



## **Resilience, Equity and the Development of Ecological Social Practices: the Transition Town Movement in Canada**

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**Purpose:** Our study examines the emergence of the Transition Town movement in Canada, with the aim of generating information about “lessons learned” and “promising practices” that can be useful to movement leaders and participants, and of interest to students and scholars of social movements and social change. The study itself has no ties to industry or government partners and is being conducted by an independent team of researchers from across the country (names and affiliations noted above).

### **Background & Academic Statement:**

North America is entering a period of significant change. There is mounting evidence of the potential for 'runaway' climate change, unprecedented species extinctions and ecosystem degradation, accelerated resource depletion, widening socio-economic inequities, and mounting concerns regarding energy security. These challenges require not only technical solutions but also substantial changes in many areas of human organization and social life, changes that several social movements have taken on with gusto.

'Transition Towns' are one such movement. Originating in 2004 in the UK and now spreading rapidly around the world, the Transition Town (TT) movement seeks an integrated and community-based response to the threats listed above. The movement projects a transition to a low-carbon society, requiring resilient communities, 're-skilling' for a low-carbon future, and re-localizing the production of

basic needs, while emphasizing opportunities for greater connectedness and celebration. There are over 80 Transition Towns at various stages of development in Canada.

Our study of the TT movement in Canada puts social science research on the leading edge of a potentially significant emerging social movement. Our aim is to: **1)** Document the emergence of the Transition Town movement in this country, attending especially to conditions that favour or limit the development of such initiatives; **2)** Produce a contextualized account of the movement's attempt to build new patterns of community practice that support and normalize locally grounded, sustainable and equitable social relations; **3)** Contribute to transdisciplinary social theory about the conditions for operationalization of local sustainability movements and practices; and, **4)** Derive lessons learned & implications for practice, for the Transition Town movement and environmental sustainability in general.

The proposed research is informed by scholarship on the role of social movements. Drawing on practice theory and the work of Pierre Bourdieu, it examines Transition Towns as agents of cultural change reshaping social relations and institutions in ways that generate new contexts for social learning and new citizen values, norms and practices. We will pay special attention to the current and potential value of Transition initiatives in advancing social and environmental equity and social inclusion.

Our methods triangulate this emerging movement through document analysis, interviews with movement leaders, surveys of movement participants, and interactive regional workshops. The research process is oriented toward dialogical action research that critically engages with, learns from, facilitates the story-telling of, and seeks to contribute to the TT movement. Our multidisciplinary team includes a geographer and qualitative community development researcher (Poland; PI), two sociologists and environmental justice researchers (Teelucksingh & Haluza-DeLay), an anthropologist of social movements (Antze), a Canada Research Chair in Food Security and Environment (Newman), a scholar of community environmental health activism (Parent), and an expert in sustainable urban planning (Ling), as well as students from our respective departments (7 universities). Lessons learned will be of interest for other environmental/social movement leaders and scholars in terms of understanding (i) how communities mobilize to address environmental concerns, (ii) how groups are addressing equity in the transition to a low-carbon future, and (iii) how social movement organizations function as 'communities of practice' for the development of place-based 'ecological practices'.

The research team is also supported by a **Movement Advisory Group** chaired by Michele Colussi from the Canadian Centre for Community Resilience (and a Transition trainer), in a consultation/advisory role. Although we are working closely with the MAG on a variety of issues (social media strategy, etc), they will not have access to 'raw' data.

## We Would Love to Hear from You!

### Contact us!

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