Radicals without rebellion? A Case Study on four Transition experiments

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Introduction

This paper investigates whether and how social movements can promote radical positions whilst refraining from adopting an oppositional approach. Having an oppositional identity and a confrontational background have long been taken as fundamental features for social movements (e.g.: Tarrow, 1994). Nonetheless, empirical and theoretical investigations have highlighted that social movements can be also venues for consensus-building (della Porta, 2009a). This paper takes this insight further and focuses specifically on Transition, a movement that is characterised by a markedly non-adversarial approach and that, whilst pursuing radical objectives, refrains from using confrontational means. In particular, this work focuses on community groups associated with the Transition movement. Through a theoretical analysis and illustrations from four case studies this work investigates what are the implications of pursuing radical objectives through a non-adversarial approach. Two cases studies are from Italy, a *Città di Transizione* in Emilia-Romagna and one in Sicily, and two from Australia, a Transition in Brisbane and one in Tasmania.

The first part of the paper introduces Transition and argues that the movement embodies radical critiques to existing societies. Following, the non-adversarial approach of the Transition is also discussed in some detail. Transition is then analysed from a social movement perspective in effort to illustrate its significance from a political standpoint. The lack of both an adversarial approach and a confrontational background represent an interesting modification when compared to other movements but not a break with other contemporary and current social movements. The four case studies are presented in turn and insights are discussed in the concluding section.

Transition and it claims

The theoretical and practical aspects of Transition were first explored in 2004 when, as part of his course on permaculture design, Rob Hopkins – the movement's co-founder and its main figure (Scott-Cato and Hillier, 2010: 875) – run a project which led to an Energy Descent Plan for the town of Kinsale (Ireland). In 2006, a more comprehensive approach to localisation and resilience at community level was developed in Totnes (Devon, UK) where the first Transition Town (TTT) was set up. TTT contained *in nuce* some fundamentals of the movement subsequently shared and elaborated throughout the world.

Nowadays Transition Initiatives take action within widely different contexts and they are often networked through national and regional hubs. Of particular relevance is the transnational Transition Network Ltd. set up in 2006 to 'inspire, encourage, support, enable networking, and training' Transition Initiatives around the world (Hopkins and Lipman, 2009: 15). More than 1,100 official Initiatives are part of the Transition Network Ltd. and countless more unofficial ones are active in all continents and particularly in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (see Transition Network). The movement engages at different levels and with an incredibly vast array of organisations, including social, political and religious ones (see Transition Network, 2013), yet grassroots activism within communities remains central to Transition.

The movement attracts a segment of population identified as 'liberal, highly-educated cosmopolitans with left-liberal political inclinations and a strong attachment to the institutions of liberal-social democracies' (Quilley, 2011: 9-10). Indeed, Transition's views appeal to a broad audience, including anti-globalisation sympathisers and environmentally conscious people (Bailey et al., 2010: 596-602), and the movement is integrated within alternative knowledge networks and what Featherstone (2008) has termed 'counter global networks' (Mason and Whitehead, 2012: 496-7). Transition appears to be (to use a term often employed by participants themselves) a 'catalyst' movement, involving the formation and networking of local companies clustering around more or less shared narratives (which are critical of contemporary ways of living) that individuals seek to enact privately and publicly.

Transition is built around the idea of developing community-led responses to the twin challenges of peak oil and climate change. Over the years, however, the movement has engaged also with other concerns, from the financial crisis to resources depletion. The term 'Transition' is often simply characterized as a shift away from 'unviable way of living' towards a future with 'lower energy' but 'happier, fairer and stronger communities' (see Transition Network). In practice, transitioning towards more localised and resilient communities is the overarching objective of the movement (e.g. Hopkins, 2008b, Hopkins, 2010a).

An overview of the theoretical underpinnings of Transition shows that the movement envisions radical changes to contemporary societies. Resilience and localisation are particularly important in this respect since they are central to Transition and provide it with a framework to engage in wider discussions on social, political and environmental matters. The idea of resilience is fundamental to engage with the discourse of sustainability in particular. '[R]esilience in the context of communities and settlements, ...

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refers to their ability to not collapse at first sight of oil or food shortages, and their ability to respond with adaptability to disturbance'; it involves a 'fundamental rethink of assumptions about infrastructure and systems' towards a more sustainable economy and society' (Hopkins, 2008b: 54). Localisation, on the other hand, offers a platform to reflect upon economical and societal issues, and Transition's capability to rearticulate a variety of concerns – not limited to environmental ones – under a markedly localistic view contributed greatly to the spread of the movement (Bailey et al., 2010: 602). Localisation refers to a 'far-reaching adjustment of economic focus from the global to the local', and unlike localism it focuses 'on the practicalities of building more localised economies' (Hopkins, 2010a: 237-8).

> In the words of Hopkins (ibid.: 239): 'Localisation carries within it an inherent social justice and resource-focused critique of globalisation (Bailey et al., 2010, North, 2010), emerging from concepts such as Limits to Growth (2004), Steady State economics (Daly, 1977) and Schumacher's (1974) concept of 'Buddhist economics'. Localisation is a social movement and a principle for social and economic reorganisation...'.

Interestingly, Transition localisatic and resilience-building goals seem in line with those of a burgeoning critical literature on localism (Felicetti, 2013). Actually, in considering the potential limitations of localism, Hopkins (2010a: 154) himself refers to the distinction between 'unreflexive' and 'reflexive localism'. The latter challenges inequality and hegemonic domination, while 'unreflexive' or 'defensive localism', to use Winter's (2003) term, involves a narrow response to cope with economic difficulties and ineffective national politics. Transition localistic perspective actually seems largely built in opposition to this latter and more conventional understanding of localism. In fact, Transition stresses the role and prerogatives of agents of localisation from below, and it resonates with forms of localism that seek to enhance local democracy and the 'reflection of local identity' (Pratchett, 2004). Indeed, Hess (2008: 625), drawing from a US-centred analysis, argues that localism in itself is also a social movement 'that aims to increase the role of locally owned, independent businesses and other organizations that primarily serve the geographical communities in which they are located'. In geography, Featherston et al. (2012) contrast the notion of 'progressive localism' with what they label 'austerity localism' – the 'latest mutation of neoliberalism' (ibid.: 178). In economics, Transition's localistic view is close to an eco-localistic approach (Curtis, 2003) which, unlike (new) localism, challenges 'conventional economic wisdom' and 'reject[s] globalization' (ibid.: 84). In this sense, Transition strives towards 'intentional' localisation, as opposed to an 'immanent' localism, intended as a mere adaptation to the varying circumstances of market economy (North, 2010: 589). Finally, in development studies (Mohan and Stokke, 2000), a distinction is drawn between 'revisionist neo-liberalism' – which is 'top-down' – and a 'post-Marxist' conception of localism. In this latter case, '[t]he institutionalised political system constitutes a set of negative or positive political opportunity structures that can facilitate or hamper collective action rather than simply being a monolithic 'other' for collective actors' (ibid. 260). Such a conception in particular acknowledges, as Transition does, that the relationships between community actors and political institutions need not necessarily be conflicting. Indeed, this aspect plays an important role in understanding the Transition movement.

The Transition approach

The greatest influence on Transition is found in the philosophy of permaculture (e.g. Mollison and Holmgren, 1978) and Transition has also gathered insights from studies on psychology of change and system thinking (Hopkins, 2008b: 89). Given its antecedents, Transition places a particular emphasis on the link between the individual and the surrounding social and natural environment. Emphasis upon the inner being, however, is paralleled by a focus upon more relational aspects involving action at community level.

The Transition approach draws on elements from a variety of pre-existing environmentalist concerns ranging from deep ecology to ecological economics (Quilley, 2011: 2). However, while the movement continues an environmentalist and alternative living tradition, it also differs from older environmentalism (ibid.: 2-4; Hopkins, 2008b). Transition, in fact, is an expression of a 'new environmentalism' discourse, the novelty of which is represented by collaborative and issue-based action on environmental matters (Connors and McDonald, 2010: 559-60).[1]

In regard to politics in particular, Transition sees government as a 'reactive' institution, which by itself is not capable of fully addressing the challenges the movement envisions. The movement asserts that governments should be addressed by a 'proactive' citizenry, especially at local level where the relationship is more straightforward (Hopkins, 2010b: 76). However, government, in Hopkins' (2010b: 2) words, 'is part of the solution'. Indeed, a key tenet of Transition is to avoid the 'them and us' adversarial competitive logic when dealing with other actors in the community. In order to solve fundamentally common problems it is necessary to avoid divisiveness. Transitions should refrain from confrontational attitudes and maintain a non-adversarial and an inclusive approach (see in particular Hopkins, 2008a). Politics ought not to lead Transition, which remains fundamentally a community response, but groups should 'build a bridge towards local government' (Hopkins, 2008b: 170, for a broader discussion see Rowell, 2010).[2] In spite of that, Transition is seen as apolitical. However, there is no doubt that the movement deals with politically-loaded issues (Chatterton and Cutler, 2008: 34, Haxeltine and Seyfang, 2009: 8-14, Connors and McDonald, 2010: 560, North, 2010, Smith, 2011: 102, Mason and Whitehead, 2012: 511) even when Transition strives to act 'below the radar' (Hopkins, 2008b: 146) of mainstream politics.

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[1] There are countless Transition 'success stories' referring to collaboration with institutions. Bailey et al. (2010: 599) point to a number of examples: Somerset County Council, which became the first Transition local authority in the UK in 2008 and established working relationships with the movement; Transition Leicester, which submitted a plan for the development of a local eco-town; and Transition Glastonbury, which supported the inclusion of carbon reduction and resilience building in the local development plan. Similarly, Seyfang and Haxeltine (2010: 15-6) report that Transition Town Totnes was recognised as one of the ten 'Low Carbon Communities' by the Department for Energy and Climate Change, and that Transition Trainings for local authorities have been organised by a number of Transition Initiatives. Other interesting cases are peak oil resolutions, like the one championed by Nottingham City Council (with help from the local Transition), and dozens of Energy Descent Action Plans which, following Totnes' and Kinsale's examples, have been accepted by local governments in New Zealand, Australia and the USA. Transition has also introduced complementary local currencies with the Brixton Pound representing the most advanced experiment (see Longhurst and Seyfang, 2011).

[2] 82.4% of Transition Initiatives in the UK have actually already started this process (Haxeltine and Seyfang, 2009: 10).

The firm willingness of the Transition movement to collaborate, among others, with political actors provides a fundamental connection between the movement and politics, especially at the local level given the community-based nature of the movement. Although the choice to collaborate with institutions has spurred a number of critiques and warnings about the risks involved (Smith, 2011: 102, Connors and McDonald, 2010: 560, 566, Chatterton and Cutler, 2008: 159, Mason and Whitehead, 2012: 512), the Transition movement is already undertaking this path. Having an open and non-confrontational approach is a central tenet of the movement and it is hard to remove that element without transforming the whole Transition concept into something else.

Interestingly, Transition stresses the value of open, clear and high quality communication. Transition, for instance, recommends the use of Open Space Technology or World Café (see respectively: Owen, 1997, Brown, 2005). Indeed, deliberation and discussion are said to be central to the movement (Kelly and Cumming, 2010: 16, Mason and Whitehead, 2012: 496), and as argued by Barry (2012: 114), deliberation is a 'necessary prelude to action'. This observation suggests a commitment to some deliberative principles in the movement and it seems in line with della Porta's (2009b: 7, 2005a, della Porta and Rucht, 2013) observation that paying attention to communication processes is increasingly common among movements with democratic aspirations. Moreover, to Quilley (2011: 11) the public debates in the Transition network are characterised by an egalitarian and feminist nature. The ongoing expansion of the movement's concerns parallels the wider extension and shifts characterising the environmental justice discourse (see Schlosberg, 2013: 38). Indeed, references to 'environmental' or 'social justice' are present in the writings and discussions within the movement. Finally, Transition projects, especially those on food and energy issues, embody some features of the 'sustainable materialism' discourse, effectively bridging the movement to concerns that characterise the discourse on environmental justice (see ibid.: 48-9).

A non-adversarial yet radical movement?

Framing the Transition within the social movement theory sheds light on Transition's effort to promote radical claims through a non-adversarial approach. Transition is commonly referred to as a social movement. For instance, geographer Peter Taylor describes it as: 'one of the most impressive and important social/community movements of the early twenty-first century' (2012: 496). However, as Barry and Quilley (2009: 18) argue, in one of the earliest and more in-depth analyses of the phenomenon, Transition differs in important aspects from traditional (new) social movements in 'its ontological and strategic orientation'. As the authors point out, what makes Transition 'an odd kind of social movement' is 'a communicative and ideological misalignment' with more explicitly 'political' globalisation and climate change protest (see also Scott-Cato and Hillier, 2010). It is thus interesting to explore whether and in what sense Transition can be understood as a social movement.

To begin with, Transition does display several organisational features widely shared among social movements. Networks of Transitions exist at different levels, and generally they have low institutionalisation; formal associations (e.g. the Transition Network Ltd.) are paralleled by small and informal groups (e.g. most Transitions); although the figure of Rob Hopkins is widely acknowledged, in practice many Initiatives rarely feature strong leaderships; at local level in particular organisation and

coordination appears fairly flexible, additionally there is no formal membership to access groups (see della Porta, 2005b: 79). According to a classical definition, a social movement is characterised by '(1) informal networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest' (della Porta and Diani, 1999: 16). Following Melucci (1994: 102) one could argue that the 'conflictual' component characterising new social movements is to be intended as 'a challenge that recasts the language and cultural codes that organize information'. Transition can be seen as giving voice to 'actors [that] fight for control and the allocation of socially produced potential for action', which suggests that there is a 'conflictual' dimension also in Transition. Therefore, the applicability of the above definition to Transition may be limited only by the latter's lack of a protest background. However, an earlier version of the aforementioned characterisation can be found in Diani (1992: 7), who substitutes '(4)' with a possibly more congenial criterion according to which social movements take 'action which displays largely outside the institutional sphere and the routine procedures of social life'. Moreover, although the notion of conflict has been historically important to (understand) social movements, with time the possibility to envision social movements as spaces in which to overcome conflict and build consensus has also emerged (della Porta, 2009a). Overall, it appears that Transition manifests a 'family resemblance' with new social movements which, according to Crossley (2002: 2, 7) who borrows from Wittgenstein's vocabulary, is typical of social movements, in so far as they lack 'a fixed essence'.

Moreover, although Transition is relatively recent, the movement features cultural traits that early discussions envisioned as being characteristic of (new) social movements at large. For instance, as Habermas (1981: 31) argued long ago, conflict in Western societies has moved towards 'cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialisation' and it is not sparked by '*problems of distribution*' but concerns over the '*grammar of forms of life'* (italic in original). This latter concern seems to aptly capture the themes around which Transition mobilises. Indeed, Transition embodies concerns related to life quality within the context of a post-materialist society (Inglehart, 1989: ch 11, Touraine et al., 1988, Benhabib, 1996: 5), and it engages on cultural grounds within the context of information societies (Melucci, 1994:109-126).

Perhaps more strikingly Transition even shows substantive similarities to Claus Offe's (1985) fourfold ideal-typical characterisation of new social movements: *issues*, *actors*, *values* and *modes of action* (ibid.: 828). Transition's and new social movements' 'dominant' *issues* seem to overlap. [3] Moreover, Transition embodies in many ways new social movement's 'most prominent' *values* of autonomy and identity. Likewise, new social movements' *actors*, like Transition participants, do not 'rely for their self-identification on either the established political codes...nor on ...socioeconomic codes'. Rather, categories in which political conflict is coded are taken 'from the movements' issues' (ibid.: 831). Finally, regarding its '*mode of action'*, Transition features many of the characteristics that define new social movements when it comes to the 'internal mode of actions'. It features for example a 'strong reliance

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[3] 'Dominant issues of new social movements consist in the concern with a (physical) territory, space of action, or "life-world," such as the body, health, and sexual identity; the neighbourhoods, city, and the physical environment; the cultural, ethnic, national, and linguistic heritage and identity; the physical conditions of life, and survival for humankind in general' (Offe, 1985: 828-9).

upon de-differentiation', which refers to 'the fusion of public and private roles, instrumental and expressive behaviour, community and organization, and in particular a poor and at best transient demarcation between the roles of "members" and formal "leaders"' (ibid.: 829-30).

Following Offe's model, the deepest differences between Transition and new social movements concern the *'external mode of action'*. Offe's new social movements feature demonstration tactics and 'other forms of action making use of physical presence of (large numbers) of people'. Protest tactics, moreover, are 'paralleled by protest demands' framed in negative forms, and '[s]ocial movements relate to other political actors and opponents... in terms of sharp antinomies' (ibid.: 830). Even if these modes of action may have a role within Transition (although protest tactics are distant from Transition's repertoire) the movement, at least in its ideology, firmly opposes this approach. Transition's mode of action is purposely shaped to distinguish the movement from more confrontational 'conventional environmentalism' (Hopkins, 2008b: 135).

However, some cautionary considerations are necessary on this point. First, often social movements 'have defined themselves in imitation of, or opposition to, their higher profile counterparts' and these choices have affected their strategies (Polletta, 2002: 4, see also 2005). Moreover, as argued by Keck and Sikkink (1998: 226-30), protest politics is just one of the two strategic alternatives for social movements to gain attention (see also Baber and Bartlett, 2007: 6). An alternative strategy of information politics, which strives to provide valid information to selected sites, would permit a social movement to pursue the same end through different means. Moreover, the work of della Porta (2009c: 122) shows that the standard image of anti-political social movements significantly diverges from a reality made of movements which critically and selectively engage with institutions.

Finally, a more substantial departure from Offe's idealtype occurs at a different level. Offe's new social movements are *'incapable'* of negotiating because they would have nothing to offer in return for possible concessions. This occurs because they do not have 'the properties of formal organisations' (e.g. 'the internal bindingness of representative decisions'). Indeed, they 'typically lack a coherent set of ideological principles and interpretations of the world from which an image of a desirable arrangement of society could be derived and the steps toward transformation could be deduced' (Offe, 1985: 830-1). Without speculating here on the actual capability of Transition to negotiate, and overlooking the fact that the movement is variegated and different groups may attain different results, it seems clear that, unlike Offe's idealtypical social movement, Transition has a (more or less) coherent worldview. Rather than fighting back over given issues, Transition puts a deliberate effort into envisioning a resilient and localised future. Thus, whilst to Offe 'a practice of exchanging long-term gains for short-term losses, a practice of tactical rationality and alliance formation' cannot be expected from social movements (ibid.: 831), that can instead be possible with Transition.[4]

The affirmative (rather than dissenting) approach of Transition which emerges from the above discussion may account for the different 'ontological and strategic orientation' of Transition that, as

[4] Moreover as Dryzek et al. (2013: 140) claim, movements such as Transition do not represent a 'post-material liberal interest group'; rather they see it as an example of 'prefigurative politics and economics' (see also Barry and Quilley, 2009).

seen, Barry and Quilley pointed out (2009: 18).[5] The lack of the confrontational, oppositional protest background may be a relatively important modification that Transition as well other movements may manifest without, however, implying a major departure from more traditional (conceptions of) social movements.

Empirical discussion

Although Transition pursues rather radical objectives it does so through an ideally non-confrontational approach. Through illustrations from four different case studies this section investigates empirically how this dynamic affects the life of community groups associated with the movement. The discussion below is informed by an interpretive and qualitative methodology (see: Yanow, 2006, Ybema et al., 2009) and is based on at least six weeks of direct observation for each case study, participation to their activities, and 94 interviews with Transition participants and other local actors (Felicetti, 2014).

The first case under examination is a Transition nearby Bologna (we call it here TA). TA was by far the most active Transition among the four case studies. The local Initiative had two leaders who attached special importance to the development of high quality interactions in the Transition-related activities. The relationship with the local Council had surely reported important results and, for instance, it led to a council deliberation which made of that town the first Transition Town in Italy. That decision generated a high level of enthusiasm within the Transition movement and, for the occasion, the Transition Network (2009) released an exciting post. Nonetheless, the opportunity of such collaboration represented the main point of disagreement within the Transition. For instance, one of the Transition participants reported:

> 'I personally do not share the deliberation of the council in which they acknowledge the Transition and end up putting a cap on us, because to me Transition has to be a process that comes from below and doesn't have to have connections with politics, because when politics gets in it ruins everything'.

Partly as a consequence of this situation, the local Transition had divided its activities between sub-groups. Thus, whilst many events were developed in collaboration with local institutions, there were initiatives that were only loosely connected to local politics, if at all. Collaboration with Council was vital in developing numerous activities that allowed the Transition to reach out to the community. This collaboration, however, was largely based on private and informal interactions among community leaders and did not include the bulk of participants. On the other hand, independent initiatives, such as a social agricultural association, left more room to express participatory values and featured substantial engagement among participants and also with the rest of the community. Overall, although collaboration with institutions led to the organisation of numerous environmentally and community minded local initiatives, the values of Transition found best expression in those activities carried at a

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[5] In the parlance of collective action frames (Hunt et al., 1994: 190-2, Benford and Snow, 2000) we may say that Transition partakes in framing or 'meaning construction' processes. Nonetheless, its diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing (that is the identification of the source of an issue, the quest for potential solutions and the motivation to engage in collective action) differs from that of more traditional social movements.

distance from institutions. Although independent initiatives were never used as a means to oppose the work of the local council, many Transition participants did not seem to put aside the 'them and us logics' when it came to politics. As one of them reported: 'What I can personally say about the administration is not that they are not collaborative, it's that they do a job which is not our own: for them it is advertisement, it is good for them to have the Transition, they splash it around…'.

The Transition group in Sicily (TB) was basically a study group where Transition ideas were debated in systematic fashion by a dozen local participants. Transition members attached a fundamental importance to the democratic and the communicative qualities of the group. Meetings were seen as a space for egalitarian and constructive discussions based upon the Transition's approach. In the words of the local leader: '…to many of us it is a new thing to be able to engage with each other and say our own opinion within a given time so it's also that which is part of the [Transition] experiment, isn't it? [It is also about] us learning how to engage with others because we have not been used to seat around a table, or better on a circle, and having each and everyone of us to speak out and say what we think and being understood or at least not being attacked. Down here usually when people group together it ends up that there is two individuals talking and all the others have to listen. We have been used to do it that way, or even interrupting the interlocutor. The study group is also about getting familiar to respecting others'.

Whilst the more or less radical nature of issues under discussion were not a problem for internal debate the local context presented aspects that made it difficult to engage on some Transition proposals. This was clear to participants: 'When I talk about my lifestyle or when I show my lifestyle and my interlocutor is a person that is, so to say, on the other side, I feel criticized or derided because what I am doing is worthless or pointless because nothing is going to change anyway'; or also: 'The obstacle [to the action of TB] is people. Take my mum, my grandmother, they are, as they say "disenchanted". They tell me in dialect: "*chi'nna fari*?" "What do you do it for?" "It's useless". It's been too long, at this point it must change!'. Moreover, interaction with local institutions was not an option for the local group. This was in part due to the fact that the local Transition was at an initial stage but also to the particularly problematic nature of the political context, which emerged clearly, as it can be seen, for instance, in the words of a local environmentalist activist close to the Transition group:

> '…probably it is not the mayor stopping you because he is a good person like you, believing in what he is doing, but perhaps it is the president of province or of the regional council. Changes are monitored, it's not like there is someone watching but when you really change things then, at some point you will necessarily get in the way of existing interests. Probably as long as here we are ten, twenty, fifty people nobody is coming to stop us. But if say people from the province stop eating greenhouse products, and in Ragusa most of the economy is based upon greenhouses, then at that point something would happen. They would move at a higher level against this movement that is crushing greenhouses based economy. As long as it is fifty people doing permaculture in a valley we are not getting on the way of Province's or Region's interests'.

The case of the Transition group in Tasmania (TC) represents a most problematic instance. In the local community environmental issues historically represented a highly conflictual topic, and the locals had just recently come to a compromise over this issue. 'A significant part of the effort that I put in is about reducing community conflict' said a State MPs of the Green Party in an interview, before mentioning the occasion in which someone in 1992 blew up a bridge to impede the local 'hippies' from reaching the polling station and voting for the Greens. In this area coexisted very different communities: farmers, flourishing pockets of alternative lifestyle and business owners. As reported by almost every interviewee, including council members and managers, this was reflected in the council which was a sort of consociational government where the main different local interests were represented: forestry, agro-business, farmers, environmentalists, exponents of religious groups, and alternative lifestyle communities. Interestingly, the lively environmentalist scene was not at all embraced by the local Transition. In the words of a group leader:

> '…[this place] is potentially a kind of an ideal place for a Transition Town. I think the only the problem may be that if it is perceived as an environmental type of movement, there's a lot of them, there would be some anger on certain parts of the community where they blame the environmentalists for you know losing jobs and stuff if they are in the forestry industry, and then things like that. If it was perceived as an organization that was trying to benefit everyone then it would be successful, but if it was perceived as an environmental thing they would be, they would just ignore it, some people would ignore it'.

Indeed, TC's response to the local situation was to remove discussion on green themes altogether. TC tended to stress the non-conflictual nature of the movement more than any other case studies. After three years the local Transition had developed meetings during which participants engaged on subjects that allowed for amiable discussion but hardly ever could be connected to the perspective for a resilient a sustainable local community. The Transition had thus attracted only a very homogenous and numerically small group of people leaving behind environmental activists, businessmen, farmers, and old-timers (people born and bred in the area).

Interestingly, it appeared that the relationship with Council had a fundamental role in eschewing discussion on environmental themes. This relationship was developed not through group engagement but depended almost exclusively on the activity of one local councillor, a founder of the local Transition. The shared understanding that the group did not have to take a green-tinge seemed consistent with the effort to keep Transition on a 'political safe ground' to use the expression of the local councillor. In such political safe ground, freed from any contentiousness, rather peculiar views emerged that seemed quite at odds with those of the local environmentalists. An instance is represented by the councillor words on the role of forestry in a sustainable and resilient community with a localised economy:

> 'a Transition Town's future, or a resilient and sustainable future, would employ far more people in the timber industry because it would acknowledge the fact that timber is a very valuable resource, one that Tasmania does well: everybody needs a house to live in and if we are serious about locking up carbon then what better resource than to grow timber for building, I don't, and then lock it away in a house, and it is there for four hundred years, it is

a long term storage for carbon so you know they [the pro forestry organizations] are a very important part of the picture and I wait eagerly for the day when they realize we are on their side'.

In the Transition group in Brisbane (TD), the group was rooted within an anti-development local protest scene. The group sought to interact with local institutions whilst undertaking actions which retained some ties with Transition's views. The tension between the views of local institutions and the contents of Transition did not fail to emerge in subtle as well as more overt ways. An instance of the former is given by the local project on sustainability. Through this project TD along with other about twenty local NGOs and charities aimed at developing a campaign to both raise awareness on energy consumption and fund energy efficient projects. Although it was important to the activists, the discursive dimension of the project was discarded altogether by the council. In fact, as pointed out by TD leader: '[TD] applied for 50,000 [AUD] to do the energy orders but also to do workshops and community outreach, networking, events and that kind of thing but they decided they would only fund the energy orders and the quantification [of emissions reduction] component of that', for a total of 37,000 AUD. The tension was manifest, instead, with the One Hundred Trees Action (OHTA). The basic idea of this project was to plant fruit trees alongside a public road as part of a broader project aiming at transforming urban space into a productive, eco and community friendly area. OHTA appeared to resonate with the broader struggle against development in West End and nearby areas. As the action's informal leader explained: '[OHTA] it's been an idea that's been around for about ten years in the community' and when eventually '23 trees were planted' some residents – apparently just a couple –protested against the action. Interestingly, as the OHTA leader explained: 'The local councilor was very supportive of the idea in principle but she had to [abide by] the broader council's regulations and she was stuck, she couldn't authorize what we wanted to do so we ended up planting the trees without council consent'. The residents' complaints thus presented a perfect situation for two contrasting views to emerge. In fact, on the one hand there was the view behind the OHTA, according to which, in the words of its leader: 'the community can design its way to the future…it has to because government and other leaders in business are not doing that'. On the other hand, there was the view of the supportive councilor who acknowledged that it 'is very important to have groups like Transition Town' whilst noticing that 'they are single issue groups…often they don't have to worry about other parameters which an elected representative has…', and 'often [this type of groups] gets more internal looking rather than external looking'. Following the two residents protest, the leaders of the OHTA and the local councilor started a 'negotiation' to solve the problem. Whilst it was avoided that council would uproot the trees already planted, the OHTA was interrupted.

Concluding Remarks

The theoretical as well as the empirical discussions in this paper claim that the Transition represents a movement where radical positions are promoted through an ideally non-confrontational approach. Although Transition can be understood as a social movement, the above feature represents an interesting difference between Transition and other movements. The ways in which the non-adversarial

yet radical views of the movement affect community groups associated with it have been investigated through a comparative analysis of four case studies. Of course, this study does not suffice to come to general conclusions on this topic and further work is needed before generalizing any observation to community group associated with contemporary movements. Yet, some clear observations can be made from this work.

First, context specific dynamics do affect the capability of groups to promote radical positions through a non-adversarial approach. It seems therefore advisable that activists give some thought to the changing circumstances and the way they may affect their activities. One way to think about context specific aspects is to reflect upon the characteristics of the local group and the public and institutions it is facing.

Second, an ideally non-adversarial approach may hold sway when it comes to a movement ideology, yet critical judgments among participants may often lead to oppositional and antagonistic views. Although complaints were occasionally less harsh with regard to local politicians, the overwhelming majority of Transition participants I interviewed were highly critical of politics. Comments ranged from politics being 'detached from the people' to 'a business committee'. Moreover, although observation suggests that some local leaders may closely abide to a non-adversarial attitude and be willing to engage with institutions, the bulk of ordinary participants may struggle to welcome this development. As noted by Quilley (2011: 9) often ordinary participants share a discourse without being well versed in the detail of the numerous Transition-related debates (and certainly this may be common among other movements as well). The existence of a non-adversarial ideology in a movement does not guarantee that participants will leave behind their (more or less adversarial) views. The different understandings of non-adversarial attitude that are likely to exist may contribute to internal tension, which may lead to domination and exclusion of some people and views from a group.

Third, the views and ideas of a movement can be adopted selectively by participants in light of their own beliefs and the situations they are in (see della Porta, 2009c: 5). The non-adversarial approach may be implemented in ways that adversely affect other desirable aspects. Whereas it is not always the case that non-adversarial approach requires sacrificing other qualities, interactions with political institutions seem bound to bring a tensions which require groups to devise original solutions. A particularly detrimental way to interpret the non-adversarial approach is to eschew or constrain discussion on potentially divisive topics.

Finally, institutions and activists may be informed by very different logics. The former may welcome the views of the latter views only up to a point. Internal channels for group wide reflection over the costs to be paid for collaborating and the payoffs of undertaking this effort should thus be widespread. To conclude, this paper does not formulate a rejection of an ideological commitment to promote radical positions through a non-confronting approach. However, it invites to test this approach as much as possible against the conditions characterizing the context in which activists take action. Indeed, taking into account the potential practical problems that a commitment to radical values and a non-adversarial method seems an important step towards the identification of satisfactory solutions.

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