - now largely discredited but arguably still omnipresent - presumption of directly tying specific places with specific cultures and identities (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992) is clearly insufficient for analysing this case. Nonetheless, the notion of place of course still proves itself to be important in analysing economic localisation in Totnes, and I will acknowledge and explore this further in Chapter 3.

Field and Object of Study

As I have mentioned, my fieldwork took place in Totnes, a small market town in the South West of England. Totnes is home to approximately 8,000 people (DCC, 2011 in Northrop et al. 2013). Yet do not let its small size fool you; Totnes is an increasingly famous town both nationally and internationally, with a reputation for being on the “front line of cultural dissonance” (Giangrande, 2013). Totnes’ fame is in large part a result of its position in the Transition movement. The Transition movement started in 2006, with the aim of changing lifestyles and building resilience at a local level in response to the growing risks of peak oil and climate change (Hopkins (a), 2008). As mentioned, Transition promotes practices of economic localisation as one route towards lowering carbon emissions through creating more resilient, self-reliant and environmentally sustainable communities (Hopkins, 2011). Totnes is an extremely significant place for the wider Transition movement; not only does Totnes hold the title of first ever official ‘Transition Town’; it is also home to the Transition Network, which coordinates international Transition-related activity. Globally there are now over 1,000 places officially registered as Transition initiatives across all continents in the

world, and at least 14 national hubs to coordinate activities in different countries (Transition Network (a), 2013).

It is worth noting briefly at this point that although Transition Town Totnes and the Transition Network are deeply linked and operate from the same office building in Totnes, they are also separate organisations with distinct, albeit overlapping, aims. Whilst Transition Town Totnes (TTT) runs projects in Totnes to instigate change at a local level, the Transition Network focuses on supporting and connecting with different Transition initiatives worldwide. However, in practice many local people I spoke with were involved in both Transition Network and Transition Town Totnes activities, therefore for simplicity I will refer to those in Totnes working with or supporting the Transition Network and / or Transition Town Totnes together throughout this thesis, calling them 'those involved in the Transition movement in Totnes' or 'Transitioners'. The reason I highlight this distinction here is only for clarity, and to point out the significance of the Transition presence in Totnes, in the form of both a strong local Transition initiative and the larger international network in one place.

Those working for Transition in Totnes told me that they estimate there to be approximately 450 people directly engaged with supporting Transition's work in the town. These people are mostly working in a voluntary capacity, and are engaged at different levels of involvement, requiring widely varying levels of commitment. In addition to those actively involved, there are many others in the town who are likely to have engaged with Transition in some way. The main motivating factors for people to become involved in the Transition movement generally consist of concern about peak oil and climate change, and a desire to do something about these challenges in their own lives and in their own community. As I will explore in more depth throughout this thesis, the desire to engage with these challenges in positive and creative ways, enabling actions which are accessible to implement in people's daily lives, is one of the motivations which has lead Transition to focus directly on the economy.

Transition has a palpable and visible impact on Totnes in many ways. For example the Totnes Town Council identified itself as a Transition Town Council, Transition has initiated its own local currency in the form of the Totnes Pound¹, and Transition runs many projects in the town – such as open gardens and regular public events. Many people will come to visit Totnes from all over the world to see Transition's activities in-person and visit the home of the first Transition town. Yet Transition's presence in Totnes is not necessarily as all-encompassing as some outsiders may expect, and this is a topic I will explore further below, in Chapter 3.

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Whilst I was conducting my research in Totnes those involved in running the Totnes Pound were in the process of preparing to re-launch the currency, therefore I have chosen not to focus on the alternative currency in-depth within this thesis. It is an area which would certainly benefit from further research upon the re-launch of the Totnes Pound.

Relevant Academic Debates

Economic growth has monopolised perceptions of how societal progress can be achieved and measured for decades. The dominating position growth has occupied in academic and public discourse has led some scholars to compare it to a religious belief system (Kallis 2011: 877); it can be seen as wrong – immoral even – to question faith in the benefits of growth (Latouche, 2004). However, given the environmental problems and the inequalities currently facing those social systems favouring economic growth, an increasing number of academics are now taking the ‘blasphemous’ step of actively questioning the importance of growth, some even completely rejecting it as a signifier of societal progress (Latouche 2004, Fournier 2008, Kallis 2011). These academics argue that *de-growth* is what is now needed; that economic systems need to fundamentally change due to the connection between growth and negative outcomes, such as overuse of non-renewable resources and growing inequalities in society. As mentioned above, some *de-growth* scholars are proposing a move away from economic growth through a shift towards localisation (Fournier, 2008: 538). Therefore, it is imperative that research be done on the viability of localisation through analysing the impacts of existing examples of localisation being adopted in practice.

De-growth scholars also make a connection between their criticisms of economic growth and critiques of neoliberal economics. “The idea of *de-growth*... and the debates it has generated are inscribed within a critical tradition that has challenged neoliberal understanding of economic development and growth for some time” (Fournier, 2008: 531). Growth is neoliberalism’s chosen measure of success, promoted at all costs, and used as a term which “reinforces neoliberal common sense” (Massey, 2013). *De-growth* scholars reject the “endless growth preached by neoliberal economics”, and pose one potential alternative in the form of localisation as a strategy for re-organising society (Fournier, 2008: 531). It is therefore significant to highlight that I chose my fieldwork to take place in Totnes in part due to the prevalence of localisation practices in the town, but also due to Totnes’ geographical location in the United Kingdom (UK), a nation that has remained at the heart of championing the importance of economic growth since the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1970s (Harvey, 2005).

The UK is defined as an economically ‘developed’ country where the benefits of neoliberal growth are freely available; albeit in weakened form due to the current economic crisis (Stiglitz, 2011: 230). The UK was in fact one of the places where neoliberalism itself first gained traction, through the conservative policies of UK Prime minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s (Harvey, 2005). Since that time the UK has embraced the neoliberal doctrine of economic growth, and the current Conservative government can be seen as a part of this trend in their rhetoric supporting a minimalist state enabling optimal market conditions (Monibot, 2013). The Transition Network has emerged from this context to challenge the dominant paradigm and inspire people to voluntarily lower their consumption and turn away from

aspirations for economic growth (Rudel et al, 2011: 232). The economic localisation values and practices adopted in by Transitioners in Totnes are therefore made in spite of the 'benefits' of neoliberal growth being available to the local population, through the market and with support of the state.

When considering what holds power over a population's behaviour the sharp distinction drawn in neoliberal theory between the state and the market has often been proven less clear-cut in practice (Elyachar, 2003). Those promoting a neoliberal agenda often rely on the state's institutional tools and frameworks to access and influence populations (ibid). Similar to Hart et al (2010: 2) my intention here is not to "just to celebrate another swing of the pendulum from state to market and back again." It seems that in Totnes many people, especially those involved in Transition, would agree that "it is time for people to have their say in economic matters again" (ibid). If we are to focus on a localised, community-level, place-based economics where people are central, rather than the state or the market, this does not equal an absence of institutional influences or power in a disciplinary form. Yet just as Foucault was "most interested in analyzing the 'power we exert over ourselves' rather than the more conventional central, coercive, institutional conception", so too am I interested in investigating how localisation practices come to be adopted as a powerful and disciplinary reference point, shaping behaviour for some people in Totnes.

It is through an analysis of the practice-focused ethos of Transition's economic localisation discourse in Totnes that I uncover some distinctions between Transition's form of localisation and the approach advocated by de-growth scholars. Whereas de-growth scholars retain their main priority as challenging the dominance of economic growth, Transition seek to create an inclusive change which avoids attacking any particular actors within the current economic system. Rather than solely focus on confronting the problems in existing systems, Transition emphasises that people's daily practices can create a change from below. Although the latter approach can certainly appear less immediately radical, it is nonetheless trying to create a fundamental shift through incrementally changing the discourse which guides our economy and people's day-to-day lives.

Overall, it is extremely significant to the on-going academic discussions on de-growth and economic alternatives to research the viability of organising economies around the principles of an environmentally informed and socially embedded localisation. Throughout my thesis I will draw on these academic debates when analysing what motivates changes in people's daily behaviour. In particular I will explore localisation as a discourse in Chapter 1 and look at the differences between de-growth and Transition approaches to social change in Chapter 2, and will review different attitudes towards the relationship between localisation and economic growth in Chapter 3. Overall, my research hopes to contribute to important academic debates on the process of striving for and implementing alternative economic models in practice.

Social Relevance

Ensuring that my research is socially as well as academically relevant is an important consideration, and this point became increasingly evident to me throughout my time in the field. Anthropologists are of course well aware of the importance of participation; one of the primary research methods used in the field is participant observation. However, it was only during my own fieldwork that I experienced how important it can be not only to participate, but to actively contribute during research. The difference can be subtle, but whilst the aim of participation is mainly to understand a research population in academic terms, I see the aim of contribution is to have a positive impact on a research population in social terms.

During my time in the field I got actively involved in as many Transition-related projects as possible. Since my research took place in the context of an activist community my own actions and contributions were vital in terms of positioning myself in the field. This was also a conscious attempt on my part to try to ensure my fieldwork results would be socially relevant as possible. Through actively contributing to the Transition community I found out more about their genuine views in relation to my key research themes, localisation and economic growth, and also learned about the current status of the Transition movement in Totnes, and where they could benefit from my input.

One result of these efforts was my subsequent involvement with the Transition Research Network, which is “a self-organising peer group of academics and community activists which aims to help advance understanding and practice in Transition, support Transition groups to address their research needs, and help make research relevant, fulfilling, and fun” (Transition Research Network (a), 2013). Through involvement with this Network I was able to contribute to a *Transition Research Primer*, which aims to provide a guide for Transition initiatives about how they can benefit from the input of researchers (Transition Research Network (b), 2013). Therefore, whilst still in the field I was given the opportunity to reflect on my fieldwork, and contribute to a resource of benefit to my research population. Following my research I also plan to write up my research for various blogs, in order to share the outcomes with wider audiences.

Methodology

The main method I used to collect data during my fieldwork was participant observation. I positioned myself so that I was immersed in activities relating to the Transition movement and economic localisation practices. I lived with someone working for Transition, I did an internship four days per week with an organisation which I was introduced to through Transition, called the Network of Wellbeing (NOW), and I spent much of my free time volunteering for Transition-run projects and attending Transition-run events.

Therefore, during my fieldwork my daily life was in many ways comparable to those in the community who were heavily involved in Transition. In order to become a participant observer I knew it was necessary to immerse myself in a culture and simultaneously retain the ability to remove myself, to maintain a broader perspective, and analyse my observations and experiences within the broader aims of my research (Bernard, 2001: 324). Therefore, I actively kept a record of any observations I made, and spent time analysing my data and writing up notes as I went along. Being a participant observer helped me to observe and understand the implicit values underlying people's beliefs and behaviours around localisation.

In addition to participant observation I conducted a range of interviews in different formats, including informal, semi-structured and structured. Interviews are a valuable method for identifying attitudes and values (Bernard, 2001: 390), therefore I felt it was important to have a range of interview data to supplement the information I collected through participant observation. As a result of the ways I participated in the Totnes community throughout my research period, I had many opportunities for informal interviewing, which was valuable for connecting with people and understanding their views. However, in order to ensure I covered all necessary topics, semi-structured interviews proved a vital addition, and enabled me to incorporate a list of key issues whilst also leaving room for me and my informants to follow new leads (Bernard, 2001: 205). During semi-structured interviews I asked participants some structured questions about how much localisation affects specific areas of their lives and certain day-to-day behaviours. For this purpose I covered set categories based on how closely consumption habits and daily practices correlated with a localisation ethos. This structured section of my interviewing enabled me to collect specific data, allowing me to "control the input that trigger's people's responses, so that the outputs can be reliably compared" (Bernard, 2001: 240). When analysing my results this structured data has helped me to identify how much people claim to strongly accept or reject localisation practices in their daily lives. Furthermore, having some structured questions directed interviewees to relevant topics regarding localisation practices, which some participants then often brought up themselves in the less structured section of the interview.

The less structured sections of semi-structured interviews were composed of questions covering some key themes, but participants were informed that this part of the interview was more like a conversation and they were therefore free to bring up any topics which they thought interesting or relevant, even if not directly referred to in my questions. During interviews I explained to participants that the purpose was to learn from them, so they should feel free to bring up topics and speak their minds. Overall, I hoped that a combination of interviewing styles with those involved in Transition – a mixture of informal and semi-structured (with some fully structured and some open questions) – would leave room for "reflexive progression" on the part of the interview participants (Hiller & Diluzio, 2004) since their initial responses may conform to the narrative of the Transition as a whole, but further interviewing may lead to deeper and more complex responses. Indeed, I found this to be the case during semi-structured interviews which

followed informal interviews. When I asked specifically about something which had been discussed informally, and took time to explore issues in more depth in interviews, participants at times said things such as, “I hadn’t thought of it like that before” or “I didn’t really think of it until you asked the question in that way”. Therefore, through building up a rapport with participants and using different interviewing styles over time I was able to develop a more in-depth understanding of different views and behaviours.

Furthermore, I found that when I already knew my interview participants through my engagement in the community they were likely to be open during semi-structured interviews. For example, one participant challenged the framing of one of my questions which revealed very relevant and valuable insights. When this participant did this she explained, “I wouldn’t say this if it wasn’t you”, indicating that since we had already got to know each other she felt able to speak her mind, and this openness certainly proved invaluable for the progression of my research. In addition, I found it pleasantly surprising how many people enjoyed the experience of being interviewed, stating that it was nice to have the chance to discuss their views on issues such as localisation and economic growth at length with someone they knew. This also helped my interviews to run more smoothly.

In total I conducted twenty-three full semi-structured interviews, which generally ranged in length from 45 to 75 minutes. Twenty-two of these interviews were with people I deem in this thesis to be involved in Transition in some way in Totnes. This involvement could range from working full-time for Transition to being broadly supportive of their aims but involved in a more voluntary capacity. The final in-depth interview was conducted with a local resident in Totnes, who was not involved in Transition’s work.

Although my research is focused on the Transition movement as an entry point to evaluating the localisation practices evident in Totnes I knew that it was vital to also incorporate the views of those not directly involved in the Transition movement, but whom nonetheless had a direct interest in the local economy in Totnes. Therefore, in addition to my semi-structured interviews I also conducted fourteen structured interviews with local businesses in Totnes. This provided me with valuable additional data, revealing some diversity of views in Totnes on the issues relating to economic localisation.

Overall, utilising a combination of research methods – including participant observation, and a range of interviewing techniques, used with a range of interview participants – enabled me to gather data on both the ideals and practices evident in Totnes, as well as identifying any gaps between the two. This enabled for triangulation of data in my analysis, which involves using data collected via different methods, and from different places and people, in order to check the validity of the data collected (Flick, 2004: 178). Interviewing allowed me to explore specific topics in-depth, whilst participant observation provided richness and context to the data collected through interviewing. This combination of methods and participants was vital for my research as a whole, because it enabled me to identify the intentions of

localisation practices and how they actually play out in day to day activities, thus revealing the intentional and unintentional repercussions of these practices.

In order to analyse the data I collected I employed a few key techniques; in addition to the triangulation of my data mentioned above, I also used grounded theory and data matrices to organise and effectively interpret my data. In practical terms, I highlighted my data based on key concepts using a coding system, as advocated by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003). The most significant codes I identified as key themes included: neoliberalism, economic growth, de-growth, environmental sustainability, economic localisation, embodied practices, and connection to place. To identify how pieces of data should be coded I looked out for direct use of these terms as well as related words which identified the same theme. Furthermore, I also organised all of my interview data into matrices in order to examine how different properties of the data connect to one another (Bernard, 2001: 431). Through this combination of methods and analysis techniques I have been able to draw out a full evaluation of my data and identify its significance within wider academic discussions.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical challenges I expected to encounter before leaving for my fieldwork mainly related to doing my research on the workings of a professional organisation, in the form of Transition in Totnes. Professional organisations which set norms and have internal values are important sites of research for anthropologists, and they are also sites accompanied by unique ethical challenges (Mosse, 2006). There is a certain policy line upheld by professional organisations and communities, which it is important for them to maintain in public discourse (ibid). Since Transition can be considered professional organisation (as an official charity organisation) there could be potential pressure to produce data which is cohesive with the organisation's public material. Of course I have aimed to mitigate this risk by ensuring my research participants were fully and openly informed about the topic of my research, my need for independent status as a researcher, and also my plans for sharing my research results via a variety of formats, such as in blog posts and presentations.

Through writing up my results for blog posts and sharing research outcomes with participants I also hope to address another ethical concern which I encountered during my fieldwork, which was based on my position as a researcher. Due to the huge popularity of the Transition movement, many other researchers have previously wanted to find out more about the vibrant Transition community in Totnes. Unfortunately not all researchers have been able to make a positive contribution to the community, leaving many in Totnes sceptical of researchers. The Transition Network website explains this perspective as follows: "research is often undertaken as an *extractive* process with minimal benefit given back to the subject(s) being researched" (Transition Network (b), 2013, emphasis in original). I tried to actively counteract this

perception by aiming to find ways to share my research data as much as possible in accessible ways. As mentioned, I will do this by writing up parts of my research for public blogs, and I will also achieve this by presenting my research in public. In addition, whilst in the field I also aimed to positively contribute as much as possible to different social projects in Totnes, so that my presence in the town was not purely “extractive”, but was also hopefully giving something helpful back to the community. I do understand that the decision of how to contribute positively during research is highly context-specific; it is not always clear what the implications of researcher actions will be or whether you are really having a positive impact. However, I nonetheless think it is an important ethical consideration for anthropologists to aim to contribute positively to their research population as much as possible, and it is also of course important to consider how to make research as socially relevant as is possible.

One final yet very important point, in terms of ethical considerations, is that I have taken care to protect the anonymity of research participants and I have respected the importance of participant confidentiality throughout my research. Therefore, I have not used any names of interview participants throughout this thesis, and I have not shared any of the data collected any further. I also informed all interview participants that information collected would be anonymous, to maintain privacy and allow people to be able to speak freely.

In summary of my thesis introduction, thus far I have introduced the argument of this thesis, providing an explanation of the structure and different points which will be made in each chapter. In addition, I have explained the context of my fieldwork, framed within wider academic debates, and shown the social relevance of my research. I have also provided an explanation of the methodological approach taken and the ethical questions handled during my research. I will now turn to the opening chapter of my thesis, which is based on the economic localisation discourse being promoted by Transition in Totnes.

Chapter 1: Socially Embedding the Economy in the Local

The ethos of the Transition movement is in agreement with those who argue the ultimate environmental unsustainability of economic growth; Transition's official literature states that it is wrong to think that "economic growth can continue indefinitely" on a planet with finite resources (Hopkins, 2008 (a): 2). As an alternative to the current growth-focused economic model Transition is actively promoting economic localisation in order to build resilience at a local level in response to the growing risks of peak oil and climate change (Hopkins 2008, North 2010). In Chapter 2, I will explore this presumed relationship between rejecting economic growth and adopting economic localisation, but in this opening Chapter I would like to initially introduce economic localisation as a concept and explore the variety of ways it is implemented amongst the research population I have focused on in Totnes. In this first Chapter I will argue that economic localisation can be operationalized as a discourse, which enables those embodying this discourse to reposition their economic interactions more strongly into the social realm.

Localisation is, "a relative term. It means different things to different people, and depends on context" (NEF in Woodin and Lucas, 2004: 69). The aim of localisation for Transition is to lower the environmental impact of production and consumption, and therefore to focus on making materially intensive production processes more local. Transition's intention is not to seek to completely close off all national and international trade. Those involved in Transition often caution against oversimplification of the term localisation in relation to their work, as a common perception is that Transition would like move all economic interaction to the local scale. To avoid confusion Transition have at times suggested "'localisation' should maybe be replaced with 'appropriate in scale'" (REconomy, 2012), to show acknowledgement that the most local is not always the most suitable option. This was a view which was reiterated during some of my interviews with those involved in Transition. For example, one person working directly on the intersection of Transition and economics said, "some parts of the economy, such as information services, may work better globally... localisation is not saying 'it's all got to be here'; it's more about looking at the material intensity of things".

Many Transitioners I spoke with in Totnes emphasized that localisation is contextual and should be seen as part of a wider systematic shift needed towards more sustainable ways of living. For example, a person working with Transition explained to me that, "localisation is not the answer on its own; it needs to be set within a framework that acknowledges natural systems". This argument was based on an understanding that if the cost of environmental destruction was adequately included in the cost of production and goods, then localisation would be the expected result. So when asking the very practical question of "how local is

local?" the answer would most commonly be "as local as possible, depending on what kind of product or service you are referring to". These interpretations map closely to how some academics have identified the true meaning of the term: "localisation does not mean everything being produced locally, nor does it mean an end to trade. It simply means creating a better balance between local, regional, and international markets" (North, 2010: 587). What is significant for my own research is how those in Totnes are attempting to re-align this balance to acknowledge the importance of the local, and what the social implications of these attempts at re-alignment are.

Localisation is posed as a part of the "solution to peak oil and climate change [and is a reaction]... against unsustainable and unequal neoliberal globalisation" (North, 2010: 587). Neoliberalism has dominated global economic policy since the late 1970s, with its central focus on economic growth and supporting aims such as deregulation, privatisation, individualisation, unencumbered markets, and free trade (Haque, 1999, Harvey, 2005, 2007). Although the neoliberal approach has arguably been weakened in recent years (Hart et al, 2010), it can still be presented as a route to successful economic development, which has been adopted or enforced to varying degrees across the world (Harvey 2005, Monibot, 2013). The neoliberal policy model has proved ineffective in many cases (Mitchell, 2005), particularly as a result of its narrow conceptions of people as *homo economicus* (Latouche, 2010: 522) and the lack of attention paid to heterogeneous cultural contexts (Coronil, 2000). However, in spite of its failings the neoliberal focus on growth remains powerful, with some evidence showing failed neoliberal projects being interpreted in a way that allows reinforcement of the existing model (Mitchell, 2005).

The age of 'globalisation' has been used to shape rhetoric supportive of neoliberal claims. Ostensibly globalisation is promoting increased access and equality for all across the world - through higher movement of goods, ideas and people - whilst in fact it's been shown to produce networks which only have benefits for a select few (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000, Ferguson, 2005). Many people I spoke with involved in Transition in Totnes perceived localisation as a direct response in opposition to the economic ills resulting from globalisation. During interviews people described the processes of globalisation enabling, "very large distances between the consumption of something, and the waste and degradation that results from its original extraction". The notion of the true value of goods being distorted through the process of globalisation was mentioned repeatedly, with one interview participant involved in Transition emphasising a theme that came up often; that the "costs of goods do not represent true costs, if you consider all that has gone into making them". The perception of hidden social and environmental costs being disguised through the globalised economy was shown to be a strong motivation for people to aim to localise production and supply chains. As one person working with Transition told me, "as a society we are not yet very adept at counting the costs of our consumption, and if the costs were shown closer to home I think we would be much more aware of it." The awareness of "the true cost" of people's consumption being more than what is signified in existing price tags did seem to be especially evident amongst the Transition community in

Totnes. These attitudes demonstrate certain beliefs about consumption and goods which certainly do not align with the dominant economic ethos in the UK, which is currently closely aligned with neoliberalism and a desire for a return to ever-increasing economic growth.

The Relevance of Scale

It is important not to take for granted the apparent boundaries between the global and local (Tsing, 2000: 353). This can certainly seem a risk when presenting perceptions of the globalised economy as negative and the localised economy as positive. However, the distinction between globalisation and localisation is certainly not that clear-cut. Furthermore, anthropologists can no longer presume to analyse homogenous cultures in bounded places (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992); rather local sites are often an entry point into issues of more global relevance. When interviewing those involved in Transition in Totnes I asked whether people perceived globalisation and localisation as positives or negatives. Generally, the response was to see globalisation as broadly negative and localisation as broadly positive. However, the majority of people interviewed added nuance to this opinion, stating that globalisation had some positive aspects – mainly categorised under cultural and information exchange – and that localisation had some negative aspects – in terms of the risks of becoming too culturally localised, and thus isolated from the outside world. There was an acknowledgement amongst those I spoke with that, “something like a transnational public sphere has certainly rendered any strictly bounded sense of community or locality obsolete” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 338), and this transformation of the local was not perceived as a completely negative thing. There was a consistent distinction made by many of those involved in Transition in Totnes – between on the one hand the globalisation of materially intensive production of goods and on the other hand the blurring of cultural boundaries due to globalisation; the former is what the Transition movement aims to change through economic localisation practices, whilst the latter was seen as a contemporary reality which brought many benefits in terms of positive cultural and information-based exchanges.

The Transition movement itself actually provides an interesting example of the intersection between globalisation and localisation, because it strongly promotes localisation practices but attempts to do so as part of a wider international network (Hopkins, 2011). The Transition Network evokes globally relevant issues – such as climate change and peak oil – across an international network in order to encourage localisation practices (Hopkins, 2011), and this approach does not necessarily entail any contradictions. It can be argued that “in social spaces organised under neoliberal global conditions, collective identities are being constructed in unprecedented way... [to connect] social movements respecting difference [and] equality” (Coronil, 2000: 370). It can be empowering for movements protesting the conditions of globalised neoliberalism “when social relations are articulated in new ways across scales” (Haarstad & Fløysand, 2007: 294). It follows that global connections can be utilised – albeit in different ways – by those who support neoliberal growth *and* those who actively reject it. The call for an environmentally informed

economic localisation should therefore not be interpreted as a call to close off all forms of global interaction.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of global flows of culture in specific localities it is also crucial not to disregard the “powerful role of [physical] space in the ‘near view’ of lived experience” (Peters 1992, in Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 341). The size and character of Totnes as a place makes it more viable to embody economic localisation practices in various ways. Totnes has a population of around 8,000 people, as mentioned, and is located in a relatively wealthy farming area of South West England. In addition, Totnes is specifically well-known for the vitality of its High Street and the large number of local independent shops there are in the town. These factors combine to make it easier to encourage a stronger local economy, and there was certainly an awareness of this amongst many I spent time with in Totnes. There was a sense that engaging in a stronger more localised economy was achievable in Totnes; that individual and community actions can more easily make a difference at this smaller scale. When talking about adopting a similar approach in the city of London one person working with Transition said: “It frightens me just being in London; I just think, ‘how are we going to feed them all?’” There was a certain awareness amongst some that implementing localisation practices at the scale of a large city would be more challenging than it is in Totnes.

Nonetheless, the Transition movement more broadly is aware of needing to make their core messages appealing across different scales, and the organisation is attempting to explore the viability of localisation at a variety of locations, in addition to small UK farming towns such as Totnes. For example Transition’s Local Economic Blueprint project, which is an economic review analysing the overall impact of moving more economic activity towards the local scale in particular areas (see Ward, 2013), started in Totnes but is also being carried out in Brixton – an area of inner city London, and Herefordshire – a county in the UK (Ward, 2013: 32). Plus, in another indication of diversification of scale, the Transition movement has chosen to no longer label places ‘Transition Towns’, but instead uses the term ‘Transition initiatives’ to acknowledge that Transition is being taken up not only in towns, but in streets, villages, cities, and broader regions, too.

It is clear that the question of scale is broadly significant in the framework of the wider Transition movement too, since the movement is trying to work across scales. Transition are operating in a globalised context, in which people can be seen to “form themselves in shifting alliances, mobilized for reasons of power, passion, discipline, or dis-ease and mounting campaigns for particular configurations of scale” (Tsing, 2000: 327). The Transition movement thus communicates across global scales in order to share ideas and promote their core messages to as many people as possible. They also aim to ensure the wider relevance and open-mindedness of their movement by operating at the global scale, to try to counter the accusation that they are encouraging isolationist behavior. Transition co-Founder Rob Hopkins revokes

the accusation that “Transition initiatives [are] building ‘havens’, insulating themselves from the rest of the world”, by saying: “I haven’t met a single person actively involved in Transition who sees it like that; indeed that is part of the reason Transition Network was established, as a way of making sure that people saw that it was not enough for just one town to do this” (Hopkins (a), 2009). Whilst actively acknowledging the importance of global interaction and involvement, it remains clear that generally the ‘local’ scale is perceived as a more tangible field for actions for Transitioners, to make a direct and practical difference through the practices people embody in their daily lives in their own local area. There are many justifications given for this preferential framing of the local scale, and many ways this preference was demonstrated in people’s daily practices, and these are topics I will explore in further detail throughout this Chapter.

Localising Patterns of Consumption

For those involved Transition in Totnes there seemed to be relatively strong consensus about the ideal daily behaviours relating to consumption; from my interviews and observations I found people involved in Transition to be in agreement that sourcing goods as locally as possible is a good idea, due to a general perception that this will result in decreased environmental impact. When asking people involved in Transition how much of their products they purchased from local producers and businesses, over half of those interviewed said that it was over 50% of their purchases, and all of those interviewed tried to shop as locally as possible, with environmental considerations in mind. Although there was some diversity in reported consumption behaviours it was made clear that there was broadly consensus amongst those involved in Transition about the importance of building a more local economy through partaking in more conscious consumption. Taking localisation behaviours into their own daily lives as much as possible was perceived by many of those involved in Transition as a way to challenge existing structural barriers, often seen to result from the prevalence of the globalised, growth-focused economy.

Upon arrival in Totnes I was immediately struck by how much environmental motivations shaped the consumption habits of those around me. This was made visible in many tangible ways, one of which being the minimal levels of waste being produced and seen as acceptable. Many people I spent time with in Totnes demonstrated a desire to re-use goods as much as possible, through fixing them or giving them to others. As you would expect, there was also a strong ethos of recycling as much as possible; when visiting the Transition offices I saw many types of recycling facilities there, and over the bin for non-recyclable rubbish there was a reminder sign asking: “Are you sure? This bin goes to LANDFILL”. These everyday disciplinary practices encouraged people to lower their consumption levels in a very public way, thus creating certain acceptable norms around consumption. As Colloredo-Mansfeld (2005) argues, “the act of discriminating among goods and activities positions the consumer in a field of relations, and consequently produces that field” (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2005: 216). In Totnes, those involved in Transition encourage

people to value goods and minimise needless consumption as much as possible, showing a desire for a new ethos. This ethos could be seen as broadly based on “transforming our relationship with stuff”, to shift towards a more meaningful and conscious relationship with what we consume (Potts, 2013). Among those involved in Transition this behaviour seemed to be producing ethical modes of social behaviour in which consumption is accompanied by conscious acknowledgement of its environmental impact, and attempts to minimise this impact as much as possible are seen as the norm.

The Importance of Embodied Practice in Creating Economic Alternatives

Many environmental and social change campaigners have focused on the potential catastrophic consequences of climate change, attempting to use shock and fear to get people’s attention and mobilize them to action. Yet, this approach has often proved ineffective, and it can be argued that “looking to the epochal quantities of both [chaos and suffering] as the shocks that will awaken the masses out of their somnolence is not promising” (Lilley et al, 2012: x). In contrast to the well-trodden path of “tales of chaos and suffering” (ibid) one of the major motivating features underpinning the Transition approach is an “engaged optimism” (Hopkins (a), 2013). It may sound counter-intuitive to some that there are reasons to be cheerful in the face of potential economic collapse and environmental meltdown. However, the argument is that “peak oil and climate change should be seen as an opportunity to build more ecologically sustainable, more local, and more convivial economies” (North, 2010: 586). It is a major drive of enthusiasm and inspiration for those involved in Transition to be working towards building the kind of society they want, rather than constantly focusing their energies on fighting against a reality they do not want. This distinguishes the Transition approach from other strategies for social change, as I will explore in detail in Chapter 2, after establishing in further detail the characteristics of the Transition movement in Totnes.

The Transition approach is fuelled by a focus on embodied daily practices being used as a channel to challenge the status quo. From a Foucauldian perspective “the economy [is a] mythicized abstraction that refer[s] to the entirety of techniques” used to order and direct people’s daily behaviour (Power, 2011: 40). Many involved in Transition in Totnes seemed to be seeking to actively embody their alternative vision for the economy in their own daily behaviours as a form of resisting the mainstream, neoliberal and economic-growth focused economy. The motivation for this approach is nicely summarised in the famous Buckminster Fuller quote, which was quoted to me a quite few times whilst I was in Totnes: “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete”. There is a strong sense in Totnes of being a part of actively creating a positive alternative to the current system, to the extent that one interview participant told me that “even if none of these things [climate change and peak oil] were there; even if they were made up, it would still make

complete sense to do what we are doing, because of the benefits to overall natural life and to us". It becomes clear that the Transition movement are enacting a prefigurative approach to social change, which "does not seek to conquer the world; it seeks instead to build the world anew" (Maeckelbergh 2011: 3). As mentioned, I will explore the characteristics of this prefigurative approach in further depth in Chapter 2. For now, it is important to highlight that it is in large part through adopting alternative economic *practices* informed by economic localisation that those involved in Transition are attempting to achieve social change.

Here 'practices' should be understood as part of a wider discourse; practice is seen as intentional and central in creating the societal change Transition are aiming for. From the activities I observed it became clear that it is not enough for those involved in Transition to change ideas; it is through embodiment of ideas in people's behaviour that new structures can be created in the local economy. "Practices [are] being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect" (Foucault, 1991 in Burchell et al, 1991: 75). Through their actions, those involved in Transition in Totnes are attempting to encourage new types of practices, new norms of behaviour, ultimately a new discourse based on the primacy of an environmentally informed economic localisation. The localisation discourse adopted by Transition attempts to pose a radical challenge to the status quo not only by pointing to the futility of existing ideas of the economy based on growth. Instead, central to their approach is adopting alternative practices that prove this futility through embodying a viable alternative in their daily behaviours.

The identity ascribed by a globalised neoliberal economy represents narrow conceptions of people as *homo economicus* (Latouche, 2010: 522), and in this formation the collective is made up of a certain "anonymity, derived from homogenous individuals meeting in the market place" (Hart, 2007: 13-15). Yet when analysing individual and collective identities from a Foucauldian perspective it becomes clear there are "mundane rules embedded in practices that govern what can be said, known, and done, by whom, and to whom" (Power, 2011: 39). Those involved in Transition in Totnes are attempting to find their own ways of redefining these rules by embodying an alternative vision of the economy through their daily behaviour. They are seeking to challenge the "alienation on which the modern economy has been built" (Hart, 2007), and much of the power of their rejection seems to come from their positive vision and practical embodiment of the alternative, informed by an economic localisation ethos.

The socially embedded, personal and natural aspects of life were certainly high on the priority list in Totnes. Based on initial appearances you could perhaps easily assume that Transitioners in Totnes are attempting to completely reject the formal economy. Yet this would be an oversimplification which presumes a separation between the social and the economic. Many anthropologists have challenged the "story of the 'great transformation' from socially embedded to dis-embedded and abstracted economic

forms” (Maurer, 2006: 17), on the basis of the continued evidence of socially embedded features in the modern economic system (Maurer 2006, Hart 2007). “In the capitalist West, sociologists found instances during which money and finance seemed more dependent on their re-embedding in social relations than on their depersonalized abstraction” (Keister 2002, in Maurer 2006: 21). The socially embedded features of economic systems can be observed in Totnes, and actually form aspects of the local economy which those involved in Transition are actively seeking to encourage and further cultivate. Rejecting the purely monetary and anonymous interpretation of the economy so prevalent in neoliberal conceptions was actually made evident in Totnes through people embodying experimentation with new forms of economy in daily practices and interactions.

By making an “ontological commitment ... to a conception of order grounded in surface habits and practical action” (Power, 2011: 50) it is possible to interpret the actions of those involved in Transition in Totnes as attempting to create a new type of socioeconomic order. Exploring some examples of these practices and interactions below will serve to demonstrate how Transition is seeking to evoke a new vision of the economy not only by changing people’s ideas on the economy, but by creating an enabling environment for new forms of economic action. This approach to localisation can be interpreted as a type of Foucauldian discourse, which “disciplines subjects into certain ways of thinking and acting, but this is not simply repressive; it does not impose rules for thought and behaviour on a pre-existing human agent. Instead, human subjects are actively produced through discourses. Our sense of our self is made through the operation of discourse” (Rose, 2001: 137). Here, by taking a Foucauldian perspective of economic localisation as a discourse, we can start to understand “how these practices function, and the kind of order they create” (Power, 2011: 37). Through the discourse of localisation many people in Totnes are attempting to re-draw the economic boundaries dictated from above, and reclaim their identity as social beings within the economy.

One practical example of this comes in the form of the free exchange of training in new skills currently run by Transition in Totnes. The “great re-skilling” is identified as important aspect of the Transition process, needed in order to improve community resilience (Hopkins, 2011: 152). The skills identified as important include “how to garden, repair things, look after small livestock, and generally make do with little” (ibid). The diversity of skill share sessions regularly available in Totnes often encompassed these key topics and regularly spread beyond them. I attended sessions on foraging for wild food, sewing, and gardening. There were also sessions available on dance, free running, yoga, cooking and much more. Those involved in organising the skill shares told me that they were amazed at the abundance of skills offered, and number of people willing to give their time up for free. Having such a strong presence of an attitude favouring skill-sharing had an impact on me too; I started to think about the types of skills I possessed which I could easily share and which others may value, and decided to run my own skill share workshop, training people on basic social media usage and also exploring the relevance of social media for wellbeing and activism.

Some of those in Totnes participating in the skill share programme perceive their actions as a form of practicing the 'gift economy'. "Gift giving constitutes one of the most important modes of social exchange in human societies" (Yan, 2005: 246). People have all sorts of motivations for giving - reciprocity, strengthening communal ties, social expectation (Yan, 2005). Yet in Totnes, freely giving away marketable skills and goods was often explained as an overt rejection of economic definitions of humans as self-interested individuals only; "we are not what economists define us as", one person argued at a meeting in Totnes during which 'gift economy' practices were being discussed. At the same meeting there were calls for the need for a wide "cultural shift, to change the way people view money and the economy". Skill sharing in Totnes can be interpreted as people acting in a way that acknowledges the inherently social embedded nature of the economy.

Many projects are running in Totnes which people involved in Transition label with the term 'gift economy', and they are all at various stages of development. There is Doctor Bike project, which is a regular stall in Totnes market at which bikes are fixed for exchange or for free. Doctor Bike - run by Ben Branwyn who co-founded Transition Network and still works for the Network in Totnes - openly states his intentions in building the 'gift economy' through his bike repair project. It is the personal interaction that is involved in an exchange which is an important motivation for Doctor Bike, not monetary payment. He explains that "one aspect of the nature of money that, for a Doctor Bike session, is most unwelcome - [is] its impersonalness" (Branwyn, 2013). It is in the hope of building personal connections and relationships, and the placing of this more at the forefront of economic exchange, that motivates Doctor Bike and many other people and projects in Totnes.

This is not to say that a shift towards the 'gift economy' should be seen as total or encompassing in Totnes; even for those who invest their time and energy in promoting this vision. Firstly, I do not wish to fall into presenting the already discredited "binary logic that... [pits] gifts against commodities" (Appadurai in Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2005: 212). It is clear that gifts play a prominent part in monetised societies without being evidence of an alternative economic discourse. Yet, it is the intention and frequency of the practices I observed in Totnes which were labelled by people under the title of 'gift economy' which distinguishes them. Freely giving away goods and services was intentionally carried out as a way to strengthen social connections and actively used as a way to challenge the "axioms of rational self-interest" which are inaccurately presented as dominant in mainstream economics (Eisenstien, 2011). Instead people involved in Transition in Totnes seem to be aiming to cultivate interdependence, not just among individuals but at the community level. This is part of a broader vision of localisation, that allows not only for more environmentally sustainable economics but enables a "re-building the fabric of connection, the fabric of community between people" (Norberg-Hodge, 2011). Additionally the intention was not only to engage in these practices to connect the community in Totnes, but rather to challenge the wider discourse of a

socially and environmentally dis-embedded economy. It became clear that fostering strong social connections and re-embedding these in economic transactions was seen as vital for successfully localising an economy.

During discussions I participated in based on these alternative economic practices people would describe Totnes as a type of social “laboratory” for testing out the viability of an economy built more strongly on the ideas of the ‘gift’ and community relations as currency, as well as other aspects of alternative economics. These are ethnographic examples which demonstrate Transition’s prefigurative approach to social change (as explored in more depth in Chapter 2) in which Transition are literally instigating a “physical intervention... in a form that itself prefigures an alternative” (Graeber, 2002: 62). By testing these ideas in practice many involved were intentionally attempting to produce evidence of how these practices could be expanded and used as inspiration for others.

At certain times the motivation for gift-based exchanges could be the hope of monetary exchange being an eventual outcome, again demonstrating the cross-over between monetary and non-monetary exchange. For example one person doing a lot of volunteering with Transition explained “I do a lot of stuff for free, but it’s not because it’s voluntary ... it’s because I see it is leading to something more”. This hope - that freely given efforts would lead to monetary reward - was repeated to me a few times by different people. This diversity of aims and motivations behind activities labelled as part of the ‘gift economy’ in Totnes should not necessarily be seen as contradictory; the market and community aspects of economy are not mutually exclusive. In fact, both should be seen as necessary for a functioning economy (Gudeman, 2005). Plus, as mentioned, the “sharp contrast between gift exchange and commodity exchange has been questioned by many anthropologists” (Yan, 2005: 246). This contrast was not only blurred in Totnes, but often intentionally so; people may give goods or time away freely in the hope that this may support monetary payment indirectly, or they may be seeking to build relationships simply to strengthen community ties. All of this activity can still be interpreted as part of the overarching aim of improving the resilience of the local economy in Totnes; through a culture of sharing and giving, skills are improved, relationships strengthened, and people are able to engage in more meaningful livelihoods, and many feel an increased level of community as a result.

This perception that socially embedded and interconnected aspects of the local community are significant for the economy was also experienced by many of those within the more formal side of the economy in Totnes, too. When speaking with local business owners some mentioned to me the significance of the camaraderie amongst many of the business people in Totnes. When asking whether localisation practices were improving Totnes, one person working in agriculture - one of the dominant economic sectors in Totnes (Ward, 2013: 10) - told me that “there’s an interconnectedness among local businesses, where the proprietors know each other well, the workers know each other, there’s a sense of; we’re all kind of

competing against each other, but we're all doing the same thing... so there's a sense of community". Another person told me that when they were planning to open a new shop in Totnes which would be selling some similar produce to other places in the town they went to speak with the other business owners first, to see how they could work to collaboratively support each other. This resulted in the new shop and the existing businesses ensuring there was enough diversity in their stock to distinguish from one another. This paints a completely different picture to the global capitalist markets, in which high levels of competition are seen as an expected, and often desirable, factor of everyday business.

Diverse, small, independent local businesses are one of the key factors that make Totnes a somewhat unique place to be. Around 80% of Totnes' High Street is made up of these local businesses; a fact which many outsiders admire (Wearn, 2013), and which many of those in Totnes are proud of (Ward, 2013: 6). In order to support economic innovation and continued entrepreneurship in Totnes those involved in Transition have started hosting an annual Local Entrepreneur Forum (LEF). I was given the opportunity to attend the 2013 LEF, where I helped out as a volunteer. This event was really interesting in terms of the way it presented the broader economic situation; presentations posed points such as "there is no cavalry" coming to save people from the economic crisis and instead people need to empower themselves to solve challenges at the local level. There was also a discussion about "the brand of Totnes" – how important the distinctive "vitality" of Totnes High Street is to the local economy, with "many shops which are good at specialising". The day ended with a 'Green Dragon's Den' (adapted from the concept of the Dragon's Den on the UK television programme the apprentice) in which the whole community were seen as the investors, and – in-line with the combination of ideas of community and monetary economy in Totnes – the investment did not need to be monetary only, but could also consist of other offers of support, such as offers of specialist skills, time, space or equipment. Many people participated in this session, and lots of valuable investments - monetary and otherwise - were made. It seemed clear that part of the intention of this event was to build and strengthen bridges between the monetary-based and community-based perceptions and practices in the local economy.

These dual aspects of the economy - monetary and community - have been acknowledged by many other scholars. As Gudeman (2005: 97) points out, "the dialectic of the community and market exist in all economies, even if not fully present in conscious thought or perhaps even denied in formal discourse". The neoliberal discourse of market rules claims dominance for the impersonal nature of anonymous market exchange (Hart, 2007: 14), yet this discourse does not accurately acknowledge that all humans in society are not just independent, profit-maximising, rational decision makers, but instead must "learn to be self-reliant to some degree *and* to belong to others" (ibid, emphasis added), since "market spaces are contained within communal agreements" (Gudeman, 2005: 96). Through activities such as skill shares, Doctor Bike and the Local Economic Forum many people in Totnes are attempting to re-draw the economic boundaries in Totnes to make clear that sociality and community are vital aspects of the economy. These activities are

adopted for many involved in Transition in Totnes as embodied practices, which in turn form a part of an alternative economic discourse shaped by a localisation ethos. “Discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it” (Rose, 2001: 136). By not only inspiring understanding of the need for economic change but also reformulating people’s practices, the Transition’s localisation discourse is enabling people to experience social change directly themselves, and therefore see an alternative economic system as a more viable option.

The Appeal of an Alternative Economic Approach in Totnes

The economic localisation position of the Transition movement is an increasingly strong aspect of their overall messaging, and this is an intentional decision made to re-align with wider public interests in the context of current economic challenges. As one person working with Transition told me: “polls have shown that the public interest in climate change, in the kind of ‘Inconvenient Truth-polar bear’ version, has fallen off quite sharply as the economic situation gets worse and worse. So I think the way that Transition increasingly presents its case - in terms of being about community resilience and economic regeneration based on those values [awareness of the significance of climate change] - is a really important way forward actually, because that is where everybody is at.” This same interview participant went on to explain that focusing on changes in the economy as a gateway to dealing with energy and climate related challenges could be seen as a kind of re-articulation of the original aims of the Transition movement, which initially focused on climate change and peak oil as primary entry points to engage public interest. This shift has been in large part motivated by a desire to reach as many people as possible, and gain a critical mass of interest to enable a wider engagement in transitioning society.

Economic localisation seems to have achieved its position as a noteworthy discourse in Totnes largely through those involved in Transition embodying economic localisation practices, thus making visible the fact they are social beings making a choice to participate in an economic system. There is an “active role each of us plays in sustaining the system”, in contrast to the way the economy can be presented in neoliberal ideology as “an impersonal system we regard as inevitable” (Hart, 2007: 12). One of the main aspects of Transition’s localisation ethos is that it enables people to become more overtly engaged in shaping the economy through their daily practices, and some people are realising the genuine transformative change their embodied practices can make. A recent article on Transition highlighted this when quoting a Transitioner saying: “it’s really true that doing little things, step by step, makes a difference.... So even if things seem small, or you think it will not make a big difference, just persist” (see Flintoff, 2013). Whilst in the latest Transition book, *The Power of Just Doing Stuff*, the Transition approach is celebrated by an activist who states: “once practical things start happening that people can see and touch, something changes in the culture. It feels like something is happening, that the reality is changing” (José Martín, in Hopkins (b), 2013). It is through encouraging the consistent embodiment of small day-to-

day changes in economic practices which the Transition movement aims to achieve wider significant social change.

Chapter 2: Economic Growth: “A Fool’s Paradise”?

“Stories are our window into the world; they are what we use to interpret the world... We also have collective stories, norms operating in the background all the time. It is not often we question how this works... [but] we are telling ourselves particular stories about the economic system – more is better, growth is good – and this is affecting our day-to-day lives... These stories are strong, but if we can send people to the moon, we can change our economic system”.

The above was part of an introduction given at an event I attended in Totnes, co-hosted by Transition, which intended to look at why economics had strayed so far from meeting human needs, and how it was possible to help reverse this divergence. At the same event the presenter said “nobody wants suffering in the world; we need a better system”, to which someone in the audience responded “I think you’re just being a bit impatient aren’t you? You just need to wait for wealth to ‘trickle-down’”. The reaction to this comment was telling; everyone in the audience burst out into laughter, including the person who had made the comment. At that point the consensus in the room became very clear; neoliberalism provides a system so far removed from meeting most people’s needs that it has become a joke. Broadly, the alternative presented was that we need to try to find ways to better connect economics with meeting people’s genuine needs, rather than striving for economic growth for its own sake.

In this second chapter I will explore in more detail people’s attitudes towards economic growth in Totnes. I will initially cover the opinions of those involved in Transition, and will then compare the Transition movement’s approach to that advocated in the academic literature on the concept of de-growth. I will show how de-growth scholars and Transition activists argue from a similar perspective in some ways, but they also take different approaches to social change. Whereas de-growth scholars prioritise attempts at righting the wrongs in the current economic growth-led system, Transition’s approach can be characterised more as a prefigurative strategy (see Graeber, 2002, Maeckelbergh, 2011), with a focus on embodying the changes they seek in wider society. Underpinning this chapter is the presumed connection between economic localisation being adopted following a rejection of economic growth, which is an assertion made both by some in Transition and in much academic literature (Fournier, 2008, Kallis, 2011). However, later

in the third chapter of this thesis, I will unpick this relationship, showing that although this connection was evident for many involved in Transition, it was not necessarily evident to all in Totnes.

Perceptions of Economic Growth

Economic growth has been dominant in perceptions of how societal progress can be achieved and measured for decades. Yet the kind of hyperbolic enthusiasm that can at times accompany faith in economic growth is not embraced by all. Many have questioned its desirability, strongly criticising neoliberals for their efforts to spread market forces and encourage growth no-matter-the-cost across the world (Coronil, 2000). One of the most powerful challenges to the neoliberal focus on “growth for growth’s sake” (Latouche, 2010: 519) is based on the environmentally unsustainable practices that this approach has led to (Adams, 2000). The increasing pressure on the finite natural resources on this planet is one of the main justifications many scholars are invoking in their call for complete reconsideration of the focus on economic growth as a positive indicator of societal progress (Latouche 2004, Martinez-Alier *et al* 2010).

This scepticism about the viability – and desirability – of continued economic growth is certainly shared by many in the Transition movement. During interviews with those supporting or working directly with Transition in Totnes I heard many different passionate criticisms of economic growth as a measure of progress. In different interviews with those involved in Transition, I heard economic growth characterised as follows: “an insane and twisted way of measuring progress”, which is “clearly dysfunctional”, “completely flawed” and “extremely dangerous”. One interview participant told me that economic growth is “the most disastrous thing that has happened, because we only look at one measure” which doesn’t take into account social and environmental costs. A completely negative perception of economic growth was shared by nearly all of those I spoke to who were involved in Transition in Totnes.

These negative views were held in spite of – and perhaps in large part because of – an acknowledgement that growth is still a widely accepted measure of progress in wider mainstream society, especially in the United Kingdom. “Economic growth is a mantra, a predominant world view, an assumption signed up to without question” one Transitioner told me during an interview. There was an awareness directly acknowledged during interviews that economic growth is still the measure used by those with political and economic power; as one participant put it, “many business leaders and politicians are still wedded to economic growth”. Often people expressed the view that the economic growth doctrine has gained its strength through claiming that to live in a growing economy effectively supports people’s needs. However, continued belief that economic growth can help to meet people’s needs on a finite planet was dismissed as “a fool’s paradise”.

People's justifications for so strongly rejecting economic growth varied. Many were heavily critical of the globalisation of supply chains, which economic growth was seen to encourage. One person articulated this criticism by stating that "the way our systems have been set up so food is grown somewhere, cured somewhere else, packaged somewhere else, and then brought to another location... is absolutely ludicrous". There was a perception that measuring increased global production in terms of economic growth and calling this progress is having a horrendous environmental and social impact. As another interview participant explained, "economic growth is clearly dysfunctional in that it has not lead to greater social justice or social equity, and is also massively dysfunctional in terms of environmental damage – these 'externalities', as economists call them". This presents a clear mistrust in mainstream economic processes to present an accurate view of progress. Many of those I spoke to involved in Transition in Totnes perceived the measurement of economic growth as a distortion, which is actually representative of damage to the environment and to the social fabric of society, dressed up in statistics which infer that growing is a positive.

This aversion to economic growth was also directly linked to some people's justifications for advocating and engaging in localisation practices. At the event mentioned at the opening of this chapter the presenter argued that "an economy based on growth has to create more and more wants" and that in order to change the system "it is necessary to start at the root; in our own lives and communities". This message was expanded with the caution to be wary of the glorification of excess seen in the aggressive marketing tactics of many global corporations, and instead understand that we can meet most of our genuine needs much closer to home in a more fulfilling and satisfying way. Through framing the message in this way, the event demonstrated that localisation practices in Totnes are being used by some as a direct rejection of economic growth. As an alternative to a growth obsessed economy many involved in Transition in Tontes are promoting a message aligned with the practices highlighted in Chapter 1; those of a more community-focused economy being able to better meet people's needs locally.

A regularly mentioned element of people's criticisms of economic growth in Totnes was based on the weaknesses in its most common measurement – Gross Domestic Product (GDP). During my time in Totnes the organisation I was doing an internship with, the Network of Wellbeing (NOW), hosted an event to launch a book called *Gross Domestic Problem: The Politics Behind the World's Most Powerful Number* by academic Lorenzo Fioramonti (2013). This book explores the political motivations behind GDP, tracing the history of this measurement and explaining how it was initially introduced as a "war planning tool" to measure economic efficiency in the United States during World War 2 (ibid: 23). It went on to become "the globally accepted measure of economic success" (ibid: 40), in part due to its accessible simplicity. Essentially the original idea was to "generate a series of aggregate measures capable of condensing all economic production by individuals, companies and the government into a single number, which should rise in good times and fall in bad" (ibid:25-6). The extension of this measurement from a war-time tool to a

general measurement of economic and societal success was challenged from the start. Even the economist who contributed to the original creation of this measure, Stanley Kuznets, warned that one should “beware of extending this viewpoint [of GDP as a measure of success], justified by the temporary crisis in the life of a nation, to the common run of public activities” (Kuznets in Fioramonti, 2013: 33). Yet Fioramonti (2013: 33) traces how the success of having a single measure during war time led to the wider implementation of this measurement, without enough acknowledgement of the “shortcomings that this number suffered from as an indicator of national welfare”. Fioramonti’s work is significant, especially because some people I spoke with in Totnes shared his analysis of this issue, some even specifically quoting him during interviews following the talk he gave at his book launch in Totnes.

In addition, Fioramonti (2013: 119) used the Transition movement as an example of the “change from below” which can challenge the dominance of GDP. When I asked Fioramonti why he chose Totnes as an example of somewhere trying to escape the weaknesses of the GDP measure, he said: “Totnes has become a reference point in the global quest for a peaceful and coordinated transition to a no-carbon economy... A post-GDP world will be the product of the many Totnes-like collective experiments underway across the globe.” It is clear that there is skepticism about the GDP measure in Totnes, as part of a wider skepticism that economic growth measured by GDP is not a suitable sign of the welfare and progress of society. Totnes seems to be a site where people can feel relatively more comfortable challenging GDP, a measure that is still so widely accepted elsewhere. Furthermore, Totnes is also a place in which some people are actively “experimenting” with alternative models through their daily practices, thus providing a “laboratory” for alternative economic practices, as I outlined in Chapter 1.

In some ways what is being critiqued about GDP by some of the people involved in Transition in Totnes is the choice of what is being quantified. Amongst the criticisms of GDP I heard during my time in Totnes, one person illustrated its limitations by describing how they could go for a lovely walk with a friend in the woods, forage for some free wild food, enjoy an afternoon of laughter and joy, and then return home, and this would make no difference to GDP figures. However, if that same friend got into a serious accident on the way home, got picked up by an ambulance and taken to the hospital then this could add to GDP figures. This example was used to demonstrate that “GDP only counts things exchanged for money; the things we love aren’t included”. Others have also highlighted that the GDP measurement counts many negative things that contribute nothing to people’s wellbeing, such as oil spills, but leave out positives such as unpaid care provision (Boyce, 2013). Therefore there is a sense amongst some in Totnes that to view GDP as the most beneficial measure is leading us in the wrong direction.

There are also some links that can be made between this rejection of GDP growth measurements and my earlier discussions on the significance of scale. People involved in Transition in Totnes explained that they had lots of motivations for engaging in economic localisation practices, many of which they deemed as

beneficial for their own wellbeing as well as that of wider society and the natural environment. Some of the motivations which people listed were more connected communities, more meaningful work, camaraderie among local businesses, a deeper engagement with nature, and often a sense of joy and fun resulting from their engagement with the Transition approach. People shared a sense that these experiences demonstrated improved quality of life at the local scale through economic localisation, and it was these types of experiences which could be perceived as more tangible success or progress in Totnes, due to their proximity at the local scale, rather than the seemingly more distant measure of GDP.

Transition as an Example of De-growth?

As I have mentioned above, there is a growing body of scholars advocating for 'de-growth'; those who hold a rejection of the growth-focused economy as their starting point and key premise (Fournier, 2008, Latouche, 2010). In many ways those involved in Transition in Totnes seemed aligned with de-growth approaches. Those advocating de-growth also suggest that localisation can provide a powerful alternative to macro-theories of global economic growth (Martinez-Alier *et al* 2010). As opposed to the macro-level change and abandonment of local knowledge which has been associated with globalisation and economic development (Escobar, 1995), de-growth proponents emphasise more localised control of societies within smaller communities (Cattaneo *et al* 2012). This idea turns away from the Universalist claims of neoliberal growth and globalisation, and follows an alternative trend towards re-localisation and relational diversity (Escobar, 2011). Again, there is a presumed link here between eliminating economic growth as a measurement and the localisation of an economy. As briefly mentioned, this is a link that I problematize in Chapter 3, but first I will explore the basis on which the link is often made.

The similarities between the Transition and de-growth movements has previously been highlighted by other academics. For example, Lorenzo Fioramonti (2013: 130) highlights that "because of their ambition to re-think the conventional economic paradigm, the Transition initiatives can be seen as a practical example of 'de-growth'". Certainly, there are many related similarities to be found, too. There is an acknowledgement by de-growth scholars that the "paradigm of continuous economic growth cannot be sustained on a finite planet" (D'Alisa *et al*, 2013); an argument that has also, as I've mentioned, been made strongly by the Transition movement (Hopkins (a), 2008). In addition, "de-growth aims to develop a new language by which to redefine what we mean by progress," (Fioramonti, 2013: 133) outside of the confines of endless economic growth. So too do those I spoke with involved in Transition in Totnes - who see economic growth as "flawed" and "dysfunctional" - seek to find ways to frame viable alternatives.

However, in spite of these clear theoretical similarities there are also some interesting contrasts between the Transition and de-growth movements. There are distinct and diverging tactics advocated by Transition and de-growth, with dividing lines based on the kinds of approach each movement uses when aiming for

social change. Those who use a de-growth framework for analysis have argued that there is a “distinction between forms of alternative activism that respect conventional societal norms and forms of resistance that fundamentally reject some of the key tenets of contemporary market economies,” and Transition is seen by some to fall into the former category (D’Alisa et al, 2013). Those calling for more radical solutions argue that since the “growth paradigm... [is an] unquestioned imperative...counter-hegemonic discourses and praxis are needed to re-politicize the debate about what kind of society we want to live in”, and that de-growth should contribute to building this narrative (Mouffe, 2005 in D’Alisa et al, 2013: 3). Others have also critiqued the limits of the Transition approach for its non-confrontational stance, since “in order to be as accessible as possible, Transition groups... develop a model that forms around what many different people have in common” rather than tackling the problems in the status quo (Chatterton and Cutler, 2008: 4). Whereas those in the de-growth movement seek to actively challenge the powerful elites propagating economic growth, Transition can be seen to be working within different boundaries, trying not to completely alienate mainstream, economic-growth focused people and groups.

These critiques come from a position that acknowledges that Transition may be successful in creating bottom-up actions, through “a strong network of pragmatic, local, day-to-day change” but they are not tackling the change so much from above, in a way which can be created through high profile campaigning and analysing the faults in the systems and institutions controlling society. Therefore, these critiques are based on a presumption that change through influence from above can be the most effective approach. There is concern that Transition do not adequately take on “high impact actions that shake people to question the habits of high consumer lifestyles, cheap flights and unnecessary car journeys and... [the] systems that facilitate them” (Chatterton and Cutler, 2008: 18). However, I learned that it is actually an intentional choice within the Transition approach to not combatively challenge people on their lifestyles or become overtly antagonistic towards those holding political and economic power; instead they aim for “pragmatic, local, day-to-day change” by trying to encourage change from the bottom-up community level, rather than focusing on criticism of existing structures. As Transition co-founder Rob Hopkins (2008) explains, “Transition’s refusal to engage in confrontational approaches to change... has been a conscious decision from the outset”. As I have highlighted in Chapter 1, Transition engage in a particular kind of discourse that places people’s daily practices at the forefront of attempts to create fundamental social change. In order to encourage new norms in daily practices the Transition movement seeks to appeal to as many people as they can, and they see the most effective way of doing this being to avoid confrontation wherever possible.

In Totnes I observed Transition’s aversion for the confrontational approach directly. Whilst being shown a new building that had recently been acquired for a Transition project in Totnes, a person working with Transition explained that the process to get permission to use the building had taken quite a while. A visitor to the town asked “why not just squat in it?!” to which the person working with Transition replied;

“that would just not have been an effective approach”. This was an example of non-confrontational tactics being purposefully chosen by Transition; as they are seen as the most effective way to deal with different people and groups, and therefore help to achieve goals and contribute to the aims of the broader Transition movement.

The pragmatic tactics used by Transition highlight a purposeful aversion to confrontation. There is a sense in which the magnitude of the problems which Transition seeks to address are so far-reaching in their implications, that it is important to appeal to as many people as possible. Always starting from a negative position and having “confrontational activism as the principal tool in our toolbox is profoundly unskillful,” argues Hopkins (2008, b). Instead it is deemed important to realise the potential of appealing to a wide audience, and empowering them with the awareness that they can make a difference – no matter how large or small – in their own community. In order to do this many people in Transition told me that it is important to work actively towards the reality they do want, rather than focusing on the negatives. This approach seems to be in-line with a growing amount of evidence showing that focus on “catastrophe can be paralyzing, not mobilizing” as a campaign call (Lilley et al, 2013: x). Rather than focus on the ills of the system, and the disastrous repercussions if we continue on our current path, many involved in Transition want to move beyond this. This also involves moving beyond “making our starting point trying to work out who is to blame for the predicament we are in” (Hopkins (b), 2008), and instead focusing on taking practical steps towards the environmentally sustainable, localised vision which Transition is promoting.

The lack of confrontation in the Transition approach could also be attributed to the sense of inevitability many people involved seem to have when it comes to changes in the structures in society. I participated in many different Transition events and training sessions during which the facts and figures of peak oil and climate change were laid out, and the impossibility of continuation of our existing system stated and re-stated. Within this framework of understanding there is perhaps a sense that there is no need to antagonize or destroy the existing system, since it is already on a path to self-destruction. Instead, many of those involved in Transition see it as more pragmatic to prepare as best they can for maintaining a livable quality of life in the after-math of the destruction of current systems. For some of those involved in Transition in Totnes this provides another justification for the strong focus on adapting people’s daily practices in preparation for the expected fundamental change in the economic systems which govern people’s lives.

This practice-focused approach could be seen as using “prefiguration as a strategic practice” (see Maeckelbergh, 2011), and is another factor which could perhaps be seen to distinguish Transition from de-growth and other social change approaches. The emphasis on the importance of embodied practices seems to be summarised in a nutshell in the title of Hopkins’ latest Transition book, *The Power of Just Doing Stuff* (2013, b), which is indicative of Transition’s model for formulating social change; that of practice becoming

a core component of the movement itself. The Transition movement and those involved seek to create change not by appealing to the status quo, but by enacting the future they want to see in the here and now. Therefore, Transition could be distinguished based on its adoption of prefiguration as a strategic approach, explained here by Maeckelbergh (2011: 17):

“There is a strategy that transforms existing power relations not by pointing out what is wrong with the existing structures and demanding that these be changed, nor by verbally convincing others that alternatives are possible, but by actively setting up alternative structures so that people can experience for themselves what is possible”.

Although this passage refers to the alterglobalisation movement the description can also be used to describe how Transition engage in their own form of social change movement; not with a focus on fighting the powers that be and criticising existing structures, but instead prioritising engaging in actions which bring an alternative way of living to the fore.

As highlighted in Chapter 1 there is a sense that embodied daily practices can be used as a tool to create change; economic localisation practices are intentionally chosen by those in Transition to seek to change the structures of power governing the economy and wider society. Just as Foucault emphasised the “power we exert over ourselves’ rather than the more conventional central, coercive, institutional conception” (in Power, 2011: 52), so too do Transition focus on small, daily practical changes people can make at the individual and community levels in order to engender wide-scale change in societies. After all, it is “surface habits and practical action” which can create a sense of order and “regimes of truth”, which then provides a framework for what kinds of behaviour can be considered acceptable, and who has the power to define the acceptability of certain behaviours within society (Foucault, in Power 2011: 37-50). Therefore, Transition seek to challenge the hegemonic power of economic growth not by attacking those who promote growth but, instead, by offering alternative forms of action; by physically demonstrating how it is possible to exist as social beings within a more localised economy which does not use growth as its primary measure of success.

There were multiple occasions on which I heard those involved in Transition pledge allegiance to this practice-focused model. It was seen as important that meetings and events did not become too much like “talking shops”, and that instead time should be spent planning actions, due to the vital role of practical action in enabling change. When speaking with someone who worked with Transition about this point they said that when it comes to Transition, “people really want to be able to see it and touch it and feel it... not only read about it in books”. Like other movements which have taken on prefiguration as a form of strategy “ultimately, it aspires to reinvent daily life as a whole” [because] “it is one thing to say ‘another world is possible’. It’s another to experience it, however momentarily” (Graeber, 2002: 70-72). There is a need to

see the reality of a social movement in practice, in daily life, before it could be perceived as valid and tangible.

This choice to focus on daily practices has caused some criticism from de-growth scholars (D'Alisa et al, 2013) for not engaging strongly enough with the apparent problem at hand; the existing economic growth-focused structures that dominate society, and which are leading the world towards a path of environmental destruction. However, this critique seems to be based on a presumption that adopting a prefigurative approach – which “involves putting into practice” principles which guide and motivate the movement (Maeckelbergh, 2011: 9) – does not correlate with a form of strategic power which can pose any challenge to the existing status quo. Yet scholars who have analysed this prefigurative approach in other social change initiatives, such as the alterglobalisation movement, have highlighted how prefiguration can in fact be used strategically to challenge existing power structures (see Graeber, 2002, Maeckelbergh, 2011).

The basic definition commonly used for strategy is “building organisation in order to achieve major structural changes in the political, economic and social orders” (Breines, 1989, in Maeckelbergh: 6). Here Maeckelbergh (2011: 6) highlights that, “‘organisation’ needs to be able to take forms other than hierarchical, fixed and structural change to political, economic, and social orders, and needs to encompass more than only demanding reforms from the state.” Rather than antagonising or lobbying existing hierarchies and power structures, Transition focus on the “power of just doing stuff” (Hopkins (b), 2013) in order to create the changes they want to see. It is through the new forms of daily behaviour that a certain form of power can be exercised. This is not the power of “government understood narrowly as the executive arm of representative democracy, but in governmentality as a broad range of highly specific practices that individuate and operate on persons” (Power, 2011: 40). Therefore, although it may not immediately seem like it, Transition are making a radical strategic challenge to the status quo through adopting a prefigurative approach to social change which presents an alternative form of action for existing within the economy; a form that challenges an economic growth for growth’s sake by demonstrating the socially embedded nature of economic practices.

Furthermore, once we acknowledge the vested interests embedded in the status quo supporting economic growth we see how unlikely they are to change, due to the huge benefits they are gaining from the system (Monibot, 2013). It is therefore important to put aside the assumption that all power to create economic change lies only with campaigning and pressuring current powerful elites. If economy is an embodied practice, as Transition are demonstrating through their work, then people’s embodied behavior in their day-to-day lives is a key terrain of struggle. Once we acknowledge the challenges inherent in change from the top-down, and compare this with the relative accessibility of social transformation through embodied practice, then the latter approach starts to look more and more strategic (see Maeckelbergh, 2011).

However, it is also important to point out that in detailing the distinctions between Transition and de-growth, and other similarly radical theoretical or activist approaches, I do not want to paint them as incompatible. Transition Founder Hopkins (2008, b) describes “Transition [as] something that sits alongside and complements the more oppositional protest culture, but is distinctly different from it” and de-growth scholars D’Alisa et al (2013: 1) argue that Transition is part of what “constitute[s] different (albeit perhaps complementary) imaginaries emerging out of the civil society arena”. As I have demonstrated, there are some differences among de-growth and Transition approaches, but they are also both strong movements attempting – in the best ways they each see how – to tackle some of the same challenges. Now that the arguments for the weakness of economic growth have been identified based on the ethnographic material I have from Totnes, and these arguments have been situated within some of the academic literature, I would like to turn to some alternative definitions of key terms such as growth posited by those I spoke with in Totnes.

Re-defining ‘Growth’ and other Neoliberal Terminology

“We’re part of a living system, with growth underpinning it, so to say all growth is a bad thing is not logical; that’s why I want to be quite clear it is economic growth as it is currently perpetuated and communicated that is negative... part of what we [Transition] are involved in is starting something up that’s small and then it grows; that’s fine. It is working out that there are limits to growth”.

A particularly interesting feature of the alternative economic discourse employed by those involved in Transition in Totnes is that people seem to adopt and re-interpret a lot of the mainstream economic language used by neoliberals, whilst rejecting the terms of the neoliberal paradigm. The above quote is from an interview I conducted with someone working with Transition. This serves to demonstrate that in some ways you could say Transition do not seek to dispose of growth completely, but rather redefine its meaning away from a predominantly de-humanised kind of economics. Part of this re-definition I heard referenced fairly regularly in Totnes related to re-claiming the term growth as a natural phenomenon, as a part of nature. Another form of re-definition I also heard was looking at those organisations and industries that should grow as part of a successful socially, environmentally aware, and localised economy. This attitude is in-line with scholars who suggest what is needed is “selective de-growth” (Latouche, 2009 in Kallis, 2011: 875) which enables an open discussion on which “extraction–production–consumption activities need to de-grow and which ones need to grow” (Kallis, 2011: 875). So just as it was highlighted in Chapter 1 that localisation is not about keeping things completely local, we can also see that rejecting economic growth does not mean completely doing away with growth of all kinds.

Illustrative of this point, there are some instances I can draw on which demonstrate the ideals of growing a new type of environmentally and socially aware economy. For example, the Totnes Local Economic Blueprint is a report which was produced by Transition Town Totnes and other partners and it states that retrofitting homes to ensure they are more energy-efficient is an area with huge potential for growth (Ward, 2013: 3.). The same report explains that “rather than sacrifice [Totnes’ local independent economy] by pursuing growth at any cost, here we suggest that protecting and enhancing this economy is where our future lies”. Here the word “enhancing” serves to indicate that there are parts of Totnes’ economy which the report’s authors believe it is important to build and grow.

It was not only the term growth which Transitioners were re-defining and attempting to re-claim from the grips of neoliberalism. Terms such as ‘accountability’ and ‘efficiency’ were used by some of those involved in Transition in Totnes, echoing the more mainstream growth-focused economic theories which Transition aims to oppose. To understand this it is necessary to unpick the meanings associated with each term when used in a Transition context in Totnes, compared with the more mainstream usage of these terms. It seems that using mainstream economic terms is one indicator of Transition’s broader aims of attempting to subvert and reclaim economics from mainstream neoliberal interpretations, whilst still respecting the importance of a well-managed economy to meet people’s needs.

The term accountability has been associated strongly with globalisation (Anheier and Hawkes, 2008), and neoliberalism (Hirsch, 2005). The need for standardised data is deemed useful for the free flow of market forces (ibid: 6), and accountability processes have become increasingly complex in a globalised society, in which economic flows cross national borders with extreme frequency (Anheier and Hawkes, 2008). “When markets are large with anonymous participants, the rules usually are more explicit and the agreements specified or written” (Gudeman, 2005: 96). The need for accountability in this dispersed, globalised context has become so great that for some it becomes an excessive “burden”, a constant struggle for legitimacy and transparency to counteract the erosion of boundaries and trust (Anheier and Hawkes, 2008).

Scale, a topic I introduced in the first chapter of this thesis, is therefore a significant factor in the accountability discussion. Whilst it may be important in globalised markets to have substantial official mechanisms in place in order to provide a method for holding people accountable (ibid) at the local level in Totnes some saw localisation as a route to a greater accountability, albeit of an accountability of a different quality. As one person involved in Transition in Totnes told me; “what is local is not always perfect, but it is usually the best option. There is a risk that local producers could have un-ethical practices, but they are more accountable – I can go down the road and check out what they are doing if I wanted to”. This idea was repeated to me in various discussions with people from different groups in Totnes; businesses, residents, and those people actively involved in Transition. Regulation and accounting practices are more enforced

when there is a lack of trust, confidence and transparency in market activities (Gudeman, 2005: 96). In Totnes there was a sense for many people that mediation was not needed, since trust in - and proximity to - local businesses and producers gave them a sense of accountability.

The trust held in local economic actors extended to the point at which some people felt that official labelling was not necessary since they know the producers and suppliers of goods directly. One shop manager told me that he would always much rather use local over organic suppliers, if the choice was necessary, since with local suppliers he knows directly where the food has come from and how it has been treated. He went on to explain that he knows the goods are produced under organic conditions from his local suppliers, even if they do not have the official organic certification. His producers may not have gone through official channels, due to the costs involved, but he knew them and therefore trusted them to use organic best practices. This kind of “relational governance... coordinated through norms of trust” is often usurped by neoliberal practices with the ostensible aim of increasing transparency (Dolan, 2010: 38). Yet in Totnes I observed many people reclaiming human interactions as the main mechanism for maintaining a transparent system. While “markets of all kinds... have shared rules” those rules in a local context tend to be more “tactic and customary” (Gudeman, 2005: 96), and in Totnes economic localisation is motivating some people to consider informal and personal connections as preferable measures of accountability.

Efficiency is another term prominent in neoliberal economics, which is being re-interpreted by those involved in Transition in Totnes. Efficiency is promoted in neoliberal rhetoric as a way to ensure businesses are “dynamic, innovative and flexible” (Clarke, 2004: 32), yet the outcomes of neoliberal forms of “efficiency” can have negative outcomes for society, creating inequality, poverty and damage to the environment (Navarro, 2007). In public discussions I have heard those working with Transition or sympathetic with Transition views call for a re-interpretation of the term efficiency. For example, during a Transition Town Totnes tour it was explained how Totnes used to be a port, and when it was many international goods were transported to Totnes by boat, resulting in lower environmental costs than those goods now transported internationally by aeroplane and motor vehicles. The tour guide explained that this process was much more “efficient”; not in terms of speed and dynamism, but in terms of enabling international trade with lower environmental impact. He specifically mentioned that “it is worth reviewing what we mean when we use the term efficiency”. In this interpretation efficiency is considered not in terms of profit-maximisation but instead in terms of how far it enables environmental sustainability.

When analysing language use it is interesting to note that in some ways the linguistic presentation of the inevitability of localisation for those involved in Transition is actually reminiscent of the same type of language Margaret Thatcher, the famous British Prime Minister from 1980s, used to promote a neoliberal agenda. Thatcher was well-known for stating that “there is no alternative” to free market capitalism, growth and economic globalisation, to the extent that this phrase just got abbreviated to TINA (Krämer,

2013). In a somewhat ironic yet understandable parallel those involved in Transition are also convinced of their own economic ideas, albeit for completely different reasons and with completely different motivations. “In my opinion, the shift in focus from the global to the local will not be a choice, nor is it something we have to campaign and protest for, it is utterly inevitable” is the view shared in Transition’s printed material (Hopkins (b), 2008). Economist David Fleming’s arguments are in-line with this perspective when he writes that “localisation stands, at best, at the limits of practical possibility, but it has the decisive argument in its favour that there will be no alternative” (Fleming 2006, in Hopkins et al 2009: 1). This David Fleming quote has been shared in Transition papers (ibid) and was also quoted to me during one of my research interviews, in which someone involved in Transition specifically said “TINA – there is no alternative” is the reason why localisation is a good idea in Totnes. This interview participant acknowledged the negative legacy of this term, but said that it accurately presents the reality faced in society today, as the economy has to respond to the challenges of climate change and depleting energy sources. It is interesting to see traditional neoliberal terminology inverted and re-claimed in Totnes, as part of attempts to re-imagine and alter the economic status quo.

Transition seeks to re-appropriate the language which prevails in neoliberalism to support and strengthen the claim that economic localisation is a desirable, realistic, and indeed an inevitable reality. It seems to me that part of the motivations for re-interpreting neoliberal language is to assert that neoliberalism – and its accompanying measure of success, economic growth - does not have dominance over the successful economic outcomes; it has just convinced many people that this is the case. Once the social and environmental context is brought into terms like ‘efficient’, ‘accountable’ and even ‘TINA’, the result is an alternative, and perhaps more genuine, meaning for these terms.

The idea of localisation’s inevitability is something which is also highlighted in much academic literature, based on de-growth and localisation. However amongst de-growth scholars there seems some dispute over the irrevocability of de-growth. Some scholars have argued that “forced de-growths are likely to occur” in the form of localisation as a result of the “social and ecological collapse” expected if the focus on economic growth continues (Martinez-Alier et al, 2010: 1747). However, others scholars have argued that de-growth should not be a necessity, but a choice: we are not condemned to de-growth, rather it should be seen as an open path we can chose and shape (Fournier, 2008: 536). So whilst some scholars seem to be convinced that a shift towards de-growth and localisation is inevitable, others emphasise that it is a choice which people should be allowed to make openly and democratically. Yet it is clear that for some Transitioners I spoke with, and within some of the literature, there is strong sense that the economic localisation approach has a certain level of inevitability on their side.

However, Totnes is a tapestry containing a variety of views and behaviours relating to the economy. Not everyone is committed to the same rejection of economic growth and an acceptance of economic

localisation as a desirable inevitability. It is this diversity of views in Totnes on the key topics covered so far – economic localisation and economic growth – that I will now turn to in my third and final chapter.

Chapter 3: The Differences Within

It becomes clear through the issues I have explored thus far - of people's discourses around economic localisation (Chapter 1) and perceptions of economic growth (Chapter 2) - that localisation practices are being taken up and economic growth rejected by many of these involved in the Transition movement in Totnes, and this is having a strong influence on the character of the town. Totnes, as the birth place of what has now become an internationally significant Transition movement, can be seen as a site for questioning the extent to which 'business as usual' based on economic growth can be rejected through a discourse of economic localisation. However, there is not necessarily a homogenous consensus amongst those living in Totnes on the framing of these economic choices. Through invoking the ideal of a more place-based economy, the Transition movement in Totnes has highlighted different local views relating to the economy.

Localisation *and* Economic Growth

What I observed through my fieldwork in Totnes is a form of alternative discourse creation – which is changing the meanings and therefore actions associated with the economy for those inspired to adopt this discourse. What becomes increasingly important is the level of acceptability the alternative discourse has among those in Totnes. Whilst there are many people involved in Transition in Totnes who disparage economic growth and promote economic localisation in their language and their daily practices, I found that there are other people in Totnes who do not so easily make the same connections between a strong local economy and reformulation of economic growth as a measure of progress. When interviewing local businesses, the majority of participants actually said that economic growth could be a suitable measure of societal progress. The strength of feeling about this topic certainly varied, with some stating that the main measure of progress should be “economic growth, [because] at the end of the day business is the most important thing” whilst others emphasised that economic growth “can be a useful measure, if you ensure other things are being taken into account, such as people's happiness and wellbeing”. Yet there was a strong sense from the interviews I conducted with local businesses that generally economic growth was a positive indicator, a sign that things are going well.

This data sits in stark contrast to those I interviewed who are involved in Transition in Totnes. When asking these participants what impact they thought a stronger local economy could have on economic

growth many rejected the terms of this question, one person even asking if this was a “trick question”, since they felt so strongly that the motivations for localising the economy would not be reflected accurately if using economic growth as a measure. For some of those involved in Transition in Totnes the term “economic growth” seems to symbolise more than just a measurement; instead the term has taken on an intertextual meaning associated with negative perceptions of a globalised culture of excessive consumption, which is (mis)guided by the principle of economic growth. “The diversity of forms through which a discourse can be articulated means that intertextuality is important to understanding discourse” (Rose, 2001: 136). In the Foucauldian sense intertextuality refers to the way that the meanings of any one discursive reference point connotes the meaning of the discourse itself (ibid). In some ways, seeking economic growth at any (environmental) costs can be seen to symbolise the discourse Transition is posing itself against, hence the strength of negative feeling towards the term. The intertextual significance economic growth can take on for some involved in Transition in Totnes results in a rejection of the association of economic growth with localisation, the latter symbolising a reference point for the alternative economic discourse many in Transition in Totnes seek to embody.

Yet these intertextual associations do not resonate with all of those who support a stronger local economy. Those local businesses who perceive economic growth as a helpful measure of progress did not seem to make the same associations. However, it is also important to note that those I interviewed from local businesses also often seemed to be unsure about the relevance of economic growth to them. When I asked if economic growth could be helpful measure of societal progress many said things like “I suppose so”, “I don’t know” or “you should ask so-and-so; they know a lot more about this kind of thing than me”. Those I interviewed from local businesses ranged from shop assistants to shop managers to business owners, and quite a few seemed uncertain about the question of economic growth, but amongst this uncertainty, as mentioned above, it was broadly perceived as positive. Again, this stands in stark contrast to the immediately negative reaction the mention of the term ‘economic growth’ solicited from my interviews with those involved in Transition.

Yet, beyond uncertainty, there were more substantial reasons why those local businesses I interviewed were at times supportive of economic growth as a measure of societal progress. The main reason given by a significant number was the perceived relationship between economic growth and employment. When asking about economic growth, one chain store manager told me “the more money cycling around, the more jobs there will be”. The importance of jobs in relation to growth was mentioned a few times in interviews with local businesses, and interestingly was also mentioned in interviews with local residents and those involved in Transition. One resident, in response to being asked why she had said economic growth was a helpful measure of progress immediately said, “well, people need jobs in order to feel secure... and people need to feel it’s worth working”. This association of economic growth with jobs was also repeated in an interview with someone supportive of Transition, who said, “we can’t keep expecting

economic growth indefinitely, I don't think, and I'm not sure it does anyone any good, since it is so badly measured... but the real issue for me is that with a population that continues to grow, if we don't have something resembling economic growth then what are they all going to do for a living?". Although this latter quote shows the familiar rejection of economic growth heard from many others involved in Transition, there is also a sense that losing economic growth will result in less employment.

The vague promise that "growth brings prosperity' [is] so alluring" (Li, 2013: 2) in large part due to the – often implicit – connection between livelihoods with growth. Yet this connection between economic growth and employment levels is not necessarily reflective of employment realities. In fact, as the global recession continues to exert its grip on economies in the global North and South, "jobless growth" is becoming increasingly common (Li, 2013: 1). Some scholars have highlighted the link between rises in "layoffs [and] corporate profits and stock prices" (Ho, 2009: 1) further challenging the presumed link between increases in economic growth through corporate profits resulting in increased employment. Nonetheless, many businesses I spoke with in Totnes maintained the connection between economic growth and jobs. Although Transition was trying to counter this rhetoric by showing how many jobs could be produced through a more localised economy which did not need to have wider economic growth as its main focus (see Ward, 2013) the link between economic growth and jobs was clearly embedded in some people's minds.

Another owner of an independent store in Totnes said economic growth "helps bring money, education and jobs to the area, which results in better quality of life. I see it as all linked. What we really need to do is get rid of supermarkets, because they are competitive and aiming to put others out of business, and they do not provide as much employment relative to the amount of goods they sell as I do in my store." Here we see an interesting connection being made between economic growth, quality of life, jobs, and a form of localisation. Whilst many involved in Transition see economic growth as part of the problem and economic localisation and improved quality of life as part of the solution, this local business owner seems to perceive economic growth as a *route to* quality of life, jobs and localisation. This makes clear that there is a stark difference in the meaning of economic growth to some of those involved in Transition and others in the local Totnes economy.

The negative connotations of economic growth for those involved in Transition in Totnes are clear. In fact, as highlighted, economic growth seems to have taken on an intertextual meaning for those involved in Transition, so that it symbolises much of the inappropriate excess, inequality and environmental damage which is resulting from a globalised neoliberal economics. As highlighted in Chapter 2, Transition responds to their aversion to economic growth not by attacking its proponents and trying to tear down the power structures perpetuated by a growth-led system. Instead, they adopt a prefigurative strategy in attempting to embody the practical changes they want to see in the system, and encourage as many people as possible

to take on the same approach as them. However, not all those in Totnes make the same intertextual associations as those involved in Transition; not all those who adopt localisation reject economic growth.

Diversity within Totnes and Transition

Those involved in Transition are aware of the diversity of views in Totnes. Many people reminded me that although Totnes may initially seem radical and alternative it actually sits within “a sea of blue” politically. Blue is the political colour for the United Kingdom’s Conservative party, and Devon (the county in which Totnes is situated) is known to be a conservative area (with both a big and a little ‘C’), occupied by many conservative, traditional farming and land-owning communities. It is this wider context in which Transition is working for change in Totnes, and it acknowledges the current structures in doing so, by avoiding being too controversial. One person working with Transition told me that Transition aims “to come in under the radar”, not associating with any particular political party or group, thus attempting to avoid unnecessarily polarizing people about key issues - of peak oil and climate change - that affect the whole of society. So, there is clearly some variety of views in Totnes, both economically and politically, and this is something Transition has accepted and is working within.

Meanwhile, broadly there seems to be a consensus in the view of those involved in Transition in Totnes. However, just as there is diversity within Totnes, there is also some diversity of perspectives amongst those involved in Transition. It would also be mistaken to present Transition as a completely homogenous group of people in Totnes, since there are no set rules on what it means to be part of Transition. As well as contrasts between those involved in a Transition and those who are not, it is also possible for there to be “difference *within* categories” (Cowan, 2000: 3), which should not be brushed over. Whilst I was in Totnes I saw trends of perspectives amongst those involved in Transition in Totnes – as I have highlighted in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis. However, I also saw differences between those involved in Transition, which were often subtle and overlapping, but nonetheless important to acknowledge. In order to demonstrate these differences I will share some ethnographic examples below, which indicate the variety of views within Transition in Totnes. I will also introduce the perceptions often coming from visitors, who tended to view Transition as a homogenous group representative of the whole of Totnes as a place, and share the problems these perceptions could cause.

Transition publicly establishes its experimental nature with a “cheerful disclaimer”, explaining that “Transition is a social experiment on a massive scale” and those heavily involved in the movement “truly don’t know if this will work” (Transition Network (c), 2013). Therefore, in some ways, contrasts and diversity within the practices of those involved are to be expected and serve to highlight the fact that Transition represents a dynamic process, with people literally seeing themselves ‘in transition’ between different visions of the world. This was visually described by one of my interview participants, as the sense

of being “torn between two conveyor belts going in different directions: under one foot there is economic growth, business as usual, and materialism, and then the other foot is on another belt going, hang on a minute this doesn’t add up; this non-cyclical system is not working”. This participant described life between these two view points, or conveyor belts, as being similar to so “a balancing act”. There is a sense of disjuncture between different models of the world – one distinguished by economic growth and dominant in our current society, and the other attempting to transition in a completely different direction – and in many ways no one can be seen as wholly on one side or the other.

Throughout my research it became clear that there are also some divides in opinion on consumption habits and choices among those involved in Transition. For example, I was told by someone actively involved in Transition that there is a divide in the movement between those who believe green consumerism can be the answer and those who think we need a fundamentally different model of society. This person explained during an interview that there is a “tension between those who want to become more radical... [and those] who believe green consumerism, corporate social responsibility, and working within the current system can make a difference”. This again shows that those involved in Transition are not homogenous in their views and approach, but rather they continue to be experimental in adopting and testing different techniques.

Totnes as the Transition “Mother Ship”?

Yet when we look at new people coming in to Transition in Totnes, to visit or to try to become more of a permanent part of the movement in Totnes, they do have a certain idea of what Transition is and should represent. New people often mistakenly perceive Transition as being the only identity possible in Totnes, because they arrive in the town due to its reputation and significance in the wider Transition movement. One person working with Transition told me, “people too often say ‘we want to find out about Transition, so let’s go to Totnes’, and I think it’s not good for Totnes because it puts too much strain on everybody... and also Transition is not just about Totnes, so people in Transition Network office spend half their lives saying, ‘go to Brixton, go to Lewes’ [which are other established Transition initiatives]” It becomes clear that Totnes has gained a reputation, an identity, as a prominent Transition landmark. One person who moved from overseas to live in Totnes and be a part of Transition told me that another of her friends had referred to Totnes as Transition’s “mother ship”. Indeed, whilst I was in Totnes I saw and spoke with multiple national and international media crews, all wanting to find out more about the Transition movement, and seeing Totnes as a place with all the answers. For many visitors it is no exaggeration to say Totnes is a synonym for Transition, and this can be both inspiring and overwhelming for Transitioners and other Totnes residents.

Totnes has come to signify Transition for many people inspired to visit the town to find out more about the movement. This highlights “the importance of attaching causes to places and the ubiquity of place-making in collective political mobilization” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 342). Those people who came to the town often spoke about being drawn to Totnes to learn about the path of Transition, so much so that many Transitioners in Totnes often light-heartedly referred to these types of people as being ‘Transition pilgrims’. These visitors were seeking to look around the birth place of the Transition movement, in order to find out more about the Transition movement. International visitors often had a certain view of what Totnes as a place would be like as a result of Transition’s presence. Yet, “important tensions may arise when places that have been imagined at a distance must become lived spaces” (ibid: 341). This happened for some visitors to Totnes. One example that is given on the Transition website, and was repeated to me in Totnes, is that of a German tourist coming to the town and stating his disappointment that there were still cars on the roads. He clearly imagined Totnes as a place which had fully ‘transitioned’ to an environmentally sustainable place, and the reality did not meet his vision.

These expectations at times seemed to weigh heavy on some involved in Transition. I got the sense of frustration at times with having to demonstrate what they are doing more than actually getting on with it. A few people working with Transition even spoke of having “pilgrim fatigue”. Responses to newcomers seemed to be directly tied to the level people were prepared to contribute to the Transition movement through their actions. If someone came from outside then they would be more welcomed if they were willing to contribute to the Transition movement in their daily practices, helping embody and further Transition’s vision for community resilience. However, many involved in Transition in Totnes welcomed general visitors too, as they provided a way to share their work. Furthermore, quite a few of the local businesses I spoke to perceived the visitors Transition attracts to Totnes to be one of the more positive impacts the movement had on the town. So, there was mixed responses from those involved in Transition and others in the town, again demonstrating the diversity of views and fluidity of different groups in Totnes.

Overall, there is clearly a diversity of views amongst those living in Totnes, amongst visitors to the town, and amongst those directly involved in Transition themselves. This demonstrates the socially experimental nature of the Transition movement, and shows that it is still very much a live movement testing out its definitions and borders in practice in Totnes, and also in many other Transition initiatives worldwide.

Conclusion

The Transition movement is increasingly articulating its environmentally motivated messages through calling for changes in dominant economic discourses. There is an increased focus on the economy for many involved in Transition in Totnes, and many are seeking to build the economy anew through daily embodied practice, guided by an environmentally informed localisation. The interpretation of the economy from those involved in Transition in Totnes actively counters the growth-focused and neoliberal interpretations, in which the economy is “conceived as an impersonal machine, remote from the everyday experience of most people” (Hart et al, 2010: 4). Yet this discourse is mainly articulated through a reformulation of daily practices through a discourse of localisation, which encourages people to live in a more environmentally conscious and socially connected way. People are adopting new practices through which they seek to actively demonstrate that economics does not operate in a vacuum, but is essentially always embedded in particular social context, and people’s choices make an impact on the shape and character of that context.

I have demonstrated how localisation has at times been presented as alternative to neoliberal, growth-focused economics by both de-growth scholars and Transition activists alike. Many scholars argue under the de-growth banner that continued focus on economic growth “will lead to social and ecological collapse [and] it is thus better to promote different social values” (Martinez-Alier, et al, 2010: 1743). As an alternative, “localisation of exchange, production, finance and politics is seen as ‘the most important strategic means’ of de-growth” (Latouche, 2006 in Fournier, 2008: 538), with “re-localisation of the economy [seen] as a way to reduce throughput and manage a stable adaptation to a smaller economy” (Kallis, 2011: 876). I have shown that Transition activists share similar views, in some ways, since they regularly argue that it is a misinformed “myth... that economic growth can continue indefinitely” (Hopkins, 2012). The Transition movement widely states that economic growth is unsustainable on a finite planet, and they actively promote economic localisation as a part of an alternative model (North 2010). Therefore, we can see much theoretical overlap between de-growth and Transition movements.

Yet when localisation is viewed through a Foucauldian framework, showing it to be employed as a discourse requiring embodied practices, some key contrasts become visible between the de-growth theories and the adoption of localisation practices in the daily lives of Transitioners in Totnes. Contrasts between de-growth and Transition have been shown to form along the lines of different approaches to social change; whereas de-growth scholars prioritise attempts at righting the wrongs in the current economic growth-led system, Transition place more immediate focus on adopting new practices, in order to make a different relationship to the economy appear viable. I have shown how this approach can be

interpreted as using prefigurative tactics as part of a strategic approach, which prioritises “actively setting up alternative structures so that people can experience for themselves what is possible” (Maeckelbergh 2011: 17). Transition seek to challenge the hegemonic power of economic growth not by attacking those who promote growth but, instead, by offering alternative forms of action; by physically demonstrating how it is possible to exist as social beings within the economy.

Transition approach this whole process with “engaged optimism” (Hopkins, 2012). Transition Founder Rob Hopkins asks, “how might our response to peak oil and climate change look more like a party than a protest march?” (Hopkins (a), 2013). Through emphasising the importance of economic localisation practices, over a confrontational stance against economic growth, Transition choose the tactical approach of using daily behaviour as a means through which to create social change, which they aim to shape in a way so that as many people as possible can feel positive and passionate about being a part of it.

Therefore I have outlined throughout my thesis that those involved in Transition in Totnes are attempting to actively re-draw the economic boundaries dictated from above - often in the form of neoliberalism and a focus on economic growth - and reclaim their identities as social beings within the economy. I have demonstrated how it is through the practical embodiment of localisation discourse that people are attempting to re-position the economy into the social realm, away from the de-personalised boundaries which have come to be associated with neoliberal, globalised, and growth-focused interpretations of the economy.

One result of Transition’s localisation discourse becoming a more visible economic alternative for those people involved in Transition in Totnes is that it has also been made more visible that “the economy is made and remade by people in their everyday lives” (Hart et al, 2010: 4). By revealing that economic rules require people’s buy-in, Transition has been able to create new space for awareness of the social aspects of the economy. “People always insert themselves practically into economic life... [but] what they do there is often obscured, marginalised or repressed by dominant economic institutions and ideologies” (Hart et al, 2010: 5). By providing an alternative discourse to guide people’s daily economic practices Transition’s localisation ethos is revealing that people’s daily behaviours are a powerful factor in forming economic norms.

Yet through the data I collected during fieldwork in Totnes I have also concluded that the apparent consensus of rejecting an economic growth-focused economy and adopting localisation practices can be more nuanced and complex in practice. I have demonstrated that a variety of perspectives exist in Totnes and within Transition on issues such as economic growth, localisation, and the characteristics of the Transition movement. It therefore becomes clear that “rather than following straightforwardly from sharing the ‘same’ culture, community, or place, identity emerges as a continually contested domain”

(Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 14). I have shown how rather than reified groups of those involved in Transition and those not, those from Totnes and those not, there are actually more flexible categories within Totnes and within Transition. I have stressed the “difference *within* categories” (Cowan, 2000: 3) in order to highlight the “production of difference within common, shared and connected spaces” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 343). It is important to acknowledge the characteristics of this production and contestation of meaning in Transition and Totnes, to acknowledge the ongoing nature of the Transition process.

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