A close-up photograph of a plant with numerous small, green, spherical seed heads or flower buds arranged in clusters. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and brown, suggesting a natural outdoor setting. The lighting is bright, highlighting the texture of the plant parts.

The story of

Transition in WA

How local communities are pioneering sustainable society

The movement started in the UK in 2005.
Now Perth has more Transition initiatives
per capita than any other city in the world.





The impacts of climate change, the end of cheap fossil fuels, and economic instability are felt in the daily lives of Western Australians — drier winters and wetter summers; pressure to develop the riskiest and most costly sources of fossil fuels; mining booms and busts. Yet government and industry march on with business as usual. What can individuals and communities do?

Introducing Transition Towns, the world's most popular new movement for addressing these global crises at a community level. Transition Towns originated in Totnes, Devonshire, UK in 2005. There are now over 1000 Initiatives world-wide, 15 in WA, 11 in the Perth metropolitan region. "Doing Transition" means organizing one's local community around the task of building the post-fossil fuel society and adapting basic economic and social functions to the expected impacts of climate change. That boosts a community's resilience and ability to determine its own future; it also means a much more neighbourly, convivial community.

This publication documents the story of Transition Initiatives in WA through interviews, pictures, survey data, and a scholarly essay.

In our interviews, we have been careful to correctly report what people actually said and how they remembered events. Within the limits of publication space, these are their stories in their voices. We hope that these stories will encourage debate about what Transition is and inspire new interpretations of how it can be done. The need for "transitioning" in some form is indisputable.

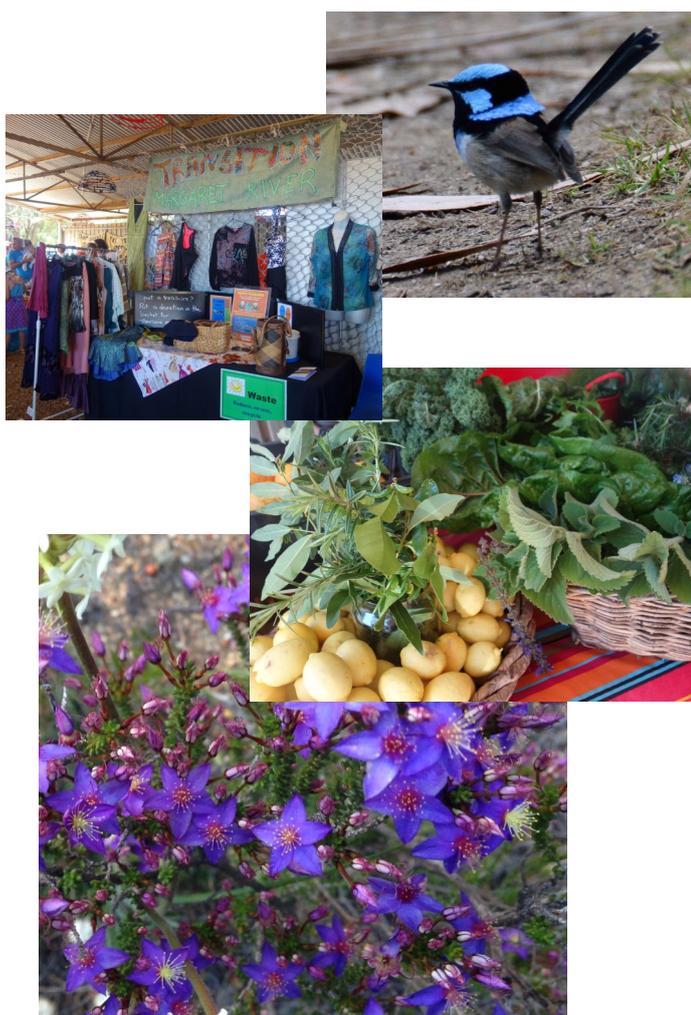
Research for this project was supported by a University Grant from my home university, Susquehanna University, USA; additional funding for equipment and technology was provided by Edith Cowan University, AU. No funding was received from Transition International or any of its affiliates.

We'd like to thank all the members of Transition in WA who contributed time, stories and data to this project.

Dr Drew Hubbell

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Thanks to everyone who contributed to this project.

Disclaimer:

In creating this magazine we made every effort to ensure that the information published here was correct at the time of publishing. Interviews were conducted in WA in late 2017. Some information was gathered in subsequent phone interviews, via an online survey of Transition participants and through other research processes.

We apologise for any omissions.

Printed by Graphic Source

24 Jersey Street, Jolimont WA 6014

Printing funded by Susquehanna University,
Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania

Published by the International Centre
for Landscape and Language

ISBN: 978-0-6482144-1-0

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Produced by Edith Cowan University
2 Bradford St, Mt Lawley, WA, 6050.

CRICOS IPC 00279B



Launching Civilization 2.0

The Story of Transition in Western Australia

An essay by Drew Hubbell

*What we cannot dream,
we can never do ~ Richard Flannagan,
The Narrow Road to the Deep North*

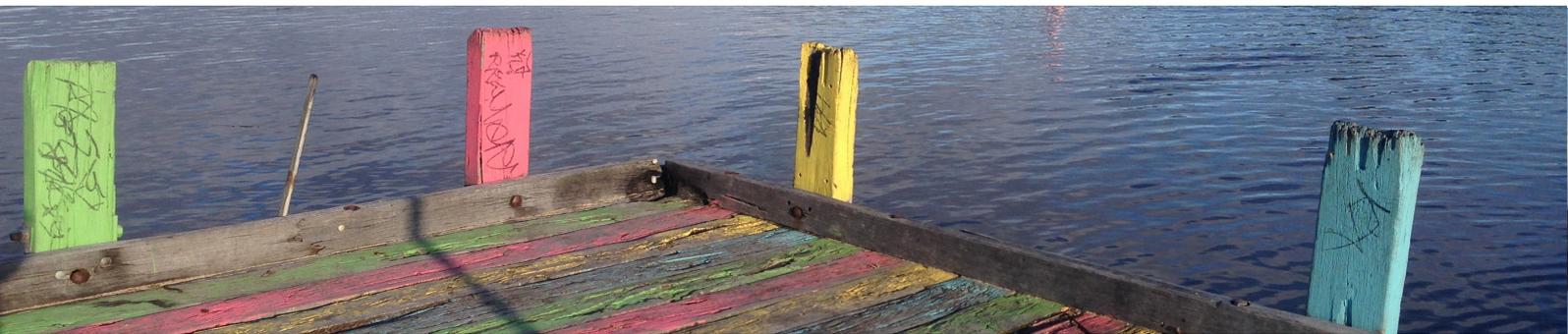
**Apocalypse is what we get if we do nothing;
Ecotopia is what we get if we do Transition ~
Boudinot and Levasseur, "The Values and Ethics of Transition Town"**

There's a Transition happening in Western Australia, and not a moment too soon. In some places, Stirling, Margaret River, Mundaring, Vincent, the movement has high visibility. In other places, Transition is just catching on, or regrouping, or morphing into something else. Whether Transition will help Western Australians create "Civilization 2.0" remains to be seen, but one thing is certain: Transition is the fastest growing, most exciting new social movement to emerge in the last twenty years.

The Transition Initiative, as it's formally known, developed in the market town of Totnes, Devonshire, UK, in 2005, the brainchild of Robert Hopkins, a permaculture

trainer from Ireland, and former member of the Irish Ecovillage, The Hollies. He fused the social design principles of Permaculture, which, in oversimplified terms, redesigns human systems according to natural systems (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010, 878, Aiken 2012), and ecovillage experimentalism into Transition, which he calls an "evolving approach to community-level sustainability" (Hopkins 2014, 134).

Unlike intentional communities, Transitioners do not withdraw from mainstream society to build a new community, nor do they work on the fringes as Permaculturalists have tended to do. Rather, they bring the Transition vision into the center of their



communities, to the council, the churches, the schools, recreation centers, clubs and sheds, unleashing their collective genius in order to build “ways of living that are more connected, more enriching, and that recognize the biological limits of our planet” (Hopkins 2014, 134). While the rest of the world fears a diminished future because of climate change and the need to eliminate fossil fuels, Transitioners are banking on their community’s ability to create a better version of “the Good Life,” one that’s more equitable, healthier, and sustainable.

The Transition movement quickly spread across the world, and the International Network currently lists over 1000 registered initiatives: 261 in the UK, 286 in the US, and 57 in Australia, which, in proportion to population, makes Australia the second most popular country for starting Transition (transitionnetwork.org). Many more communities unofficially identify with Transition principles and methods. Our data set includes non-registered, Transition-identified Initiatives. Western Australia has 15 active Initiatives, 11 of which are in the Greater Perth Metropolitan Region, more per capita than any other city in the world.

Perth has more Transition Initiatives per capita than any other city in the world.

Western Australians put their own distinctive spin on the Transition brand. Their Initiatives align with international norms in demographics, basic values, and organizational structures, but are very different in other respects. They are primarily urban, focused on food systems and community building, and only loosely follow the guidelines recommended by the International Network. Instead, they are much more interested in doing Transition to make their community more sustainable, resilient and thriving.

As a visiting research professor from the US, I

wanted to find out how people were doing Transition in Western Australia, so I partnered with Dr Kayt Davies, head of the Journalism Program at Edith Cowan University. We developed a survey sent electronically to 17 Transition Towns, and interviewed eight conveners from different Transition initiatives, some officially registered, some not; some rural, some urban; some well-established, others brand new. I edited the interviews into eight excerpts which follow this introductory essay, and Kayt developed the graphics for the “By the numbers” section of this publication. We chose the pictures and Kayt produced the booklet you are now holding.

WA Transitioners are pragmatists with big ideas

In addition to the interviews, I attended events, festivals, meetings, and a few parties. I found out that Western Australian Transitioners are pragmatists with big ideas, eager for more willing hands. With irresistible good cheer, they quickly dislodged me from my ivory tower to wrench bikes, tidy up after events, debate projects, assist with research, and discuss Transition philosophy. Rather than observing the participatory learning style of Transition, I became a participant learning about Transition. This gave me greater insight into the ordinary courage of Transitioners, who, although privileged by education, cultural access, and employment backgrounds, are not expert in the things they do as Transitioners. They are learning by doing, sticking their necks out for their ideals and values. Financially speaking, they are comfortable enough to ignore the social and environmental problems around them, or old enough to let the next generation deal with them. Instead, they are doing what they can. Not surprisingly, they are some of the most optimistic, engaged, enthusiastic people I know.

This points to one of the most important outcomes of Transition’s self-organizing, “DIY” activism: increasing participants’ sense of agency. Boosting a community’s



“can-do” attitude may be as important to building resilience as specific skills or infrastructure adaptations. A community that thinks it can, does.

The “inner transition” of each member is integral to the process of building a better world and shapes the nature of each Initiative (Hopkins 2014, 84-93, Barr and Pollard 2017). This philosophy is part of their dedication to equity, inclusion, and democracy and sets Transition apart from other social and environmental movements. This ideal impelled several groups to request that we interview all of them. Given our constraints of time, funding and space in this publication, that ideal was not possible. Thus, the eight selected stories of individual transition are by no means the full story of “Transition in WA.” This necessary selectivity is balanced by the quantitative data and this essay, which seeks to contextualize Transition WA as an international environmental / social change movement. We hope this provides a reasonable idea of what “doing Transition” means in WA.

Has consumer culture really led to a higher quality of life?

While mainstream society equates consumption of material goods with happiness, Transitioners, in common with post-materialist “New Environmental” and “New Social” movements, identify the consumerist treadmill as precisely what makes us *unhappy*. Instead of working long hours in soul-killing jobs to get more money to buy more things, Transitioners say that we’ll be happier, healthier, and better off if we shift our priorities to learning self-reliance, deepening our relationships, and learning how to belong in the places we inhabit.

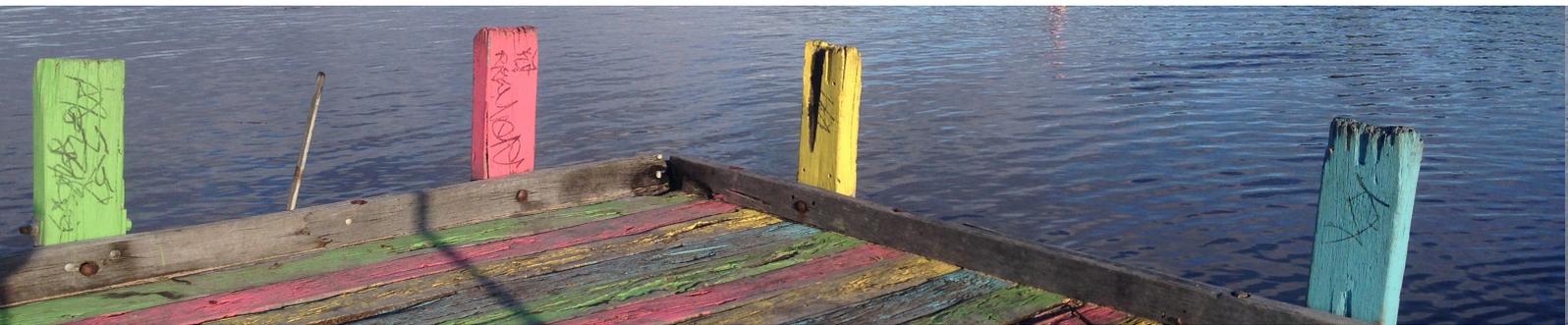
Increasing inequality and injustice, declining real incomes, high rates of suicide, depression, alienation, drug use, domestic violence, placelessness, hyper-competitiveness, exhaustion of essential natural resources like fresh water, feckless suburban sprawl, and other signs

of social fragmentation characterize modern life. These conditions are a consequence of a consumerist definition of “the Good Life,” which has been enabled by the bonanza of cheap energy discovered back in the 19th century: oil, coal, gas – the drivers of the great revolution in human civilization, industrial capitalism. Civilization 1.0 was launched by cheap fossil fuels, and it liberated us from the drudgery of agricultural life. Enormous benefits came from that revolution, namely, a quality of life heretofore unknown for a much larger number of people.

Our dilemma goes deep into what we believe constitutes the good life

However, as our demand overshoot supply, and fossil fuel pollution began to threaten the environment we depend on, using nonrenewable energy to drive Civilization 1.0 turns out to mean living on borrowed time (Heinberg and Fridley 2016). “Climate change says we should change, whereas peak oil [shorthand for the end of our cheapest, most accessible supplies of fossil fuel] says we will be forced to change. Both categorically state that fossil fuels have no role to play in our future” (Hopkins 2014, 37). “At its heart, this is a dilemma about the contradictions between what our science is telling us and what our deeply held belief systems are telling us about how we organize our economy and society; indeed its roots go deep into what we believe constitutes the good life” (Garcia, Martinez-Iglesias, and Kirby 2017, xiv). To most people, the thought of giving up this amazing energy source and “the Good Life” it provides feels tragic. What better way of life is there?

The Transition Initiative was designed to answer this question in a detailed, practical, realistic way. Civilization 2.0 will be built on renewable, carbon-negative energy sources, and completely redesigned social and economic systems, from agriculture to



housing, transportation to communication (Heinberg and Fridley 2016, 1-10, 181-197). The globally interdependent world that neoliberal capitalism has provided by over-exploitation of nonrenewable resources will come undone. But instead of an apocalyptic collapse, Transition tells a story of scrappy communities banding together to create a more vibrant, locally adapted, communal life (North and Longhurst 2013, 1425).

Transition poses a simple but revolutionary question

Transition's positive visioning may sound utopian and working at too small a scale to address these systemic problems, like massive population growth, volatile economies tied to increasingly unsustainable extractive industries, sharp political and cultural divisions, faltering ecosystems, loss of biodiversity, and rising levels of inequality. To these objections, Transition poses a simple, but revolutionary question: if we can plan well enough in advance, why wouldn't a future less dependent on fossil fuel energy have a *higher* quality of life for a greater number of people?

"We live in this strange time period when we don't have to depend on our neighbors," (Hardt 2013, 121). Instead, we depend on fossil fuels to do our work for us. The consequence has been alienation from both neighbours and neighbourhood. Hopkins says that without fossil fuel driving our lives, our future will be "energy lean, but time rich." We will step off the fossil fuel-driven treadmill and find time to reconnect with our neighbors, family, friends; learn skills that put us in charge of our livelihoods; and discover how to belong in the places we live. The future may be energy lean, but if we have the opportunity to be Civilization 2.0's pioneers, perhaps we ought to consider ourselves fortunate.

Communications scholars generally agree that

using the scare tactics of catastrophic climate change has failed to produce systemic change (Hulme 2011, Heise 2016, Morton et al. 2011). "While fear may be a powerful motivator, it is not necessarily empowering" (Connors and McDonald 2011, 559), particularly when the threat is defined as a "megaproblem" (Hulme 2011).

Megaproblems presumably require "megasolutions," but "the difficulty of literally grasping these phenomena and effects leads to alienation, whereby human stakeholders do not feel invested in environmental issues" (Neimanis, Asberg, and Hedren 2015, 74). Helpless to solve megaproblems, we must turn to "mega-actors": national governments, international organizations, transnational corporations. Yet we have seen these "mega-actors" not only fail to solve these problems, but conspire to hide the evidence and delay essential, obvious solutions in the name of profit (Conway and Oreskes 2014, Klein 2015, Gillis and Krauss 2015).

A "practical-utopian" story

Against this perfect storm of fear-induced inertia, discredited state and corporate actors, and new reports of the increasing urgency of the problem, Transition offers a "practical-utopian" story of "a *more* enriching, rewarding life in a sustainable low-energy future," and it outlines a set of organizing principles so that we can collaborate with our neighbours to get the job done (Connors and McDonald 2011, 559). Community envisioning exercises, where groups are asked to describe their community in 2030, are central to the Transition process (Hopkins 2014, 94-121), and one of the main things that distinguishes Transition as a "Prefigurative" New Social / Environmental movement: "We have become so accustomed to campaigning against things that we have lost sight of where it is we want to go" (Hopkins 2014, 98). The "navigational compass" provided by Transition's "practical utopia" (de Geus 2002) empowers citizens to make decisions over the fate of their own communities.



Not only is it true, as Richard Flanagan writes, that “what we cannot dream, we can never do,” but “by imagining the future we often help create it” (Heinberg and Fridley 2016, 4).

An idea pitched at the right scale

In addition to charting a path to the future, Transition’s envisioning addresses the way people feel about climate change, peak oil, and news that everything they’ve come to expect about life is about to end. By attending to matters of the heart, not just the head, Transition realizes that we are only going to commit to something about which we are enthusiastic. “Saving the planet” or “saving the human race” is too abstract, too big, but “creating a happier, healthier, more resilient and sustainable community for my family” is an idea pitched at the right scale to get people active in solving problems.

Conventional wisdom holds that climate change can only be solved if governments agree on international carbon reduction targets, such as the Paris Climate Accord, or consumers can be given environmentally friendly products to choose (Garcia, Martinez-Iglesias, and Kirby 2017). We’ve seen the success of these plans over the last thirty years. For this reason, Transition Initiatives identify “community” as the optimal middle scale, between governments (too slow and corrupt) and the individual consumer (too isolated and uncertain) (Bay 2013, Aiken 2012). Hopkins measures optimal community scale in terms of what an individual can become familiar with and relate to, around 5000 people (2014, 144). Transition Initiatives in WA are located in local government areas (the equivalent of boroughs or counties) that range in population from 1882 (Guildford), 2558 (Denmark), 38,160 (Mundaring), 35,587 (Vincent), to 202,000 (Stirling).

That definition of scale identifies a density of interconnected people who can organize to “relocalize” large sections of their economy and society. Instead of

relying on global supply chains to provide food, transport, energy, clothing, and housing, relocalization sources those basic building blocks of community more locally (Feola and Nunes 2014, 234). Not only does this allow the community to radically reduce its carbon footprint and vulnerability to the volatility of global markets, it also firmly relocalizes decision-making power. While conventional communities often feel dependent on state or corporate sponsored economic development (for jobs, increased tax revenue, collateral industry development), no matter the costs to local environments and society, mature Transition communities could reject economic development that damages social and environmental qualities, from sprawling estate developments to highway extensions, shopping malls, mining and fracking.

It takes many years of labor, love, luck, and faith to realize this level of self-determination. However, individuals participating in Transition feel a sense of empowerment almost immediately.

The politics of replacement

Read the interviews of Transitioners that follow this introduction, or attend a Transition meeting, event, or festival, and you are immediately struck by the optimism, friendliness, and “can-do” spirit. In defiance of the barrage of messages that make us feel helpless, the civic work of Transition enacts Paulo Freire’s theory that “whenever people act creatively, they change the world and therewith themselves” (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010, 873, Barr and Pollard 2017, Martindale 2015, 911). Indeed, for many Transitioners, gaining self-empowerment through civic leadership may be as important as achieving specific project goals (Bay 2013, 180-4). Thus, Transition begins to produce the better world it envisions immediately, with each act of its participants.

This description illustrates why Transition



practices a “politics of replacement,” not a traditional “politics of resistance.” Traditional politics resists powerful interests, the State, corporations, elites, or a class of people, such as capitalists, by organizing groups of the disempowered to wrest power from those interests, usually by means of protests, petitions, strikes, boycotts, or direct action. These means have been highly successful in extending human rights, abolishing slavery, defeating apartheid, liberating nations, and gaining protections for the environment internationally. The politics of resistance has an equally long list of failures.

A new, better system

Instead of opposing bits and pieces of the existing system, the politics of replacement creates a new, better system. It works at both a philosophical and practical level simultaneously, or as Transition puts it, “head, hands, and heart.” A politics of replacement challenges the cultural myths we believe in, such as the three bedrock ideas of neoliberal capitalism: that all men are motivated by self-interest, that there’s never enough to go around, that population always exceeds its food source. Common Transition events replace these myths (Boudinot and LeVasseur 2016, 380). The share market, for example, organizes a central location in town for people to share things they have produced in excess (vegetables, fruit, plants, seeds, compost, crafts). You lay your things on a table and then go around to other tables. No money is accepted and you can take as much of anything as you want. While there are occasional abuses, empirical evidence shows that by replacing the economics of scarcity with the economics of sufficiency, new group norms emerge: generosity, altruism, equity, and egalitarianism. These shape the behavior of everyone participating in that exchange. Abusers become self-conscious and don’t return, or

return with things to share. The myths central to the logic of neoliberal capitalism cannot allow for the existence of a share market, yet every weekend, from Stirling to Margaret River, Vincent to Mundaring, you will witness ordinary people doing ordinary things in radical defiance of the “truths” that mainstream Western Australians hold to be self-evident (Hardt 2013).

The politics of replacement is the central strategy of a broad set of social movements that have been variously defined as “Prefigurative” (Hardt 2013), “New Social” (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010), “Grassroots Innovation” (Seyfang and Haxeltine 2012), “New Environmental” (Schlosberg and Coles 2016), or “Drift” (Bay 2013). These movements are linked by common ancestry, strategies, values, and themes.

These groups relocalize economies

Hopkins says that “permaculture principles are implicit” in the Transition approach (2014, 141), but Permaculture has many commonalities with bioregionalism, Eco-villages, “back to the land,” communalism, political anarchism, even, on the radical right, survivalists (Hardt 2013). These groups relocalize economics, politics, and society to return decision-making and control of resources necessary for a community’s sustainable operation to local actors (Kurland, McCaffrey, and Hill 2012, 48, Schlosberg and Coles 2016, 172).

“Do it Yourself” organizing and initiative characterizes these relocalization efforts because often the needed skills, institutions, practices and resources are missing from the local region and must be created or relearned. Transition International publishes material on community organizing, and you can sign up for Transition training, though only a few WA members have done that.

Organizational values, structures, and processes are considered “modular,” reproducible across locations, while the specific projects and goals are determined locally (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010, 882). Goal-oriented protest



movements are driven by a single objective, such as 350.org's goal to reduce atmospheric CO₂ to 350 ppm. Process-oriented managerial movements, like Transition, are designed to transform behavior (Hardt 2013, Bay 2013, 174).

How could our response to climate change look more like a party than a protest

The difference can be seen in the slogan, “how might our response to peak oil and climate change look more like a party than a protest march?” (transitionculture.org)

Prefigurative grassroots innovators occupy a niche where they experiment with alternative ways of thinking and doing (Seyfang and Haxeltine 2012). According to Caroline Lucas, today's niche movements are “pioneers of a global future, based on sustainable living – those who have decided to stop waiting for society to wake up to looming social and environmental crises, and to do something themselves” (Dawson and Lucas 2015, 9).

Because governments and other institutions have failed to address the major problems of climate change, peak oil, and economic instability, niche innovators have felt an imperative to address it themselves before it is too late (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010, 879, Wells 2011, 379-80). Their organization, methods, values, and member behavior “prefigure” the society they envision, demonstrating how an alternative way of life can be achieved (Hardt 2013, 3, Albo 2007, 338, Feola and Nunes 2014, 233). Transition, unlike many niche movements, has chosen to work within mainstream society, teaching by example and collaborative, “transformational leadership” (Bay 2013, 176, Anderson 2017). By engaging local leaders with envisioning projects and collaborating on planning to meet local needs, Transitioners intend to dislodge the mainstream regime from its “path-dependency,” its habitual ways of thinking and doing, and initiate a paradigm shift. (Hardt 2013, 131-2, Seyfang and Haxeltine 2012).

“Step Nine” of the twelve steps to creating a Transition Initiative recommends “build a bridge to local government” (Hopkins 2014, 170). Building bridges exemplifies the “post-political” or “apolitical” consensus-building method of many in the “New Environment,” “Localism,” and “Grassroots Innovator” movements and is consistent with the “politics of replacement” practiced by prefigurative movements.

Instead of leveraging power that forces opponents to change, Transition's post-political approach calculates the advantages of engagement, flexibility, and negotiation with all community leaders and groups, from the Chamber of Commerce to the council, community gardeners and cyclists to anti-plastics campaigners. This tactic emerges from members' personal discontent with the politics of conflict, and is situation specific as our research demonstrates (also Connors and McDonald 2011).

The four main critiques

There is a good deal of skepticism, from scholars as well as other activists, about whether Transition's post-politics can achieve significant social change (Feola and Butt 2017, 16, Feola and Nunes 2014, 234). Early in Transition's existence, the Trapeze Collective, a leftist group in the UK, argued that, since the ideology of neoliberal capitalism is the root cause of the social conditions and behavioral habits that Transition is working to change, Transition's collaboration with neoliberal governments is naïve and counterproductive (Bay 2013, 175, Trapeze 2008, Connors and McDonald 2011). Instead, Transition ought to take a strong political stand, joining capitalism's opponents in protest marches and the politics of resistance.

The Trapeze essay provoked a good deal of controversy and succeeded in outlining the four main



critiques of the Transition Initiative that subsequent literature has elaborated. In sum, critics hold that Transition is politically naïve, too middle-class, not radical enough, and lacks an effective theory of social change (Trapese 2008, Connors and McDonald 2011, Albo 2007, Barry and Quilley 2009, Smith 2011, Aiken 2012, Trainer 2010, Polk and Servaes 2015). To this has been added a concern that when Transition Initiatives identify themselves as the local “umbrella” group, they colonize other existing groups, and that the central hub’s control of the brand through a prescriptive registration process contradicts its emphasis on local control (Connors and McDonald 2011, Seyfang and Haxeltine 2012, 390-1).

It is an act of bad faith to criticize prefigurative movements for not acting like resistance movements

These critiques are generally from early in Transition’s existence and come from theoretical positions rather than empirical research. They could be leveled against almost all “New Social-Environmental-Prefigurative-Grassroots Innovation” movements. Local scale, politics of replacement, and post-political tactics are their modus operandi, and it is an act of bad faith to criticize prefigurative movements for not acting like resistance movements. Simply dismissing all post-political tactics as ineffective or compromised (Mouffe 2000) is counter to the empirical evidence on Transition Initiatives, which identifies the ability to collaborate with the local government as a leading indicator of a success (Feola and Nunes 2014, Seyfang and Haxeltine 2012, Wells 2011).

This conclusion is borne out in Western Australia, where the most successful Transition Initiatives have built the most robust collaborations with their local governments, as well as Bendigo Bank, non-profit businesses and activist groups. Fear that

naïve Transitioners will be co-opted by politically-savvy councils (Trainer 2010, 68), turns out to be utterly misplaced in reality, as Transitioners in Guildford, Margaret River, Victoria Park, Mundaring, Stirling, Vincent and Bayswater have formalized reciprocal relationships with their local governments. The Margaret River and Victoria Park initiatives have members who also hold local government seats.

Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that practicing Transition’s post-politics means you can’t also practice the politics of resistance with other activist groups. Most of WA’s Transitioners came from traditional activist groups – Peter Langlands from Guildford, for instance – and continue to march when the need arises, for climate action, in opposition to coal mining and freeway development. Transitioners in WA, unlike some in the UK, see traditional activism complementing and extending Transition’s practical activism (Neal 2013, 65); they *are* confrontational when needed, but don’t fly their Transition colors at those times (Trainer 2010, 67).

The civic core

There are advantages to being able to inject Transition ideas into the local council’s planning, especially when this work complements direct action against systemic problems at the national and international levels. Since Transitioners come from the educated elite, they can be seen as the civic core of the community (Aiken 2012, 96), playing the traditional role of progressive intellectuals mediating radical populist demands for change to institutional elites (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Neal 2013). They possess a complex, scientifically informed understanding of the problems, and an astute assessment of what they, personally, are best suited to offer by way of solutions.

While it is true that Transition is predominantly a middle-class, highly-educated, white, socio-environmental



movement (Barr and Pollard 2017, 59), our empirical evidence shows a track record in WA of inclusiveness and outreach to diverse groups. There are more women, highly educated people, and retired or employed professionals, and UK-European immigrants than typical in the areas where Transition Initiatives exist, but other indicators show that Transitioners represent the demographic mix of their areas.

The people who showed up

Transition in WA was created by the people who showed up and had the time, training, knowledge, economic stability, and personalities to undertake the demands of Transition. That organic evolution is hardly nefarious.

As most of the stories of Transition relate, “doing Transition” is a choice made for a variety of personal reasons. Often that choice comes down to living the life you want, having fun, meeting neighbors, and putting energy into transforming your own community and habitat (Hardt 2013, 11-12). The global society is going to have to work really hard to make the energy transition necessary to keep climate change below 2 degrees C, which the IPCC says is the maximum we can afford before catastrophic effects are inevitable (Heinberg and Fridley 2016, Stocker 2014). But we are also going to have to work really hard at the same time to create better, more adapted and sustainable communities, ones that will be more just, democratic, and open. This is work best done at a local level, addressing the problems of adaptation specific to place. Every Transitioner that I spoke to insists that mitigating climate change *and* building a more sustainable world are equally important, and, furthermore, can explain how his or her Initiative was achieving measurable progress in decarbonizing its community. Yet, their stories show that creating Civilization 2.0 can be fun, convivial, and “look more like a party than a protest march.”

What distinguishes the Story of Transition in WA from the stories of transition elsewhere? Our study aligns with research that identifies geography as the most important driver (Feola and Butt 2017, Feola and Nunes 2014), but the environment, history of settlement, population densities, connection to natural environments for livelihoods, and prevailing cultural, social, and economic relations are also important in WA as elsewhere (Wells 2011, Neal 2013).

In the US and UK, these factors have meant that Transition is still predominantly a village-town phenomenon, a trend continued in Eastern Australia. Melbourne (4.7 million people) has nine Initiatives listed on the official Transition Network, Brisbane (2.4 million) five, and Sydney (5 million) two. The New York Metropolitan Region (20.2 million – nearly the size of Australia’s entire population), has nine; London City (8.8 million) has nine.

A recent survey of 276 Transition Initiatives across 23 countries showed that about 65% of Transition Initiatives were located in rural-village-town settings, while 35% were located in urban settings (Feola and Nunes 2014).

Geography: the most important driver

By contrast, Western Australia’s geography, settlement patterns, environment, and cultural-economic character have meant that Transition is predominantly an urban movement of the southwestern corner of the state. There are no Transition Initiatives north of Wanneroo or east of Mundaring – an interesting fact given the extreme vulnerability of the wheat belt, mining districts, pastoral lands, coastal fishing towns, and Kimberley region to the impacts of climate change, peak oil, and economic instability. With 11 Transition Initiatives and a population of about 2 million, Perth has the highest per capita ratio of Transition Initiatives of any city in the world.



While there have been as many as 20 Initiatives in the state, five of these have disbanded (Ballingup, Bridgetown, Bunbury, Joondalup and Melville) and two others are currently dormant (Fremantle and Kalamunda). Of the remaining 13, two have only one key organizer (Albany and Kwoorabup-Denmark). Of the 11 groups with more than one person involved Manjimup and Margaret River are in the rural South-West Region and the other nine are in the Perth Metropolitan area.

The Manjimup Intuitive is on some Transition contact lists and it is doing Transition-type things, but it is branded Stellar Violets with little to no mention of Transition on its website. As a result, Transition Margaret River is the Initiative in WA that corresponds most closely to the international norm (Feola and Nunes 2014).

Why Transition spread differently here

Western Australia's unique geography, climate, settlement patterns, and local cultural differences explain why the UK-originated Transition ideas spread differently here than elsewhere. These place-specific conditions have not figured in social movement diffusion theory, which explains how ideas spread internationally on the basis of identification between transmitters and recipients (McAdam & Dieter 1993).

Only Greater Perth has the core characteristics that predict successful Transition Initiatives. These are population density, communication networks, spatial proximity to other Transition Initiatives, a relatively stable population with resources of time, money and education, cultural values in alignment with Transition philosophy, the existence of other like-minded groups, and members' place-attachment (Feola and Butt 2017).

The Greater Perth Region has a population density of 320: 1 skm; the rest of WA has a population density on average of .2: 1 skm. Successful Transition

Initiatives have 10 or 11 people on the steering group and each commit an average of 30 hours a week to Transition (Feola and Nunes 2014). Transition work requires administrative organizational, technical and communication skills.

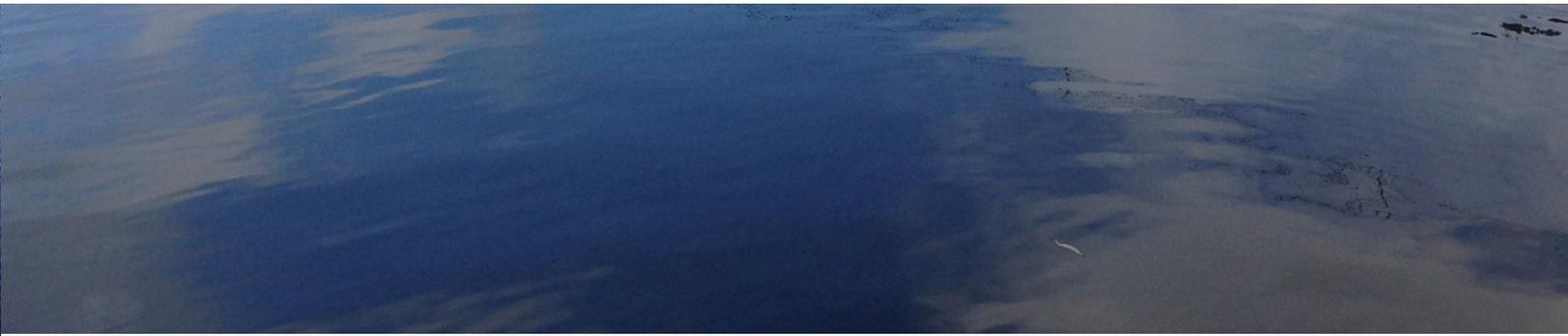
Other movements paved the way

Perth has also been home to many environmental-social change movements, notably ones directly related to the Transition ideology: John Croft's Gaia University and Sustainable Communities projects, Permaculture (which is an Australian invention), and Robert Theobald's Conversations for Change movement.

The northern and eastern parts of the state are much more sparsely populated. There are agricultural areas, semi-arid pastoral land and desert regions that host mining ventures. All of these areas have a long association with conservative political groups that have promoted the short term interests of rural communities, farmers and mining companies. This political background has been an obstacle for social change movements, including Transition.

Transition-friendly locations include a history of strong progressive and environmental values (Neal 2013, 64), and a strong connection between livelihood and healthy ecosystem functioning (Wells 2011, 389). The almost total reliance on extractive mining and industrial agriculture to the north and east of Perth has created a long history of anti-environmental values and encouraged destruction of functioning ecosystems.

These regions continue seeing resource extraction as beneficial to their livelihoods, and any shift from mining as an existential threat. By contrast, the higher volume of tourism in the South-West Region made the connection between preservation of eco-systems and the health of the local economy evident earlier. Because of their dominant livelihoods, they are equipped to interpret the impact of climate change on biodiversity, water, soil,



storms, ocean life as caused by human activity. Thus, the geographic, demographic, environmental, economic, social, political and cultural factors favor Transition in the southwestern corner of the state, over the rest.

Two curious exceptions

Two curious exceptions to this pattern are Fremantle and Denmark, areas rich in alternative cultures, progressive values, social connectedness, high education, environmentalist values, and activist populations. Denmark is home to the oldest ecovillage in WA, The Wolery, founded in 1977. Fremantle experimented with the world's first local currency tied to decarbonization, the Boya, launched in 2011 and discontinued in 2014 (www.maiamaia.org).

They are precisely the areas that are predicted to facilitate Transition emergence, and while both have nominal Transition Initiatives, they are not successful. One hypothesis, which requires further empirical study, is that Transition emerges in a “sweet spot” of demographic, cultural, social, economic, environmental and geographic indicators. An over-determination of indicators is as inimical as an under-determination.

WA's story of Transition begins in late 2010 and 2011, in Denmark, Margaret River, and Guildford. It spread rapidly in 2013-14, with many new initiatives starting up. Thus, most Initiatives are four years old or less and should be considered “growing toward maturity.” Internationally, the average time to maturity is four years, but that presumes a longer “mulling” period preceding the launch (Feola and Nunes 2014, 247).

Few WA Transition Initiatives followed the recommended “mulling” phase; instead, they simply declared themselves a Transition Town and began doing transition. While there may be less formal training in Transition compared to international peers, data from our study suggests that WA Transitioners have higher degrees

of relevant education and professional training in teaching, communications, scientific research and management than Transitioners elsewhere (Feola and Nunes 2014). WA Transitioners also have a history of volunteerism, community organizing, and activism, generally for environmental issues or The Greens. This may be one reason they feel they can dive right in.

No Transition Initiative has submitted an “Energy Descent Plan” to its community, yet this is widely seen as the instrumental goal of Initiatives (Feola and Nunes 2014, 234). Instead, Transition Initiatives in WA work on food and clothing, reskilling workshops, waste elimination (composting, upcycling, recycling, reuse), zero plastics, awareness raising, resource conservation, smart living design, and convivial community-building.

In this, you can see the influence of Permaculture and the kitchen gardening traditions from European countries of origin. Building the “New Economy,” local currencies, and transportation initiatives, which are important in the UK and US, are not pursued in WA.

Cheeky self-reliance

Reasons for this may be that Perth's sprawling development pattern and car culture make alternative transportation too difficult, and UWA's Centre for Social Impact, housed in its business school, means that a powerful institutional actor for building the “New Economy” already exists.

Western Australia's geographic isolation, clustering of population along the southwest coast and forests, recent emergence from colonial and frontier phases of settlement, influx of several waves of population, dependence on nonrenewable resource mining and Big Ag, a climate in the southwest that favors an outdoors culture, a mythology centred on clever outlaws, rugged outback adventure, Do it Yourself and make-do, and an attitude of cheeky self-reliance all combine to shape the WA Transition mob.





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Want to learn more about the Transition movement ?

Here are some key resources:



Watch

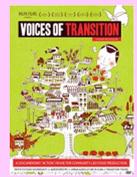
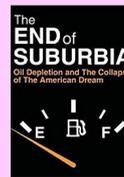
[In Transition 2.0](#)

[Tomorrow \(Demain\)](#)

[The End of Suburbia](#)

[Good Old Growth](#)

[Voices of Transition: Transition towns and community led food production.](#)



Listen



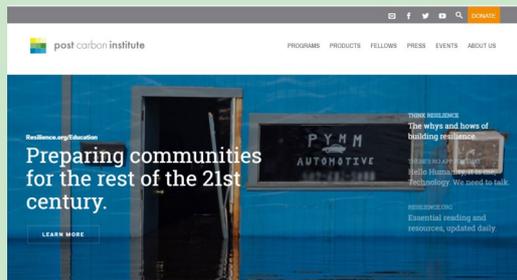
[Greening the Apocalypse](#) (Richard Heinberg RRFM Melbourne)

[Rob Hopkins TED Talk](#) Transition to a world without oil.

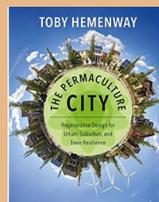
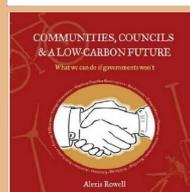
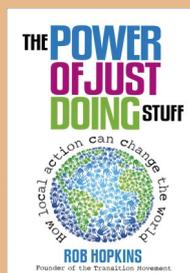
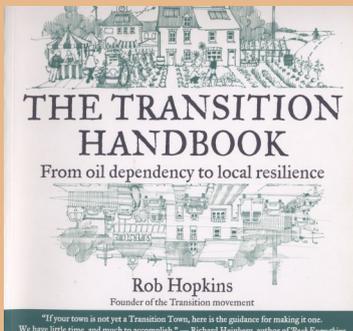
Visit

www.postcarbon.org

www.resalliance.org



Read



The Transition handbook: From oil dependency to local resilience, by Rob Hopkins

The power of just doing stuff, by Rob Hopkins

Communities councils and low carbon future: What we can do if governments won't, by Alexis Rowell

The permaculture city: Regenerative design for urban, suburban and town resilience, by Toby Hemenway

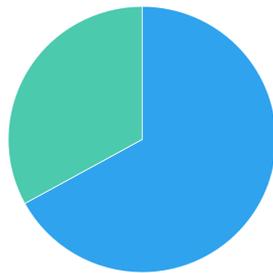


By the numbers

We asked representatives from all of the active WA Transition Initiatives to complete an online questionnaire to give us a glimpse into what is happening. Members of 11 groups responded. Asked to think about the members of their groups and to describe them, this is what they said:

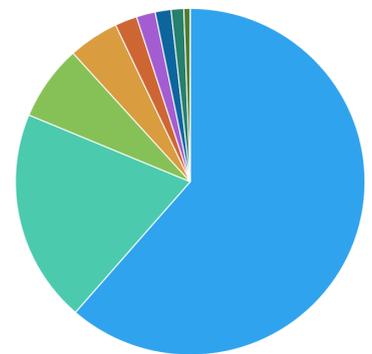
Gender

Female 67%
Male 33%
Other 0%



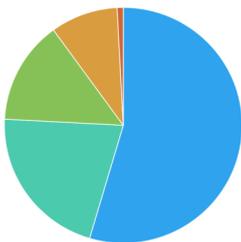
Ethnicity

White Australian 61%
UK origins 20%
Continental European 7%
Asian origins 5%
White African 2%
Other 2% (Swedish, NZ)
North American 1%
South American 1%
Aboriginal Australian 1%
African origins 0%



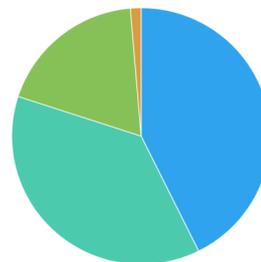
Highest qualification

Undergraduate degree 55%
Honours 2%
Masters or PhD 21%
Trade qualifications 9%
High school 14%



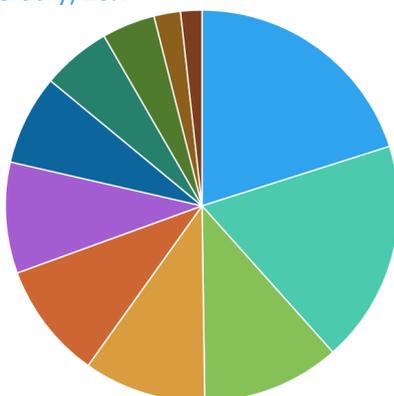
Religion

New Age or other 43%
Agnostic/atheist 37%
Christian 19%
Buddhist 2%



Profession (past or present)

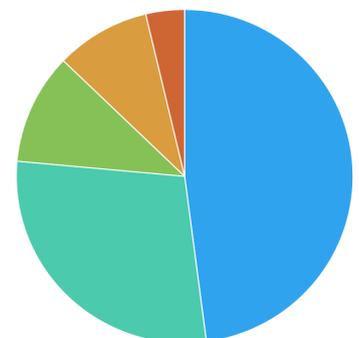
Teachers (daycare to tertiary) 20%
Other 18% *
Trades 11%
Public servants 10%
Enviro-scientists 10%
Farmers 9%
Engineers 7%
Labourers 6%
Business owners 4%
Finance industry 2%
Nurses 2%



*Other professions listed were psychology/counselling, scientists, stay at home mothers, physiotherapists, town planning, health policy officer and unemployed.

Employment

Retired/unemployed 48%
Full-time employed 28%
Part-time employed 11%
Self employed 9%
Caring duties 4%



By the numbers

Our questionnaire asked when their Transition Initiative officially formed, whether they had a mission statement and/or a constitution and whether their constitution was publicly available. They all started between 2009 and 2017, seven had mission statements and so far only four have written constitutions.

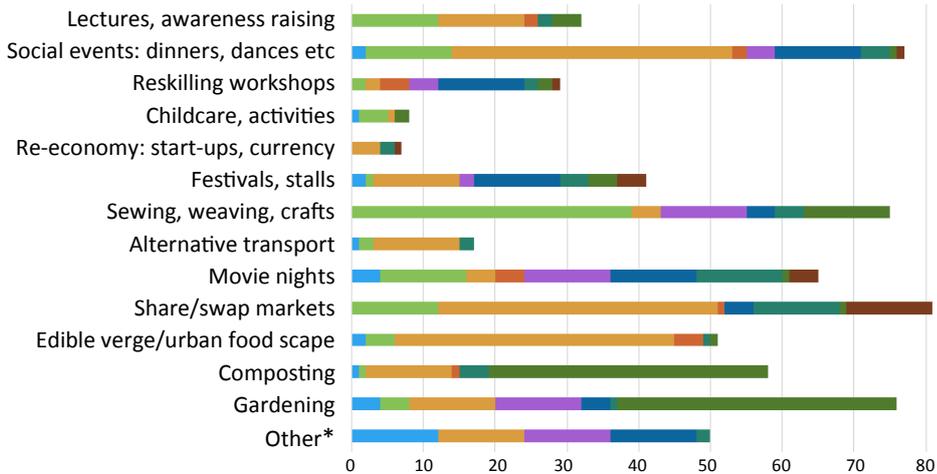
Initiative location	Year started	Mission statement	Constitution
Albany	2009		
Kwoorabup Denmark	2009	✓	
Guildford	2010	✓	2014 publicly available
Margaret River	2012	✓	
Victoria Park	2013	✓	
Mundaring	2013	✓	2013 publicly available
Stirling	2014		
Vincent	2014	✓	2016 only for participants
Kwinana	2014	✓	2016 publicly available
Wanneroo	2016		
Bayswater	2017		

We wanted to know how many people are involved in Transition in WA so we asked if they have memberships lists. Five of them did. We also asked how many people were in their core group of leaders, how many people had actively engaged with running their activities over the past three months and how many people they reached out to via Facebook, their email lists or who attended their events, such as festivals and movie nights.

Initiative location	Membership	Core group	People engaged *	Facebook likers, attendees +/- or e- list**
Guildford	36	13	10	1183 FB, 1055 e-list
Mundaring		10	125	1000+FB, 300 e-list
Stirling		6	35	1050
Vincent	18	18	350	1000
Kwinana		8	20	700+FB
Margaret River		10	40	560+FB
Victoria Park		4	5	500
Albany		1	5	289
Bayswater	12	12	8	134
Kwoorabup Denmark	101	1	0	130
Wanneroo		1	2	54
TOTAL	167	84	600	6600

*where a range was given the median has been used here

** Because of the likelihood that many people are both on an email list and like their TT's Facebook page, where both numbers were given, only the higher number was used to calculate the total.



We asked what activities their Transition Initiatives do, and how many times a year those things happen.

*Other activities listed were:

Albany's website; Margaret River's newsletter; Mundaring's Interest groups (Heart & Soul, Voluntary Simplicity, Climate Change); Stirling's Singing and Vincent's Neighbourhood Soup.

In 9 out of 11 cases these activities were initiated and led by members of the core leadership groups. In Kwo-Denmark and Margaret River they are run by other

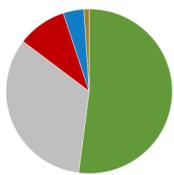
We wondered how much the WA Transition Initiatives were interacting with other community groups and sectors and so we asked if they had forged any formal or informal relationships.



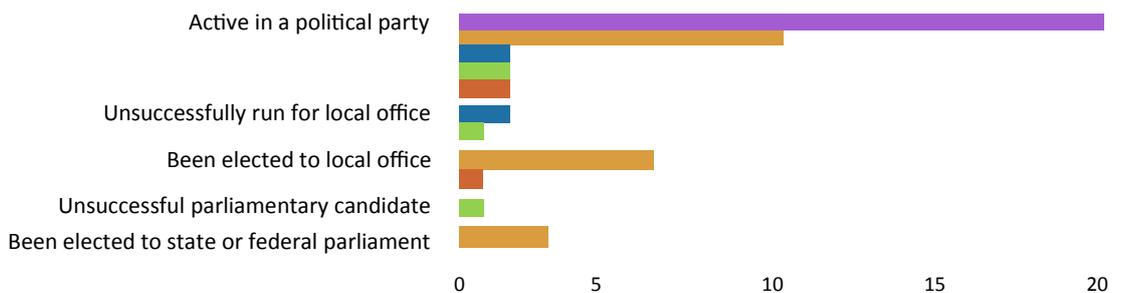
Key to colours in graphs

- Albany
- Kwo-Denmark
- Guildford
- Margaret River
- Victoria Park
- Mundaring
- Stirling
- Vincent
- Kwinana
- Bayswater

To find out how politically active WA Transition people are, we asked our respondents to think of the people in their groups and to describe their political allegiances. Digging deeper we asked a more about political activity. Albany, Kwo-Denmark and Wanneroo had no one actively involved in politics. Vincent has a member active in a party and Kwinana and Bayswater each have a member who has run unsuccessfully for local office. The other five combined have 50 people engaged in political activities in the following ways.



- The Greens 52%
- No allegiance 33%
- Labor Party 10%
- Liberal Party 4%
- The Nationals 1%



Meet the people making it happen:

The Community Organizer

Excerpts from an interview with
Behrooz Eslam

Transition Town Vincent, 10.4skm
Urban, local population 35,587

Age 50

Lived in WA since 1975,
originally from Melbourne.

Bachelor Degree

Employed in Primary Education; casual relief teacher



I started at Transition Town Mt. Hawthorn in January, 2014, because my friend, Irma, suggested I come to the first organizing meeting with her, and I just went. My interest in the meeting was because I wanted to create some sort of community on the street where I live, which is all units, roughly 2200. It's pretty isolating. No one shares anything.

I had plans for creating community with a shared garden that I had designed in a Landmark Education program, but no idea how to put them into action. Irma suggested that Transition Town people might be interested in helping. My idea was to join the Transition Town and attract more members for the community garden. That didn't happen. Instead, I discovered that Transition Towns are about engaging the community, working the local council, getting grants, everything I was interested in. For me it's all about connections and

that's sustainability; sharing, connecting, a network.

There's a lot of crossover with other community groups, such as the Greens. We all have similar interests: refugees, growing food, renewable energy, sustainable building design, public transport and cycling, reusing greywater. All those different things link together. And some of us do bits and pieces, and some of us are doing all of them. It's crossover in a grand style.

There's a lot of crossover with other community groups

As we extended our reach beyond Mt. Hawthorn, it made sense to change our name to Transition Town Vincent (TTV), which we did in December 2016. In 2017, we hosted a big event to celebrate and both our mayor, Emma Cole, and our previous mayor, the current state MLA, John Carey, spoke. So our council is very supportive. Other community groups joined us too,

showing off what they are doing, but I think it was also a recognition of what we've achieved, the way we've bridged all these different projects, shown how we're all part of the bigger picture. That's where we want to be. In the middle, helping connect it all. If we want to do bigger things, we need money, more grants, and more members.

We're a small group of 18 to 22 people, maybe 14-15 that are very active, and we all have busy lives. We tend to do a lot and then get exhausted. I've been part of lots of different groups in my past, and if we're not sustainable, then we won't be doing anything that's sustainable for the community. Energy will come and go. Ideas will come and go. Personalities will come and go. But I think Transition is on the up, because when I first started nearly four years ago, there were only a handful of groups in Perth, and Guildford was the role model. And now, lots of other groups are starting up, we're becoming the role model. That's the



My father Mansour and me at the Lake Monger community garden. When I was young my father made me water the garden and rake the leaves. I saw this a chore and resented him. I now know that my father, who is 85 now, was teaching me life skills. I am so grateful to my parents for 'making' me do the gardening as a young boy

direction Perth is going.

I grew up in Melbourne, lived in a flat on the sixth floor, but I spent all my spare time outside. I remember exploring a lot of places with my older brother, playing in the creeks and in derelict houses across the road, and climbing trees.

I was always curious about the creatures I'd find, frogs, redbacks, snakes, whatever. I've never been afraid of animals, like I'd pick up a snake, it wouldn't bother me. I know a lot of people grow up with fear of things. I think that gets passed on by adults.

I remember kneeling down on the edge of Maroondah Reservoir in Melbourne and putting my hands in the earth and feeling a strong connection. I got a sense of belonging that I've always carried

with me. They say that putting your hands in the dirt is an anti-depressant.

Nature is something that humans haven't destroyed yet, haven't influenced or rearranged. TTV contributes to preserving nature by planting native seedlings, preserving native vegetation and identifying the value of trees.

People don't value trees because they want money, which means putting up more buildings.

We worked with Trees for Vincent a while ago because they were concerned about the green canopy in Vincent diminishing. So many studies that show that more trees create cooler urban areas, which means less air conditioning and less fossil fuel burned. They provide habitat for animals.

At TTV, we're all here for the right reasons, so we come to consensus on everything we do.

People join a Transition Town because they are in transition themselves, growing emotionally and mentally from one place to another.

And they come to our group because it allows them to transform, with our projects and our structure.

Transition is one of the best things I've ever done because of what I've learned about myself, about building relationships, communicating with people, organizing all this energy.

If I wasn't learning anything, I'd find something else. And I think the others in the group feel pretty much the same.

The Doer

Excerpts from an interview with
Julie Neill

Transition Town Stirling, 105.2skm
Urban, local population 210,000

Age 57

Originally from Yorkshire, UK, moved to Gwelup WA 1987.

Bachelor Science: Information Studies

Works part-time in Health, Nursing



I read *The Transition Town Handbook* in 2009 because it looked interesting. A few years later, I attended a Living Smart session about building community, and a few people spoke about the Transition Town thing. The following year, Meegan organized an interest meeting and invited Bob Frey from Guilford. That was our first meeting, February 2014, with Bob, Meegan, Brett, Annie, Cara and Wendy. We skipped the “mulling” phase and just started straight into it.

Three years later, we have close to a thousand people on our Facebook page. We've developed a profile with the City of Stirling [our local government] and some of the local organizations. As soon as we announced the Groat Street

Festival, people were clamouring to have stalls. And now the Rotary Club asks us to help them organize things. Other organizations want advice on how to run workshops, or they want us to run workshops in their space. They want to know how to engage more with community, which is interesting because none of us are trained in any of this.

We won't be involved in something that doesn't align with our principles. People don't understand that with Groat Street, we make no money. It's not about making money. It's about building community. And it's a foreign concept to a lot of people.

A large part of who I am results from my father taking me on walks through the woods when I was very young. Although we come

from a working-class coal mining village in Yorkshire, it's surrounded by part of Sherwood Forest. So my love of forests and nature and animals and the environment stems from that.

Like a lot of people, I spent my early years worrying about career and things like that. And then a girl I worked with had a brain aneurysm and she died. Until that point, I'd been manager of the library. And then I suddenly decided that work wasn't important. So I switched my thinking from career to friends, family, surroundings, community.

By changing what you value, you benefit. Because there's been too much emphasis in the last 60 years on being valued for what you have or own or your job title. And less value on who you are as a person.

I'm a doer, I've never seen myself as a leader.

Transition provides room for everybody to do their thing.

What I like about Transition is that it doesn't have to be doom and gloom. We can actually end up in a better place. And it seemed an easier way of going about things than trying to stop everyone eating meat or driving cars. You can have fun, make friends, and build community, while doing positive things for the environment.

So at Transition Town Stirling, we think of a lot of our work as modeling what our future community could look like, showing people what they could do and how. We also raise awareness and create things that make it easier for people to shift. But simultaneously, we're building community and creating friendships.

Transition is about changing society, it's about changing the economy. What you choose to buy is

the most radical thing you can do. If you choose not to buy Halloween rubbish, then that changes the amount of plastic in the oceans, the amount of oil to produce the plastic. It reduces the amount of pollution, it changes businesses here and in other countries. It's a huge shift from a seemingly small thing. So ultimately, all those small things, if you can convince enough people, will have a huge impact on the natural environment.

A whole array of people have managed to ban the single use plastic bag, which is an amazing achievement. And then you can move on to something else, to straws and balloons. And then the microbeads in shower gel. Small steps, but hopefully, it'll build something.

Trying to get young people involved is a challenge. You need new people to do new things. My ideal is to establish projects, like Groat Street, Community Share and the Repair Café, and let other people keep them going. And then I'll move on to something else. I'm trying not to take on the Supreme organizer role. I'm a doer, I've never seen myself as a leader.

Transition provides room for everybody to do their thing. There's less ego involved with Transition Town people. People say, "Are you the president?" And I say, "No, I'm not the president. There is no president. We all just do things." Even Rob Hopkins doesn't present as someone with a real ego, does he? He's just someone who tells a good story.

Transition Town
Stirling initiated
the Groat Street
Festival in 2014
and it was going
strong in
October 2017



The Inventor

Excerpts from an interview with
Edward Metcalfe
Transition Town Albany, 4310skm
Regional city,
local population 37, 407

Age 54

Moved from Kalgoorlie to Albany in 2012

BA in Business, CPA

Employed full time as accountant



When I came to Albany in June 2012, it was hard to find environmental and social groups. A Transition Town had started in 2009, but dissolved, so I figured that I could use the name for a website that would identify environmental groups in Albany, key concepts about the environment, how to save energy, and how to grow your own food. Transition Town Albany (TTA) gave me a niche in the environmental-sustainability scene.

I learned about Transition Towns after I moved to Kalgoorlie in the goldfields area of WA in 2004. Living in Kalgoorlie is a real challenge from a sustainability, self-reliance aspect. Normal gardening is impossible. The soil is just orange dust, no structure at all. In Western gardening, we just grow supermarket-style veggies, but the Kalgoorlie environment kills them.

I began experimenting with local food sources that were adapted to the environment, but I had to change my diet and learn a different kind of gardening. Local prickly pear cactus produced a delicious fruit and the young pad could be sliced, peeled, and eaten. Very high fibre. But I had to learn how to recreate its symbiotic relation with microbes, which they require to get nutrients from poor soil. When I started burying our Rottweiler's droppings by the roots, not only did the cacti take off, but the texture of the soil itself improved.

When we moved to Albany, I experimented with nitrogen-fixing compost. Most agriculture is based on plants photosynthesizing sunlight. My method is based on the detritivore cycle. I compost eucalypt leaves with food scraps, and keep in a damp pile near a nitrogen fixing tree. Decomposer

organisms eat the compost and are eaten by chickens, which excrete nitrogen-rich manure eaten by more decomposer organisms. The whole thing is virtually self-sustaining and dramatically boosts the biodiversity of small invertebrates, meaning I've far more different species in my garden than most people, meaning more productive soil.

I first tried this idea back in the late '80s. I had just read Bill Mollison's, *Permaculture: A Designer's Manual*, and was tending my parents roses while they were on holiday. The roses did better when I mulched them with gum leaves and chicken manure, but the smell was rank. I thought maybe if a nitrogen fixing tree was nearby it would help. Since then, I've watched Justin Rhodes and Geoff Lawton's videos about chickens eating compost. Now I got two old hens from the battery farm, who have been promoted to pets and nitrogen

People don't have to be environmental vandals.

We could be good for the world.

fixing trees, and the whole thing works like a treat.

In Albany, I'm involved with a community garden, Green Skills, various recycling initiatives, and the sustainability expo. I take bags of tagasaste [tree lucerne] seeds to the monthly produce swap at the community garden.

You scan the QR code on the bag which takes you to our Web page explaining the benefits of tagasaste. I put the best ideas I find on the TTA website. I've also copied things done in other parts of the world, like using *Drosanthemum floribundum*, a low-maintenance, succulent groundcover that doesn't require watering in Albany. It can be used as a chicken

fodder and a good early spring source of nectar for bees, when they need it most.

I developed photograph and diary databases to track various experiments. It is easily searchable so you can find patterns of success and failure, and surprising synergies, to refine your food and waste systems. A great opportunity to learn from your own mistakes and help others avoid repeating them.

My goal is to increase biodiversity and promote perennial food plants, mulching, and using waste to benefit the environment.

I put newspaper and food slops in my earthworm farm. The chickens eat solid kitchen waste. Smell is

eliminated so we reduce fly spray. There's less waste going into the landfill and down the drain. We have more earthworms to improve the soil and feed the chickens. The chickens fertilize the lawn. That helps the microbial soil life.

Tagasaste not only fixes nitrogen but flowers in late winter to provide a source of nectar for the bees, protecting the species from extinction.

So that's how humanity interacts positively with nature. Rather than pulling resources from nature, the entire ecosystem benefits. People don't have to be environmental vandals. We could be good for the world.



Image of King George Sound near Albany by Chris Fithall, via Flickr CC Licence Attribution

The Movement Builder

Excerpts from an interview with

Jim Thom

Mundaring in Transition, 645skm

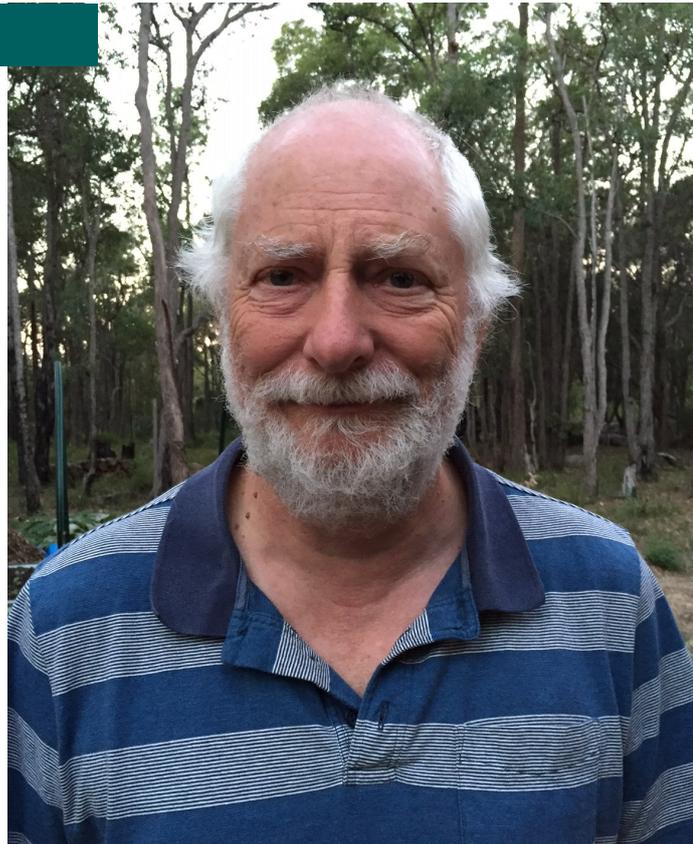
Urban fringe, local population 39,174,

Age 66

Moved to Mundaring, WA in 1987; originally from Dundee, UK

Masters Degree

Retired from laboratory science, haematology



My wife, Joy, and I had been generally concerned about the environment for many years. We joined various climate action groups, sustainability groups, saw Al Gore's movie and did the Living Smart course, but when we heard about the Transition movement in England, we recognized the advantage of being part of an international network. We followed *The Transition Handbook*, taking six months as "Mullers" to consider how the Transition model applies to our area, and then declared ourselves "Mundaring in Transition" in January, 2013. Ten months later, we incorporated.

My personal view is that we're not making enough difference, considering the massive problems and our small solutions. But when the mainstream realizes that there is a serious problem, Transition will be ready as a platform for effective action. We are successful in modeling how we'd like the

world to work. We reject hierarchy and try to be egalitarian. Instead of a leader, we rotate facilitators. We have thirteen guidelines to support healthier group relationships. Having a happy, egalitarian steering committee means we are flexible and go with the initiative of individuals. But we've got limited skills and limited capacity. Working by consensus is slow when you're dealing with massive, urgent problems.

The Shire is very supportive, and I think that's probably because we're doing things that they want to see. The community, particularly Bendigo Bank is supportive, but we don't have any teeth.

Our interest groups, workshops, and events keep a big range of people involved. Interest groups such as Down to Earth, Heart and Soul, Voluntary Simplicity and Renewable Energy form when people take initiative.

Workshops teach sustainable and self-sufficiency skills, like making cider, preserving olives, making boomerang bags and green funerals.

We run ten events a year, usually movies, but sometimes we have speakers on topics, like ethical investment. We run market stalls and, this March, we'll create the Blue Sky Festival to showcase local resilience and sustainability. We hope to host around 2000 people. One of the objectives is to be inclusive, so we've involved a lot of groups, including the Shire, the organic growers group and the wild flower society. Sustainability will be the driving principle, so there will be no single-use plastic, no commercial selling. It will not be about making money, but showcasing sustainability.

I grew up in the industrial town of Dundee, Scotland, with a working-

I would like to be more courageous in pushing Transition.

class mantra, “get on in life.” Get an education, if possible, get a good job, earn lots of money, get a good house, you know, buy, buy, buy. It was a materialistic culture. But we lived on the edge of the city, and I had lots of friends and five brothers and a sister. We wandered the fields outside the city. An important experience was walking with my father into the country to fish. I loved being in the country.

I've always found nature beautiful and calming, especially forests. My favourite place in the world is the south-west karri forest. I can almost feel, in a mystical sense, the interconnection between me and the massive trees, know that all life is sacred. At the same time, I'm aware of nature's fury and random suffering. Joy and I try to go to the karri forest once a year, just to be in that environment, to restore our perspective.

In the '70s, I moved to Australia, but it wasn't until the late '90s that I really started to take environmental problems seriously. I suddenly realized we can't jump on planes all the time, buy things all the time.

Talking with my wife, Joy, has been essential to my growth, but *Inconvenient Truth*, *Do the Maths*, Attenborough's *Life on Earth* series, and my friend, Jo Vallentine, a member of the Greens, also influenced my thinking. I read a lot, *Climate Code Red*, *The Story of Stuff*, Margaret Attwood, Tim Flannery,

The Lancet Climate Commission Report.

The birth of my daughter made me think more of the future. It became personal.

We see ourselves as a movement with diffuse edges. Our Constitution says something like, “membership is open to anyone who supports our vision and objects.” We like to think of ourselves as a glue that holds together a diverse coalition around sustainability, resilience, self-reliance.

It's said that Perth's three days away from mass starvation. If suddenly we couldn't get food across from the eastern states or overseas, Coles and Woolies would run out of food. And then our social networks would be a matter

of survival. I am disappointed that Transition hasn't developed faster in WA. The way it took off in Britain was spectacular.

In Australia, such a beautiful country and a wealthy country, climate change is an invisible crisis. Plus, it's so easy to focus on working and earning enough money to buy stuff.

We are trying to build a movement of people who realize that everything goes back to our interdependence with the natural environment and foster an anti-materialistic way of thinking.

We're starting the Australian Transition Network, which will increase the energy. Personally, I would like to be more courageous in pushing Transition.



Mundaring in Transition's 2017 Steering Group

Meet the people making it happen:



The Idealist

Excerpts from an interview with
Julia Heide
Transition Town Bayswater, 34.6skm
Urban, local population 66,050

Age 26

Moved from Siegen in German to Ashfield WA in Feb 2017

Bachelor of Science with honours

Casual employment as Environmental Consultant

In January 2017, I saw *Tomorrow*, a movie that features the Transition Town movement. One month later, I moved to Perth and happened to learn that Environment House wanted to start a Transition Town group in Bayswater. And I thought, “wow, just a few weeks after I first heard about Transition Towns, there's one starting up right next to where I live!” I called Rachael at Environment House, and we organized the first meeting together, which was in March.

We've had two events already and we're connecting with other Transition Town groups. In September, we showed *Tomorrow*, and so many people came who hadn't heard about Transition. We got some new members,

including one who joined the organizing committee. If we keep the community informed about our environmental projects, then maybe they will start making changes in their lives, getting more active.

Siegen, where I grew up, is a small city, about 100,000 people, and apparently the greenest city in Germany because of the surrounding forest. I was always wandering in the forest, taking the dog for a walk, enjoying nature. My favourite subject in school was biology, the science behind nature. And that's why I chose environmental engineering, because I'm really interested in how everything in an ecosystem works together. In the first semester, we discussed climate change and water problems and all the fertilizer,

pesticides, things I'd heard about before, but not in as much detail. In the second semester, I wrote a paper on how human rights are affected by climate change. And for me that was shocking, because so many people don't have access to safe drinking water, and with climate change, that will get even worse. And I think for me that was the moment when I thought, "climate change is even worse than I thought." So that inspired me to volunteer, to take first steps to conserve our nature.

It's difficult in Perth to get into real nature because you have to drive a long way to the borders of the city. In my hometown, it was quite easy.

In my picture of nature it's quiet and everything grows naturally without any influences. So that's why I'm probably doing more gardening

If we have common interests, we can help each other.

We can have a bigger impact by partnering with other groups.

now to have my own nature around me. It's not growing as it would be naturally, but I still have green around me.

Our first Transition Town project was supposed to be a community garden and orchard next to the basement of the library. But our group is too small to manage such a big project. Eventually we'll find a way to make a nature island in the city.

When I first heard about Transition Towns, I thought it was only about the environment, but it's actually more social. It's about getting to know your neighbours, your community, share your skills, your experiences.

Our second event was the Plastic-Free July Lunch. We had a good time together, but also did something good for the environment. We made a meal without plastic and shared ideas for how to reduce plastics in everyday

life. So that's our aim, to do both community and the environment at the same time.

The people who have come to our Transition events are already interested in the environment, but once the community knows us better, we'll get people who come for other reasons. For the movie screening, we got a bigger variety of people.

We just did a survey, asking people if they've heard about Transition Towns, and most people haven't. If we had more members, we could organize more events, but we need to get the word out. Building our group is the real focus. But also keeping a good atmosphere so our members stay close.

We want everyone to feel welcome, because it's about community. Our group is very democratic.

We discuss problems as a

group and everything is decided by consensus. We have meetings at Environment House because they provide a meeting room with facilities. They also support us with our events. And because Environment House has built up quite a good connection to the city council, we were able to have our movie screening there. Without having Environment House posting our events on their Facebook page and mentioning it in their newsletter, no one would have known about us. So we're happy to have Environment House's good contacts, and I think Environment House benefits too, because some Transition Town members are now volunteering for them too.

If we have common interests, we can help each other. We can have a bigger impact by partnering with other groups than trying to be separate.



TT Bayswater sharing a Plastic-free Lunch in July 2017

Meet the people making it happen:



The Networker

Excerpts from an interview with
Donald Clarke,
Transition Kwoorabup-Denmark, 1860skm
Rural, local population 5845

Age 58

Moved from Fremantle to Denmark, WA, in 2007

Doctorate in Geology

Semi-retired; previous career in management training
and university teaching

I got involved with Transition Town Kwoorabup Denmark by accident. In 2007, my wife and I decided to move from Fremantle to the south coast town of Denmark, WA. I left my career as a self-empowerment consultant and coach and eventually became Treasurer of the Environment Centre, which I thought needed more urban sustainability programing.

In my research, I came across Transition Towns. That was 2009. I read everything I could find on the Internet. Tracked down the original book. I was planning to just rip off a few ideas, but then, by pure coincidence, my friend Dave asked me to join a Transition Initiative that he was creating as a TAFE project. In late 2010, we had our first steering committee meeting with seven people. We put together a brochure, a web site, an email list,

and a Facebook page. In 2011, we launched Transition Town Denmark to a couple hundred people.

Denmark's not like other places, so we're not going to be like other Transition Towns. For a town of 2500, we have 115 community groups listed on the Shire's website, many of them sustainability / environment focused.

The original Transition template requires a "Great Unleashing" event to create buzz about environmentalism. If we'd done that in Denmark, the townspeople would have said, "Well, whoop-di-do. We're already doing all this stuff." So a lot of the Transition Town model is redundant here.

The steering committee's original intention was to explore energy descent and gaps in the town's community groups. We found that there was no food sufficiency group, no Growers' Market or food swap and there was

no cycling advocacy. So we got a local food group going, and supported a woman to get a local market going and a food swap. Some members encouraged the Shire to do a bike plan and now there's a cycling group. The town started a community windfarm, and I chaired the committee that distributes about \$20,000 in dividends per year into sustainability projects. And through our influence, the Shire developed a sustainability working group. But none of them consider themselves "Transition" groups. Rather than doing events or programs, Transition Denmark provided a narrative that connects the local groups to each other and to the global sustainability movement.

Transition is a social change organisation with a sustainability focus. For us, it's advantage is localization for localization's sake.

All the environmental benefits of relocalization are secondary to the

local empowerment aspect.

Because it is bottom-up instead of top-down, Transition appeals across the spectrum. If you show ultra-conservative groups, like the Country Women's Association, a network of people around the world who are growing their own veggies, just like them, and encouraging people to knit, sew, make their own clothes, they can plug into that local empowerment story. Once you plug in, it's very hard not to get contaminated. It can appeal to a much broader spectrum of people than top-down lefty groups.

At the moment, Transition Town Denmark is a website, Facebook, and email list. The steering committee fell away, members moved onto other projects. A facilitator uses the network to distribute information on what's happening in Denmark and the south west.

As a geologist, I was aware of environmental issues,

but I was more interested in social justice and empowerment. It was only when we moved to Denmark, and I was mixing more with people who live and breathe environmentalism, that I moved from social justice to environmental justice.

Empowering people, shifting their conditioning, has always been my focus.

I heard stories about the fight to save the South-West forests, and the Great Walk they did from Denmark to Parliament House.

So I began supporting the activists, providing them with materials and publicity, and joining beach cleanups with my kids, who were two and six when we moved to Denmark, immersing them in this environment. That also made me more active.

The Transition idea remains the strongest influence on my environmental perspective, but it was being able to join a community of people who were also excited about Transition that shifted my thinking.

Empowering people, shifting their conditioning, has always been my focus. Transition shows how self-empowerment is central to becoming sustainable on a global scale. Denmark's new Ecovillage is the culmination of my own personal journey in sustainability. The Ecovillage will be a local hub in global networks. By bringing together people with huge knowledge and experience, the intention is to become a centre for sustainability for our town, for our state and globally. Being a fringe group will not change the larger society. We gotta contaminate everything and everybody.

This is our first gathering of the housing group with many of the city mob on the block.



Meet the people making it happen:



The Movement Intellectual

Excerpts from an interview with
Peter Langlands
Transition Town Guildford, 125skm
Urban, local population 1882

Age 35

Lived in Guildford since 1982

Doctorate degree (ecology)

Works part-time in environmental science (entomology)

In the late 2000s, I was volunteering in climate activism, and met Rod Mitchell, who's also from Guildford. We talked about starting a local climate group, but then I mentioned *The Transition Handbook* which I'd recently bought at Environment House.

I loaned it to Rod and he came back and said, "yeah, let's do this!" So, in mid-2010, Rod and I co-founded Transition Town Guildford (TTG). We met every fortnight to share what we were learning. In hindsight, that was really good because it gave us strong, interpersonal connections to build the group from. We held our first Transition Town event, a movie night, in January 2011.

I realized that I can either build the world I want to see, or try to stop the destruction. Both are important, but I only have the energy for one. With the protests, it was, "gotta save the world, gotta do rallies." There was never an opportunity to get to know each

other, form community. But Transition was the complete opposite. The community work builds you up as opposed to being draining.

Our previous experiences influenced how we designed TTG. In addition to our climate activism, my wife, Jane, and I brought our training from Living Smart, and both of us bring our doctoral training. Rod brought his experience with the co-counselling movement. He now chairs the board of Citizens Climate Lobby-Australia.

In terms of building community, TTG has made a big difference. Even though I've lived here my whole life, I didn't feel strongly connected until I started doing Transition.

Transition is how we've met most of our current friends, and when I walk around Guildford, I see all these familiar faces. And they all know each other now.

Guildford was the first metro

Transition Town in WA, and we helped the ones that have started since. And we helped create the Perth Transition Hub and the Western Australian network.

We cohosted a divestment forum with 350.org a few years ago, partnered with Permaculture West and some of the other groups.

Several of our members are active with the Greens. We partnered with the Primary School and the Guildford Association on an annual Clean-Up Australia Day. Men of the Trees helped us win our first couple of grants. And over the years, we've worked with Rob and Brenda of Environment House. The City of Swan Waste Team has been great, but working with the council has been mixed. More recently, we've teamed up with other transition groups.

Most of our Transition work is about building connections and a resilient, sustainable local community, about relocalization, self-sufficiency. It's not directly about preserving or rehabilitating nature. But everything is

connected. If you want to build local food security, then you're not going to do that by stuffing up your local environment.

The natural world was always my number one passion. When I was young, I was fascinated by insects, and Dad said, "you should be an entomologist." When people asked me, "what do you want to do?" I'd say, "I want to be an entomologist." I must have watched David Attenborough's documentaries on the private life of plants half a dozen times. And mum took me to see David Suzuki at a bookshop in Midland, and he signed my books.

My big turning point was in 2007. I was sitting in bed, halfway through Tim Flannery's *The Weather Makers*, and it scared the crap out of me. I couldn't sleep, I was so terrified. The last chapter on solutions was unsatisfying. Transition, on the other hand, feels hopeful, with practical solutions.

In the last year or two, we've started a Guildford outdoors group to get people connected to nature. Jane knows the psychology of this.

No one is going to care about nature unless they develop a personal connection to it. The outdoors group does bushwalks, canoeing, bike riding, so it puts people in contact with all the living things that inhabit the world around us, all the plants and animals, from the bacteria and fungi and insects to the cuddly megafauna and mammals. But it also builds community.

Ultimately, I think Transition is more of a social movement than an environmental one, even though the main reason people get into it is environmental. But a lot of people say that our environmental problems are actually social problems, and so targeting social change is actually the best way to solve environmental problems. The way Rob Hopkins articulates it,

Transition is stronger than ever.

Transition is about changing what it means to be "successful," changing materialist and consumerist values. A less materialistic society benefits us and the environment.

In the last few years, lots of new Transition Towns have sprung up in WA. It's going strong internationally too.

When I went to the international conference in 2015, the baton was being handed from Transition Network UK, where the movement started, to a global steering group. With an Australian National Hub starting, Transition is stronger than ever.



TT Guildford's Great Guildford Bicycle Treasure Hunt in March 2017 was a great success - fiendishly clever clues, lots of unexpected places in Guildford and some pretty inventive prizes at the end. It was a safe, fun event to round off Bike Week.

Meet the people making it happen:



The Storyteller

Excerpts from an interview with

Karen Majer

Transition Town Margaret River, 2243skm

Rural, local population 14,258

Age 67

Moved from Fremantle to Margaret River in 2011

Graduate Degrees in Science, Media, and Sustainability

Retired; previously employed in communications with environmental agencies, including the Maritime Museum and the Rottnest Island Authority

In March 2012, I went to Felicity Haynes's Tingrith Meeting House to join Sustain Margaret River, and Jodie Lane, who runs Fair Harvest Permaculture, had just come from a Transition workshop and couldn't stop talking about it. Everybody was immediately inspired and someone moved that we change the name to Transition Margaret River (TMR).

At subsequent meetings, we worked through the *Transition Handbook* and people volunteered for tasks. Six years on, nearly all those people are still with us, in many cases working the same job,

including me with communications. We are up to 68 Newsletters!

The first thing we did was an Open Space to test community interest and generate ideas, and then we applied to become an official Transition Town, and that was granted 29 November, 2012. We tried to follow the 12 steps of Transition, but the book says that the steps will be different for each community, depending on where they start. Because Margaret River has a long history of environmental and social activism, we found that we had already achieved many of the required steps, so we skipped

the mulling stage. Margaret River has many specialized issue-driven groups, and many Transition people are involved with them. What was missing was an overall sustainability network. We see Transition as being that big picture. It's the narrative about a better, happier, more resilient community with lower energy and resource use. Other action groups play very practical roles, and we think of Transition Margaret River as the glue.

Our Hub Group performs a coordinating and decision-making role, but we don't have a steering committee and we're not incorporated. That structure gives us

more flexibility. Everything we do is by consensus. There tends to be a lot of agreement, a lot of love between the people centrally involved.

We follow the Transition Network idea "Let it go where it wants to go." At the start of every year, we invite everyone on our mailing list (currently over 500) to an open planning session, and we re-examine how we're progressing on the steps. Creating strategic plans and setting priorities doesn't work because everything depends on who shows up. The community is designing its own journey.

We would like to embed our narrative in this community and that's happening. More than 10 percent of the community is part of TMR, making us an opinion leader. We've also developed a partnership with the local council and Curtin University's Sustainability Policy Institute to run our popular seminars.

We have events connecting art, poetry and music with sustainability, a monthly Swap Shuffle Share at Fair Harvest, a Saturday morning Garden Produce Share, a 'Clobber Swap' of clothing, bags and jewelry, and a Fix It Up Café. We've had several evenings on sustainable gardening. We have a sustainability pavilion in the agricultural show. Each event

attracts different people, so our tentacles reach beyond the greenies and environmentalists.

Our relationship with local government is two directional. When the Shire won a Keep Australia Beautiful award, the judges credited their partnership with Transition Margaret River. We joined the Shire on a major renewable energy project, incorporated this year as Augusta Margaret River Clean Community Energy.

As a scientist, I see nature in terms of habitat, ecosystems and biodiversity, but overriding that is a spiritual belief in the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things. Humans are part of the whole biosphere, which is quite fragile, and we ignore that at our peril.

I did zoology at university and went straight into a job working overseas in biological pest control. When I came back, I got a job as an environmental officer with the Environment Protection Authority, their first biologist on staff. But I quickly moved into environmental education and communications. My specialty was attitudes and behaviours around wetlands, rivers and estuaries.

As a small child, I loved animals and I'm not happy unless I've got greenery around me, water and the coast. And that has persisted. I've always been passionate about people valuing the environment and trying to contribute to behaviour change. My sons joke that I'm always out saving the world.

I'd position Transition in the sustainability sphere, where environmental, social, cultural, and economic values come together. The immediate impact is social, creating a resilient community that is connected, cares for each other, and shares.

The biggest challenge is maintaining the energy of the volunteers, because, however many people are involved, it often falls back on a few to do it. But in the last year, many new people have come on board. Getting young people involved is a challenge. Some say we're dominated by the older age group, but we're the people with the time to put in. When Boyd and I retired down here, we decided to volunteer while we've still got energy and time. Maybe I'm over-optimistic, but I'm just very positive about where we're going.

**Everything we do is by consensus.
There tends to be a lot of agreement,
a lot of love between the people centrally involved.**

Get in touch



According to the International Transition Network (with data for WA updated by this project) there are 63 active Transition Initiatives in Australia.

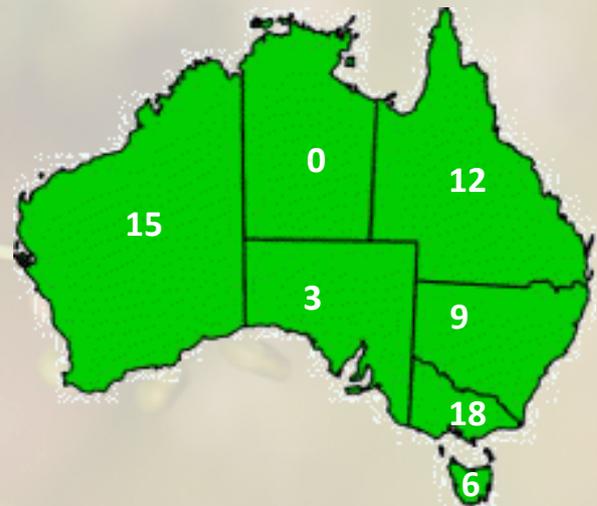
More information is available from:

The Perth Transition Hub

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/809428475808219/>

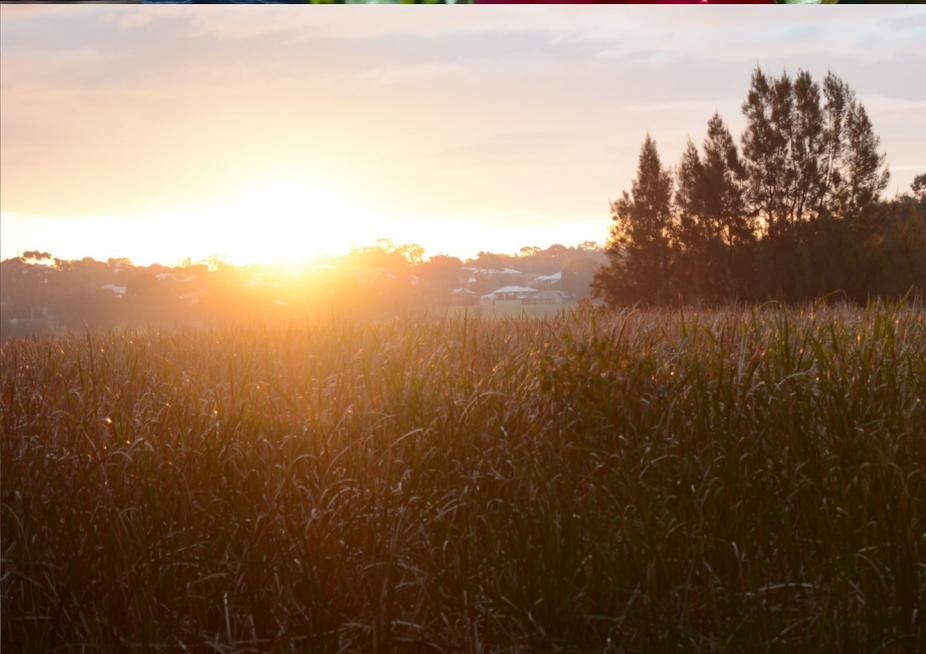
And the International Transition Network

<https://transitionnetwork.org>



Use these links to contact the WA Initiatives that were active in late 2017/early 2018

Transition Town Albany http://tiny.cc/ttalbanyoz	Kalamunda in Transition www.facebook.com/transitiontownkalamunda/	Mundaring in Transition mt.org.au
Transition Town Bayswater www.envirohouse.org.au	Kwinana in Transition www.facebook.com/KwinanaCommunityShare	Transition Town Stirling transitiontownstirling.weebly.com
Fremantle in Transition www.facebook.com/fremantleintransition	Transition Koorabup-Denmark denmarkwa.wikispaces.com	Victoria Park Transition Network www.facebook.com/VicParkTransition
Transition Town Gosnells www.transitiontowngosnells.com	Manjimpup: Stellar Violets stellarviolets.org	Transition Town Vincent www.ttv.org.au
Transition Town Guildford www.transitiontownguildford.com	Transition Margaret River www.facebook.com/transitionmargaretriver	Transition Town Wanneroo www.facebook.com/groups/198890547203522/



While there have been as many as 20 initiatives in Western Australia, 15 are currently active, as of the time of this publication. All are in the south western corner of the state: three in rural towns; one in a small regional city; and 11 in the Perth metropolitan area. This means that WA has the highest concentration of urban Transition initiatives in the world.

