



Graduate School of Development Studies

# **Environmental Agency by Everyday Politics in Transition Towns**

**Voices from Canadian Agents**

A Research Paper presented by:

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of  
MASTERS OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Specialization:  
**Politics of Alternative Development  
(PAD)**

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The Hague, The Netherlands  
June, 2011

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to start with big Thanks to Life because within its particular forms and hazards allowed me to achieve this master at ISS after more than a decade desiring it...

Also Big Thanks...

... to Lauren, Susana, Mauro and Thomas Oliver, soul mates that I met during the course of this student adventure ... whose emotional support and intellectual exchange has been invaluable for academic learning, personal growth, and the performing of this paper...

... to Darby for his support in the discussion and in the collective edition of this paper, but also for the pleasant exchanges on issues of life and maturity...

... to Yvonne and Timothy Clark who so sweetly facilitated the completion of my field work in Canada...

... to Sophie, Daniel, Sara, Natalia, Ana Maria, David and Celeste who coloured everyday life in ISS with a warm shared friendship, providing me support and inspiration to overcome little battles of knowledge and life...

... to my family ... My Mother for teaching me to believe in utopias. My Grandfather for teaching me the wisdom of be responsible. My sister Ana for being the wonderful interlocutor on the everyday life in my soul. My brother Nicolas, who always give me strength through jokes and laughs...

... to Cata-C, Matthew, Esperanza, Nicola, Natalia, Anne and Walker who from a close distance have accompanied and supported this student period and other many seasons of life within alternative perspectives...

... to the indigenous of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia and other special friends in different geographies and oceans in the world who have been partners, angels and masters of life within voluntary simplicity and alternative forms to inhabit the Planet...

...Thank you All very much!! for the strength of your print in my heart...

... as well as yours Emily...

Also Many Thanks...

... to Iseult, Sally, Michel, Emmanuelle, Bernard, Arthur and the other agents involved in TT in Canada, who being kindly willed to share and teach me their experiences and practices...

... to Kees Bickart, my supervisor for his interest and trust in my topic, which were a great support and motivation in the writing course of this paper...

... to John Cameron, my reader and from day one a patient listener, who guided me in the process of building an academic paper from the subjectivity of my utopia...

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## List of Acronyms

IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
CC	Climate Change
TT	Transition Towns
EDP	Everyday Politics
APA	American Psychological Association
UK	United Kingdom
ZOPP	Zielorientierte Projekt Planung Goal Oriented Project Planning
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit German Development Service
TC-Website	Transition Culture Website
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
GNP	Gross National Product
WTO	World Trade Organization
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
NRCan	Natural Resources Canada (government)
EDAP	Energy Descent Action Plan
ToC	Theories of Change
LETS	Local Exchange Trading Systems

## **Abstract**

Transition Towns is a proposal for building local resilience regarding to Climate Change (CC) and Peak-oil in urban spaces. Performing a review of its discourses and practices, this paper is focused in the examination of the experiences of individual and collective Agency through the lenses of Everyday Politics and Theories of Change. In this line, reflections around incentives and constraints for greater environmental agency, as well as contents related to politics and development are examined through the voices of agents in eastern Canada. The author argues that these kind of post-carbon initiatives deserve a close look, because they can help in the identification of paths to diminish the clash between environment and development, also revealing important elements to promote a greater engagement within environmental agency. Perhaps, many questions remain open around the effectiveness and possibilities to influence decision-makers from these examples of alternative development. However, they are in a pathway to build more harmonic models to inhabit our Planet, increasing the potential for greater achievement of well-being in more holistic forms - beyond its current boundaries of income and consumption.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

Development aims to establish conditions for human welfare. However, nowadays some critical circumstances are evidencing contradictions in the model that assumes an unlimited economy and consumption within a limited capacity of the natural ecosystems. In this sense, this paper aim to contribute to the structuring of more sustainable development, from a socio-political analysis on the everyday environmental agency of people promoting alternative forms for development and welfare.

## **Keywords**

Environmental Agency – Everyday Politics – Social Change

# Overture

*"All things are connected.  
Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth.  
Man did not weave the web of life; He is merely a strand in it.  
Whatever he does to the web, He does to himself."  
- Chief Seattle, 1854 –*

The current environmental situation<sup>1</sup> of our planet is not a new subject of study. However, many questions can be made around the human attitudes and responses to the loss of the space that we inhabit, especially now when many studies are evidencing some dangerous consequences of the pattern of our lifestyle (IPCC, 2007). Most alarming are the minimal human actions contributing to solutions in comparison with the activities related to the causes of the degradation of natural ecosystems. Contributions towards the set-up of solutions or adaptations are becoming more relevant, day by day, as the natural ecosystems and the demands of humanity seem to be at a breaking point that threatens the adequacy of the long-term welfare conditions necessary for the survival of all.

As some of the limits of nature are becoming more visible, some have asked “How long can this mirage continue to prosper?” (Bertrand, 2009:min44).<sup>2</sup> The combined effects of crisis in energy sources, food supply, poverty reduction and environmental resources are demanding adjustments, changes or even alternative models to tackle the dangerous borderline that we are currently facing. Paradoxes in the lack of integration of social and environmental aspects, within economic interests, seem to call for reflection

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<sup>1</sup> This paper uses the terms environmental “situation” and “issues” regarding to the current fragile conditions of natural ecosystems, specifically its deterioration and problems generated by the enormous quantity of resources extracted which obstacles the revering of ecosystems’ equilibrium. It includes issues like extinction of natural species, desertification, instability of weather conditions, diminishing of water and other natural resources, increase in the sea level and Climate Change, which causes and estimations are still under study and debate. (Adams 2006, Dyson 2006, Flitner&Heins, 2002, Hulme 2009, IPCC 2007)

<sup>2</sup> “Home”, movie promoted by United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP).



and action (Beck 1999, Escobar 2007, Sousa-duSantos 2007). This situation can be examined separately from economic, political, social or environmental perspectives in relation to development. Nevertheless, from a perspective of deep ecology, this paper visualizes the world as “a web of phenomena interconnected and interdependent” (Capra, 1996:29). In this sense, even if it is understood that structural forces shape our lives, it is assumed also that in human agency lay an enormous potential for change elements related with all those perspectives.

Thus, this paper focuses on the agency of individuals and communities in local contexts and wishes to contribute to the literature contesting models of development based solely in economic terms and their inability to integrate socio-cultural and environmental contextual features. Also, even if many questions remain about concepts, assumptions and possibilities of these agency initiatives to be meaningful solutions for social change, it is important to consider the elements proposed towards the identification of greater possibilities for more sustainable lifestyles. To this end, this paper explores the case study of Transition Towns (TT) in Canada, to understand agency processes of human responses to the environmental situation. This case was selected because it represents an alternative to the stereotypical “Western-style” mode of living as the “end” of the development process.

Broadly, a TT initiative “is a community-led response to the pressures of Climate Change, fossil fuel depletion and increasingly, economic contraction” (Transition-Network, 2010:website). These place-based initiatives have arisen in towns, villages and neighbourhoods. TT proposal was initiated around 2005 in Kynsale-Ireland, and Totnes-England, with a key leadership role of Rob Hopkins. Throughout their activities they seek to construct resilience in order to best manage the threats of peak-oil and Climate Change (CC). The current number of official TT initiatives register in 34 countries, distribute in UK (190) and 170 in other countries<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, 373 Muller<sup>4</sup> initiatives are registered,

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<sup>3</sup> **Annex 1** presents a **Map** with TT initiatives registered.

<sup>4</sup> The network uses Muller to nominate starting initiatives.

not including many groups that are not registered in the network because they do not fulfil all the required criteria.

Many questions can be made around TT in terms of the role played by key actors, the strategies to engage a major number of active participants at local and global levels and the effectiveness to influence in socio-political spheres. The present paper aims to contribute elements for this debate.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Research Outline**

This paper takes as its point of interest the human agency in relation to the environmental situation, conceiving humans as solution-makers. It is inspired by personal reflexions on the failures of the global governance structures to address the deterioration of our planet Earth. It is reflected not only in the continuity of causes and destruction of natural ecosystems, but also in the gap of pro-active solutions from international meetings like the COP15 in Copenhagen in December 2009.

As is presented in Chapter 1, this research paper is intended to approach the tension between environment and humans from a socio-political perspective, through the experience of 'TT' agents. In this sense, the paper continues with a brief presentation of the environmental situation in Chapter 2, in terms of the clash between environment and development reflected in peak-oil and CC, which are the main justifications of 'TT'. It is followed by the presentation of the analytical framework in Chapter 3, where the concepts of Agency and Everyday Politics (EDP) are linked to socio-psychological theories of change, to elucidate factors involved in human responses and social changes around environmental concerns. To identify some of those elements from the experience of 'TT' agents, a group of people involved in some initiatives in Canada was interviewed. This data is presented in Chapter 4 from the voice of the respondents. At last in Chapter 5, the analysis of data is presented combined main elements of previous chapters.

### **1.1 The Relevance of research on Environmental Agency**

Problems generated by the concept of development based in economic principles and its limitations in resolving environmental consequences are becoming more evident (Daly 1996, Dyson 2006). Many cooperative actions emerging from civil society are understudied, while international relations are still the main focus of politics in environmental affairs. The cost and risk of the current governance system is being confronted by informal processes exploring different sets of principles to make agreements that allow relations

closer to the self-reliant perspectives on route to more concerted and supportive actions. While international politics praxis and academic debates follow more formal normative narratives for sustainable development without achieved agreement, many civil society groups are engaging in place-based initiatives to validate other notions of development and welfare, through making life-style choices which are arguably more sustainable. Within this framework, the author considers it is important and relevant to understand the reasons that motivate or prevent people to become agents.

The relevance of study environmental agency arises from the recognition of the impacts of unsustainable development, lifestyles and over-consumption, and the under-estimated viability of local civil society initiatives that are attempting to create solutions to ensure a sustainable future. As a consequence of the lack of research and appreciation of these localized initiatives, they are constrained in their ability to impact wider social dimensions and to become means for collective change. In this sense, similar to politics of alternative development, environmental actions are disregarded because they go “against development” (Thomas, 2000). Furthermore, they are seen to be ideas already co-opted by mainstream development agendas, for example protection of nature through its privatization (Flitner& Heins, 2002).

Therefore, the analysis of factors related to individual and collective levels of agency becomes relevant in the search for effective solutions to the plethora of environmental issues. Initiatives to establish solutions for the management of uncertainty of environmental conditions are nowadays promoted by different stakeholders in developing and developed societies such as those associated with TT. With different focus and strategies, self-willed actors are suggesting solutions for current environmental problems and aiming for better, sustainable futures for the planet and its inhabitants. Why people decide to react or not is a common matter of study that emerges in terms of the human ability to address solutions. Research focused in this direction could be useful to recognize key factors for environmental agency and contribute to further educational programs, environmental policies or alternative development models.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

As stated by Gasper “What can social scientists do about climate change is to think about the possible human impacts and reactions” (Gasper, 2010:26). However, much research in development studies has focused on the causes and consequences of CC, and therefore dealt with the failures of global governance systems to achieve robust agreements towards the placement of solutions. Aiming to contribute to additional perspectives to the understanding of human reactions to environmental issues, the present research paper is focused in the examination of factors involved in environmental agency and its possibilities to achieve social change.

## **1.3 Research Outline and Question**

As was mentioned the paradoxical challenges between nature and development, and the possible solutions for this tension, are still limited in terms of understanding factors involved in human choices to act in response to environmental issues (APA 2010, Dyson 2006, Hulme 2009). Assuming a social-constructivist perspective of knowledge and reality, structural frames as well as individual experiences are crucial in the processes of decision and agency. These instances usually shape each other through interactions over longer periods of time, and in this sense it is important to identify elements in each one that may help to improve our collective response to environmental struggles. Our personal “choices are environmentally important” however, these decisions are “constrained, shaped and framed by institutions and political forces that can be remade only through collective citizen action” (Maniates, 2001:50). At the level of global governance, many efforts have been made to understand political and economic dynamics around environmental issues. However, failures to assemble sustainable frames of governance could be an opportunity to promote other kinds of solutions through actions from people. Perhaps, to face gaps in institutional frameworks, the hope and trust in everyday actions like a course to achieve greater changes may be an alternative to protect our planet and to guarantee life with dignity for us and future generations. Thus, our choices and actions in everyday life are relevant

because they make us political agents even if we do not have intention or awareness of it.

Aiming to contribute some elements to this debate, this research explores the experiences of local leaders of 'TT' in Canada, identifying incentives, constraints and perspectives of their agency towards sustainable changes. In this sense, the main question of this research paper is:

*How are agents experiencing change towards greater sustainable practices from Transitional Towns initiatives?*

Furthermore, to understand factors linked with answers to this main question, in terms of the human role in environmental issues, some elements like incentives, constraints, values and meanings of the practices implemented will be examined. Also, because the concept of agency locates us in the ambit of politics, elements like effectiveness, functionality and relation with structural settings will be analysed.

## **1.4 Methodology**

For the identification of relevant elements for strategies to promote agency, this research has as its main interest to know the perspectives of people involved in environmental initiatives. The identification of values, priorities, contributions, and limitations of environmental agency from people that opted for it could help shed light on the construction of social change and the potential for increasing agency practice. In this sense, primary data has been collected through qualitative interviews of a group of persons involved in 'TT' in Canada. This country was selected because the researcher considered it significant to hear the perspectives of individuals who have benefited from the advantages of living in a “developed” country and yet recognize the environmental risks of the patterns of lifestyle and consumption. According to the official directory, Canada already has a total of 47 'TT' initiatives registered. Interviews for this research were conducted in Quebec and Ontario, the most populated Canadian provinces, in different towns where 'TT' initiatives have been started: Quebec City, Coaticook, Boucherville and Guelph. The people interviewed were contacted by a snowball process, where from each person was possible to get information for other interviews.

The design of the qualitative interview process was guided using the framework of “conversation form” presented by Rubin and Rubin (1995). The interview had a guideline, which began with the individual approach to TT, going throughout motivations to be involved, actions realized, elements learned, agency constraints and it closes with the visualization of future perspectives and desires. Additional data had been used, especially the information posted in Transition Culture website (TC-Website), managed by Rob Hopkins.

For the analysis, the information collected was organizing in groups of similar topics according to Goal-Oriented-Planning methodology ZOPP (Helming and Göbel, 1997). Furthermore, post data-collection a system of analytical topic coding (Richards, 2005) to identify more details for the analysis of information was applied. The coding was added in terms of categories relevant from the theoretical framework, like discourses, practices and changes proposed. Also, the ambits of scope have been used as coding in terms of individual, collective, local and global dimensions of the data collected. The information coded was combined to obtain the analysis summarized in Chapter 5.

One of the main limitations of the identified during the analysis of findings is related to the lack of information from people not directly involved with TT, which could be useful to validate and contrast the information collected. Also, in this sense could be useful if the initial contact with the persons interviewed was done in a more random form to avoid a biased vision of environmental agency. In this sense, for future research in environmental agency it is recommendable to include the perspective of people that is not active involved in it.

## Chapter 2

### Framing the Context

*"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."*  
Iroquois Confederacy

Since the 1970's, the concept of sustainability in development has been formulated in different ways. A 2006 UICN report said: "people use 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' to express sometimes very diverse visions of how economy and environment should be managed" (Adams, 2006:3). Many concepts of sustainability reference the general understanding of the Brundtland Report (1987) which stresses the use of resources to satisfy present needs, without compromising the livelihoods for future generations. However, given this frame of reference, the selection of priorities, routes and goals to achieve sustainable development, has been taken in different ways from different stakeholders such as governments, private sector and civil society organizations. Diverse claims on its dimensions of economic growth, social progress or environmental protection have exposed ambiguity in the key elements of sustainable development.

In addition to the contradiction between the assumptions of an unlimited economy or unlimited consumption and limited natural resources, other inconsistencies can be identified in the perspectives on causes, priorities and desirable outcomes for environmental strategies and actions – such as state boundaries and the transcendence of ecosystems, political interests and ecosystems processes, and, local realities and global conditionalities- (Adams 2009, Daly 1996, Flitner&Heins 2002). All are relevant items in politico-ecological debates and demonstrate that the definition of sustainability is varied, as well as the paths, priorities and interests of different stakeholders in this arena. Therefore, while the debates presented in this section are not exhaustive, they show key elements around the clash of environment and development in terms of sustainability and the role of civil society in initiatives such as TT.



## 2.1 The Clash of Environment and Development

*“We are changing the earth more rapidly than we are understanding it”*  
- Vitousek *et al*, 1997:498-

From its official articulation as process after World War II, the meaning of development and its dominant trend of priorities, values and strategies, has been related to the implementation of economic premises of capitalism and its strategies of industrialization, markets, accumulation, financial flows and consumption (Escobar 1995, Fernando 2003, Maniates 2001). The increase of Gross National Product (GNP) as a measure of development and the central role of production and markets became crucial factors in leading the economic growth necessary to improve conditions of ‘life for all’ (Max-Neef 1998). As a result of this developmental model and its basis (Northern/Western), the goal of development is demarcating a ‘good life’ defined in materialistic terms through access to goods and services, choice among goods, and material welfare standards. However, it is becoming evident that is impossible to maintain this boundless scheme of infinite demand within a planet limited in its capacity and resources (Daly 1996, Hardin, 1968).

Consequences of the “irreconcilable tension between the sustainability of capitalism and sustainable development has become far more visible” (Fernando, 2003:8). Environment is, nowadays, at the core of many discourses in private and public spheres, reflecting common concerns about its limitations and problems. The concept of sustainable development is under questioning due to contradictory assumptions involved in growing economies which are evidenced on anthropogenic causes of environmental harm, like CC (IPCC, 2007). Sustainable growth is not possible because “in its physical dimensions, the economy is an open subsystem of the earth’s ecosystem, which is finite, nongrowing, and materially closed” (Daly, 1996:193).

Since prehistoric times, human actions have shaped the environment through daily life activities and agriculture. However, some historical events “have led to [relatively] uniform changes in nature over vast areas” (Foster, 1999:34), generating larger consequences and more challenges for [the] resolution of problematic environmental situations. This is the case of the Industrial Revolution of the 19<sup>o</sup> century and the “Black Gold” Revolution in

1950, changed the previous forms where “all economies everywhere were extremely constrained in what they could produce” (Dyson, 2006:3). Nowadays, the increase of global trade<sup>5</sup> implies inestimable consequences in terms of the use of natural resources, in addition to large emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) generated in the processes of production, transport and waste (Daly 1996, Fernando 2003, Ford 2003, Morris 1996b). Also, agriculture is adversely affecting the Earth due to the elevated water consumption and the intense use of petrochemical supplies in intensive crop productions. Furthermore, population growth of around 140% in the past 60 years, and the concentration of more than half of world’s population in urban areas, has engendered enormous costs in terms of natural resources like water, food supply, energy sources and waste management (Dyson, 2006).

Many actions negatively affecting the Planet have occurred from the half of the last century, due to the development premises that increased human mobility, transportation and a wide variety of commodities from the petrochemical industry. It is reflected in situations like CC and the shortage of resources like oil. The energy generated by oil generates more than 70 times more working force than the force of just animals and humans (Hopkins, 2009), facilitating the expansion of production and surplus required by the development model. Even more, dependency on petrochemicals and the promotion of fuel production has been extended to the increased interest in production of bio-fuels, affecting food security and increased poverty (Von-Braun and Diaz-Bonilla, 2008). Thus, a discussion of the clash between environment and development is not complete without speaking of CC and energy.

### ***2.1.1 Energy and Oil***

According to Strange (1994), energy is the fifth crucial element of political economy, along with security, production, finance, and knowledge. It is little

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<sup>5</sup> The World Trade Organization (WTO) stated that between the years 1950 and 2000 there has been an increase of 22 times in international trade. (WTO-Website)

wonder given that energy is a vital factor in the production chain of economic growth and that oil is the source of between 35% and 40% of world energy (Dyson 2006, Strange 1994). “Energy is the *sine qua non* for the exercise of power in the international political economy, and neither security nor wealth can be achieved without a secure supply of energy” (Strange, 1994:209). The interrelation between oil and power is identifiable in situations as the immense US economic expansion from the 50s, and the key role played by oil in the configuration of international political relations. It is also reflected in decisions and policies around markets, economies, investment, security and military programs that are negotiated by stakeholders and states linked with property, extraction and consumption of oil (Strange, 1994).

Supplementary sources of energy like coal, natural gas and nuclear power plants imply issues on transport, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and dangerous risk. Additionally, more ecological forms of energy production like hydroelectric or wind farms have not yet to reach the capacity of production to meet society needs, because of limitations in technology, investment and geographical conditions. The dependency on oil is important to reflect upon when we consider the possibility of peak oil. Authors such as Campbell (2005) and Heinberg (2004) have emphasized that an end to the age of cheap oil will be due to the increase of extraction and production costs per unit of oil acquired. Whether this warning is a reality or an excuse to speculate on prices is still under study. Still in the end, both possibilities imply an increase of cost for the population, not only in monetary terms but in environmental terms as well.

Canada is one of the cases where the contradictory interface between environment and development is particularly present. The country has a current population estimated at 33.625.689 inhabitants, of which 80.6% is located in urban areas (Statcan-webpage). Canada is ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the 2010 UN Human Development Index and has an overall life satisfaction of 8.0 on a scale of 10 assigned by its inhabitants (UNDP, 2010). In terms of natural resources 8% of the terrestrial area is protected, and 76% of the energy supply comes from fossil fuels and 16% from renewable sources (UNDP, 2010). Canada’s forest account for about 40% of the world’s certified forest. Energy products, mainly exported to USA, include petroleum, natural gas and

electricity. In the 2008 ranking of world production of energy, Canada was the sixth, third and seventh in each one of those energy components (NRCan, 2008). Nowadays, because of the enormous amount of oil in its tar sands, the petrochemical industry is a country priority irrespective of its environmental consequences, as is reflected in the pipeline project to transport oil from Alberta to China through the Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia (Pacificwild-website).

Given these characteristics, the paradox between development and environment is particular relevant in this ‘very high’<sup>6</sup> human developed country. The process of extraction and production of oil from tar sands implies five times more emission of CO<sub>2</sub> than conventional extraction and an incredible expense of water to ‘clean’ the oil, plus many health problems for the population related to contaminated natural resources in the area (Bertrand 2009, Greenpeace-Canada 2007). Additionally, “oil from tar sands is far more expensive to produce than most other sources of oil, but with the price of oil rising, these harder-to-extract oil sources become increasingly financially viable” (Hopkins, 2009:23). However, this energy source is necessary to maintain the development model and the facilities required by the Canadian geography in terms of transport and temperature. According with UN-Human Development Report CO<sub>2</sub> emission had an annual change of 3.8% between 1990 and 2004, representing the 2.2% in “share world total” in 2004 (UNDP, 2007). However with the increase of oil exploitation it is a possibility of underestimation in this measure. In terms of the Kyoto Protocol, the Canadian commitment to cut emissions by 280 million tonnes per year by 2012 is highly improbable given that the tar sands are increasing emissions by an estimated 80 million tonnes per year in 2011 (Greenpeace-Canada, 2007). This situation, among others, is an example where tensions between priorities and requirements of environment and development are clashing in Canada, which also reflects similar situations around the world.

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<sup>6</sup> Category used in Human Development Index.

### 2.1.2 Climate Change (CC)

*“Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd”*

Voltaire

Climate Change is another relevant reflection of the clash between environment and development, which become a common primary concern. Today, CC engenders the strongest environmental apprehensions and even if it is the subject of controversy, it has attention from multiple stakeholders due to its perceived impact on the entire Globe beyond the frontiers of state, class, economy or power. Facts evidencing CC<sup>7</sup> are melting of polar icecaps, floods and other climatic changes such as desertification, receding of glaciers around the world and increasing weather variability. This global warming could be produced by natural or human activity, and its effects go beyond temperature indicators, affecting the functioning of ecosystems and our planet in general.

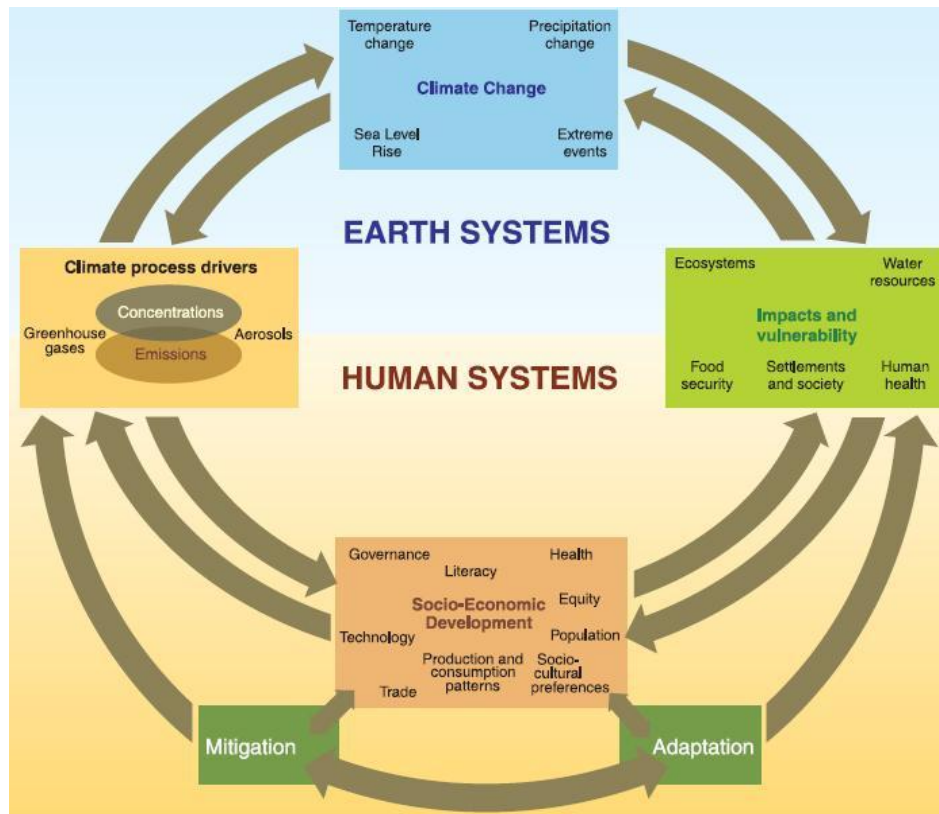
As it is reflected in the Figure 1, CC is “a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that can be understood from a number of perspectives” (APA, 2010:11). A dialogue among different knowledges seems required to identify possible responses to include and interconnect multiple factors involved like human wellbeing, technology, natural balance, economy, poverty, security, biology and politics, among others. In the words of Fritjof Capra: “The more we study the major problems of our time, the more we come to realize that they cannot be understood in isolation. They are systemic problems, which means that they are interconnected and interdependent” (Capra, 1996:25). This unprecedented environmental challenge encompasses some remarkable features in the paradox of development and environmental sustainability. Uncertainty and complexities are pushing for more integral analysis of causes,

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<sup>7</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) defined CC as “changes in the state of the climate that can be identified (e.g. using statistical test) by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer” (IPCC, 2007:30). Statistics confirming are the rising of sea levels estimated at be 3.1mm per year since 1993, in comparison with a rise of 1.8mm per year in previous period. Also, in terms of temperature, the past 50 years saw an increase between 0,10°C and 0,16°C per decade, suggesting a critical increase of 3-4°C to expected in century XXI, above the 2°C initially projected as top limit. (IPCC, 2007)

threats and responses. Among others, the reduction of human actions that act as accelerators of the process, affecting natural cycles for ecosystems recovery, are required. The Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) summarized human relation with CC in the follow graphic.

**Figure 1**  
**Anthropogenic CC drivers, impacts and responses**



Source: IPCC, 2007:26

In terms of human responses, two main pathways have been proposed: mitigation and adaptation (IPCC, 2007). Mitigation refers to actions to reduce factors that cause CC, while adaptation includes human adjustments to existing or expected environmental changes. Additional categories of responses are identified by Hulme (2009) in three groups which are related to “market-based solutions, applying principles of justice and transformative life styles” (Gasper, 2010:10). Besides, Gasper (2010) stated that at the level of policies, CC could be understood in terms of three-dimensional challenges which are paired with routine, intermediate or transformational responses. Each response implies different perspectives and therefore diverse actions to be implemented through policies to tackle the issue in a single or in multiple steps, using economic measures, political participation, moral claims or social incentives, among

others. For example, in the category of routine are including some small modifications like recycling or consumption habits, but still making minimal changes in the existing system of life. In contrast, transformational responses are related to radical changes in lifestyles. In this sense, just few changes have been promoted by policies like changed fisheries regimes or declaration of protected areas, or even more radical responses by particular communities who opted for an isolated and self-sufficient life, without receiving the benefices of the modern system.

However, markets and individualistic economic perspectives are still driving the trend of development, making the consolidation of responses tricky. “Part of the problem is the difficulty in thinking outside of this market-centric box, simply because its assumptions seem like common sense” (McMichael, 2010:xiii). Even so, aiming to a better assurance of present and future of human life with dignity, some place-based, individual or collective self-willed actions are promoting changes centered on ecology, validation of other knowledges, or local self-management of economies. Additionally, some institutional changes are happening too. “New policies are increasingly concerned with managing the hazards, risk, unintended consequences and side-effects brought about development itself” (Nederveen, 1998:368). Although if we do not know the full scope of the consequences of CC, many dimensions of human life are being altered, inspiring a kind of common reflection around functionality and feasibility of current models.

The current imbalance of social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental factors seems to require alternatives to harmonize ways to inhabit our planet. As stated by Wyman (2008) It is important to face the paradoxical constraints in trying to “come up with sustainable ways to support our unsustainable lifestyle” (Hopkins, 2009:51). If development means a process of ‘progress’ in the conditions for needs satisfaction and the welfare of human beings, the inclusion of sustainability of environment should be one essential pillar of new understandings of human aspirations and a key element to achieve development goals (Adams 2006, Holland 2007). Aiming to contribute to this debate, this paper is focused in claims and practices

promoted from everyday actions by agents interested in the reduction of the clash between development and environment.

## 2.2 The Role of Civil Society through Transition Towns

*"We must be the change we want to see in the world"*  
Gandhi

Within this global context of environmental hazards confronting development, governance, and economic paradigms, many questions remain about solutions. Alternative and critical perspectives have been emphasizing the key role of people as the meaning of development, and more recently a shift has started to emphasize people as builders of solutions and development. In the words of Ramphela (2008): "Development can't be done 'to' people. People have to become the agents of their own development" (in Boyte, 2008:119). Assuming the constraints in scope and the possibilities of change promoted from people's agency, when they are not sustained by policies or structural frameworks, this paper seeks to identify human aspects involved in collective alternatives to tackle global environmental issues mentioned in the section before. In other words, even if people's agency faces some dilemmas about its functionality, viability and effectiveness, it seems that our actions become vital to build ongoing changes and solutions. The exercise of our bottom-up agency seems as a "best hope" (Escobar, 2004:207), "as solution to social, economic and political dilemmas" (Edwards, 2009:2), or "as a privileged terrain of intellectual and moral reform" (Dagnino, 1998:41). Collective and individual actions to reduce the clash of environment and development promoting mitigation or adaptation could become inspirational in leading more extensive processes of change as they are supported, validated, institutionalized or normalized.

It is clear that in the examination of changes towards sustainability more than people's actions should be considered main decision actors like State, business and international governance institutions. However, reflecting Foucault's concept of power as an exercise of capacities day to day from the bottom to the top, this work focuses on agents of change. In other words, the



civic agency of people is understood as “the self willed action of people to create the society they individually image and collectively want” (Fowler and Biekart, 2008:7). The identification of relevant factors involved in this process of agency aims to contribute to the debate on how people’s initiatives may have greater influence promoting structural changes. This “possibility of reconceiving and reconstructing the world” (Escobar, 2000:4), starts at the individual level. But if those actions become a cultural counter-hegemonic bloc offered by the Gramscian perspective, it may be possible that “our everyday actions have important consequences for the constitution and transformation of the local, national, regional and global context” (Hobson& Seabrooke, 2007:1). This logic implies a possibility to build alternatives towards a more sustainable world if we join efforts, if the collective actions of people committed to building change are combined in the construction of new socio-cultural paradigms.

Small and large actions for building environmental alternatives are happening all around our planet, particularly within place-base locations. TT is an example of those initiatives started in 2005 by a collective action led by Rob Hopkins. The proposal already has a considerable following around the Global North, even when its practice implies challenges to central concepts and values of mainstream development. In brief, TT proposes a compilation of minimal steps and methods to guide processes in urban spaces towards the consolidation of local resilience to peak oil and CC. In this sense, key elements of this post-carbon-society proposal are local socio-economic autonomy, reduction of fossil fuels dependency, food security and promotion of resilience within sustainable principles for life (Hopkins, 2009); thus many ideas included in TT are central to debates on sustainability and alternative development. Also, even if many of them have been taking place for a long time, TT claims distinctive elements presented in Annex 2. Table 1 summarized TT proposal.

**Table 1**  
**Summary of Transition Towns Proposal**

<p><b>Pillar Concepts “Head and Heart”:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peak-Oil and Climate Change as main justifications.</li> <li>- Resilience and Relocalization as needed requirements for post-carbon societies.</li> <li>- Psychology of Change as perspective to understand the process.</li> <li>- Empowerment from the “harnessing a positive vision”</li> </ul>
<p><b>Principles for the “Hands” design:</b></p> <p>Within foundations on Permaculture (Annex 3), the Transition model proposes 6 principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Visioning</u> to believe that it is possible to move forward</li> <li>- <u>Inclusion</u> to facilitate dialogue between different stakeholders and their interests</li> <li>- <u>Awareness-raising</u> with clear knowledge, information and arguments</li> <li>- <u>Resilience</u> as local strategy to reorganization against external disturbances</li> <li>- <u>Psychological Insights</u> to neutralize psycho-emotional barriers</li> <li>- <u>Credibility and Appropriate Solutions</u> implemented as motivations for more action.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Twelve Ingredients of the “Hands”:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set-up a steering group and design its demise from the outset</li> <li>- Raise awareness</li> <li>- Lay the foundations for networking with existing initiatives</li> <li>- Organize a Great Unleashing as informative and inspirational recall</li> <li>- Form groups to work in diverse topics and strategies</li> <li>- Use Open-Space as tool to run meetings towards dialogue and decisions</li> <li>- Develop visible practical manifestations of the project</li> <li>- Facilitate the great Reskilling as form to empower people for solutions</li> <li>- Build a bridge to local government</li> <li>- Honour the elders, they know pre-oil societies, history and skills</li> <li>- Let it go where it wants to go as open attitude for the flow of the process</li> <li>- Create an Energy Descent Action Plan (EDAP) mapping actions to achieve it.</li> </ul>

Source: personal elaboration from “The Transition Handbook” (Hopkins, 2009).

## Chapter 3

### Theoretical Frame

*A Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt. He said 'I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one.' The grandson asked him, 'Which wolf will win the fight in your heart?' The grandfather answered: 'The one I feed.'*  
-Anonymous-

This story reflects the permanent conflict of forces pulling human life in different directions. Similarly, this conflict occurs in expanded levels for example between individual welfare and social justice, or agency and political apathy. Aiming to examine the role of agency from TT, this research looks at persons who decided to act and get involved in these activities. For this purpose, it is important to clarify some concepts and elements. First, the concept of agency used; secondly the scenario in which this agency is observed, which for this research it is the politics of everyday; and thirdly, a brief revision of some factors involved on the promotion of change and its achievement.

#### 3.1 Validating Agency

*The world is a dangerous place to live - not because of the people who are evil but because of the people who don't do anything about it.*  
Albert Einstein

The analysis of forces associated with change and human agency around environmental issues requires an epistemological choice in order to examine individual and social factors involved in political dynamics. For that purpose, phenomenology and social-constructivist perspectives have been selected due to their conception of knowledge and 'reality' like ambits built from an active interaction between personal subjectivities and social institutions. From this perspective as presented by Berger and Luckmann (1967), social order, imperatives or institutions frame personal aspirations, but also they are created by individuals through choices about functional responses, acts or behaviours, which had been determined within personal experiences. In other words, social constructs are validated within processes of personal development, while social ambits are structured by concurrence of languages, temporalities,

subjectivities, meanings and habits, among others. The institutionalization of social matters “may take place in any area of collectively relevant conduct” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967:63). In this sense, the dialectical dynamic of mutual construction of individuals and society make both ambits reliant on each other.

This dynamic can be identified in political matters in terms of governance and agency. Governance here is understood in line of the structure where subjects of politics are decided according to “a set of values, policies and institutions” (Boyte<sup>8</sup>, 2005:536). It translates into social institutions which exercise control and management of societal affairs. On the other hand, a broad definition of agency is related to capabilities and actions of sovereign individuals toward change of social constructs (Barker, 2004). Thus, the socio-constructivist perspective creates a link between politics in individual and social ambits, but also, provides the perspective of this paper to analyze practices of change promoted by individual and collective agency. If “society exists only as individuals are conscious of it” whereas “individual consciousness is socially determined” (Berger& Luckmann, 1967:78) the rise of awareness around alternatives might contribute to evolving political agency and governance. Many alternative and ecological actions have been built from this logic to fomenting consciousness around issues located outside of governance priorities and actions. In short, from a constructivist perspective, agency becomes a relevant mechanism to build changes towards reconstruction of social structures for more sustainable societies.

Despite some critiques of the constructivist approach to politics about its “overemphasis on the potential autonomy of ideas and institutions” and its “indeterminacy” (Cerny, 2000:436), this perspective is useful because it allocates more agency to individuals. Still, it is important to observe the risk of idealization of the equal process of rational choice in all individuals, in which is based the individualistic character of agency. It is important to assume factors

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<sup>8</sup> Using the concept of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa

of social influence through norms, moralities or institutions on the ‘free or sovereign’ rational choices of the agents (Diaz, 2003). The analysis of possibilities for human agency should take into account that “all human objects and purposes are necessarily constructed out of social meanings and values” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998:968). In this sense, even if socio-constructivism perspective opens space for more active functions of agency in processes of governance, it also indicated that normative and structural settings determine contents within the choices taken by agents in terms of meanings, values and actions toward change, among others.

Nowadays, the neo-liberal project leads political affairs, and due to its influence on agency and environmental issues, it is important to mention some features related to its principles. Neo-liberalism is understood here as the “theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (Harvey, 2005:2). Contained within this framework, political processes of agency are affected by an individualistic dynamic where market forces and capitalist accumulation are prioritized, within a system of governance that reinforce boundaries on roles and forms for participation. Therefore, the scope of relations between agency and decision-makers is strongly delineated by economic power and market dynamics.

Additionally, currently normative frameworks of governance are decided in institutions more distant from individuals, international institutions and minimalistic structures of State are ruling the world. Consequently, many responsibilities have been assigned to individuals, which, under the logic of the market become ‘clients’ of services, ‘consumers’ and ‘producers’, narrowing their participation to mechanisms for integration into ‘a market logic’. These features imply some constraints on agency due to the exclusionary dynamic where in terms of the market, civil society is recognized only when it is “able to carry out these tasks” (Dagnino, 2008:35)

Many reflections in the globalization literature have been done around this dynamic of politics, where issues of concentrated power and control in closed

spheres creates a bleak outlook for the possibilities to influence governance agendas. Authors like Boyte (2005) and Morris (1996a) argued that the main priority assigned to consumption and accumulation of individualistic wealth is undermining association and collective work around other social main concerns like environment and social justice. This argument reinforces theories of main authors like Marx, Gramsci and Polanyi about the influence of capitalism in social organization processes. The competitiveness promoted by neoliberal models is exacerbating the fact that “capitalist development still cannot resolve the fundamental tension between individual accumulation and social cohesion.” (Howell and Pearce, 2001:27).

Therefore, the possibilities for agents to build social environmental justice are limited not only by a wide mixture of interests involved, but also by the structural set-up of dominant economic powers from where many decisions to rule the world are made. Political stakeholders are confined to social expectations within models of ‘success’, where the interplay of interests, resources, costs and benefits, shapes choices about priorities, strategies and actions. “The struggle between the outer and the inner worlds defines our conceptualization as well as exercise of agency” (Rai, 2008:111). It is in this dialectic dynamic where debates around agency factors and processes, becomes relevant for the building of alternative social-realities and discourses.

Many initiatives and actions from people are taking place toward changes at the local and global level. By focusing on agency it is possible to examine the society building processes where Foucauldian power concept operates; meaning, the distribution of power exercised via daily practices within bottom-up dynamics towards the production of normalized different social orders. “This distinction between social system and social structure separates social order from social practice” (Bauder, 2001:280). Consequently, the promotion of agency practice is a crucial vehicle for the building of the counter-hegemony force proposed by Gramsci to change social structures, because it embraces larger opportunities to build forces to tackle environmental issues during the construction of alternative and new social orders.

The concept of agency has been outlined in different ways by different authors according to the main components or factors involved in its practice.

For many authors agency could take generic forms “which contains both dominant as well as emancipatory forms” (Ford, 2003:124). Also, different perspectives and theories “have defended, attacked, buried and resuscitated the concept in often contradictory and overlapping ways” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998:962). However, this “process” to exercise “the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them” (Kabeer, 1999:438) is a determinant of outcomes in political dynamics in terms of its support, opposition or obstacle to governance rules. Factors included in studies and theoretical debates about agency are related to personal elements such as subjectivities, motivations, cognitive processes, intentionality, rational choices, capabilities and actions. Additional debates are centred on social aspects such as power, meanings, freedom, relational aspects, temporalities or resolutions (Bauder 2001, Boyte 2005, Cerny, 2000, Kabeer, 1999).

The examination of these components from different perspectives outlines the variations in the functionality, strategies and challenges faced within agency processes. For example, Giddens gives special attention in routinized practices where four main characteristics are involved: intentionality, reflexivity, capacity and choice (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Garcia, 2007). Feminist theories have been working around elements of power, deliberation and action, while environmental movements have been concentrated on resistance, values, power and change. To analyse the factors involved in the agency of environmental sustainability, a general frame has been outlined with the understanding of it agency like the *conscious engagement of actors within structural settings to transform social ambits throughout selected meaningful actions considered functional towards desirable changes*.

The exercise of agency implies some opportunities, but also some cost (Rai, 2008). Also, it can be argued that linkages between individual and social forces, agency and governance, necessitate a consideration of different factors involved in agency processes. Many barriers can be faced in agency pathways however numerous psychology studies “showed that while social-contextual conditions dramatically facilitate or forestall the natural tendencies toward self-motivation, such self-direction is a basic tendency across cultures” (Boyte, 2008:122). Thus, from personal to broader societal levels, many struggles can

be found, related to individual or collective concepts and practices of agency, motivations and capabilities for action, personal values and social paradigms, local actions and broader influence. Also, there are features, determined by the context, which delineated strategies and desirable outcomes, vulnerabilities and power relations, actions and frames of multi-level governance (Rai, 2008). This paper examines some of these factors.

### 3.2 The Daily Scenario of Agency: Everyday Politics –EDP-

*“For me, this is a journey of the imagination, a dream about the utopian possibility of reconceiving and reconstructing the world from the perspective of, and along with, those subaltern groups that continue to enact a cultural politics of difference”*

-Escobar, 2000:3-

Politics has had innumerable definitions throughout human history in terms of its ends (control, organization distribution or power), exercised forms (negotiation, representation, opposition or imposition), and actors (beneficiaries, decision-makers or relations among them). A broad definition of politics is related to management of ‘who gets what, how and why’ in social spheres, where power relations are involved (Lasswell, 1936). The main outcomes of political processes are related to agreements and normative frames for social life, but also, with values, understandings and application of political projects in daily life to resolve conflicts over resources (Warren, 1999). Therefore, the process of politics happens in many ambits of daily life, where agreements and decision are concerned with elements of people, resources – material and non material-, values, conflict and power. (Leftwich 2004, Warren 1999).

For philosophy and social theory, the topic of everyday life has been in the centre of many reflections and critiques related to its character as just routinized unreflective actions or as critical reflective space to nurture political projects. The main authors of the routine perspective or territory of life are Weber, Berger and Luckman, Shütz and Garfinkel. In the other side, everyday life as space for political emancipation has as principal exponents neo-Marxist authors and figures like Benjamin or Lefevbre (Gardiner, 2004). Also, this



second perspective coincides with the Gramscian counter-hegemony force related to a self-originated process of building alternative dominant ideologies “based on the experiences and interest” of people (Burawoy, 2003:225). In other words, everyday life becomes the space where alternative discourses and new social orders can be constructed to contest dominant socio-political paradigms. In this sense, everyday life is the space where the political is constructed, meaning by political the “discursive contents that are expressed in the daily practice of the lifeworld” (Diaz, 2003:51). Accordingly, the everyday is the space of foundations for politics, where collective construction of structural cohabitating procedures and institutions take place.

Confirming the Gramscian counter-hegemonic concept, Kerkvliet (2005) in his study of Vietnamese peasants presented how, even within coercive systems, it is possible by everyday actions to achieve and influence changes in politics. The same idea is reinforced by Hobson and Seabrooke (2007) in their examination of the current world economy, where everyday actions could have important transformative consequences. However, it is important to observe that the attitude towards ‘intentional change’ that is so relevant for the concept of agency, does not have the same status in EDP, in which even if actions are chosen in terms of personal contesting they do not necessary have clear intentionality for structural changes. This feature is confirmed by Kerkvliet (2009), who differentiated EDP from Official and Advocacy types of politics. Official politics are explained as the kind exercised by authorities in relation to normative frames. Public Advocacy usually occurs in communal spheres and “involves direct and concerted efforts to support, criticise and oppose authorities, their policies and programs” (Kerkvliet, 2009:232). But, EDP is closer to the concept of the political, from a social-constructivist perspective, which is related to a subjective process where meanings are constructed and social-order is produced through objectivations like language or habits. Also, it is nearer to the relevance of everyday life as proposed by Lefebvre, and the Foucaultian and Gramscian reflections about our capacities to construct alternative meanings aiming to social changes.

A second particular feature of EDP is linked with its minimal organization, which differentiates it from other types of politics. In this sense,

EDP “is usually low profile and private behaviour, and is done by people who probably do not regard their actions as political” (Kerkvliet, 2009:232). Therefore, some actions can be common among individuals that have not necessarily made a previous agreement to act in this way. In this sense, it is from individual choices that values, meanings and actions are selected such as mechanisms of change or support within the framework of the cultural context. Those actions are subtle and do not need to be strategic because “everyday actions do not have to ‘win’ to be meaningful.” (Hobson and Seabrooke, 2007:14). In this way, even if EDP happens in organized structures like work, family or neighbourhoods, those actions are not necessarily a product of a collective organization for a demarcated change.

However, validating the relevance of agency, this approach returns the realm of politics closer to the people, and opens space for bottoms-up possibilities of change. Kerkvliet (2005) suggested some elements to explain the influence from EDP based on ‘power’ conditions, even if people are not formally organized. Those elements include the relation with authorities via ‘power of labour activities’ for the system or through face-to-face relations, especially in local spheres. Also, in the absence of violent mechanisms from authorities to force obedience to rules, it is possible to increase the number of people moving in the same direction, which is a decisive factor of persuasion. Moreover, the subtle nature of these acts is relevant to the preservation of power, because in the absence of visible organizations and directly confrontational events, it is more difficult for the authorities to implement control or restrictive mechanisms.

Four types of EDP are presented in Kerkvliet’s work (2005, 2009), associated with behaviours of *support* and *compliance* to social rules or institutions, the *modification* and evasion of these rules, and the *resistance* through intentional contesting actions. The *support* form of EDP is linked with deliberate actions backing the socio-political contents of society. This is the case of behaviours that follow social prescriptions and normative structures after a ‘conscious’ accord has been decided. Supportive actions can also be found in the form of *compliance*, which has less rational thinking process of decision, many times just vindicated the characteristic of obedience.

Contrarily, the *resistance* form of EDP means the acts rejecting the reproduction of the system, or its normative frames. *Modification and evasion* are located in the middle of compliance and resistance, and they are linked to certain indifference to the socio-political process and its results. In this sense, people are not against the rules, but their actions are ‘cut corners’ to achieve social expectations while avoiding ‘formal’ procedures.

In some cases this form of *Modification-Evasion*, combined with *resistance* can influence to adjust policies. For example, this is the case of informal vendors that get a place to operate, after authorities have decided to allocate space for a formal market due to the massive number of consumers that block public streets. However, because EDP are mainly expressed in the ‘private’ ambits of personal behaviours or through informal networks in everyday spheres, they are not necessarily the main reason behind changes in normative structures. Nevertheless, all forms of EDP can exercise a significant influence to promote change. In this sense, as well as the Foucaultian concept of normalization and the counter-hegemony ideal of Gramsci, it is in everyday life where repetition of patterns and discourses promote the reproduction or change of social and normative structures, becoming political acts.

Validating EDP, Hobson and Seabrooke (2007) compiled a set of cases in which it is possible to observe how everyday actions can influence political economy, because of the interdependence among elites and everyday actors. Assuming the relevance of the role of different actors in political economy, and not only the one of dominant elites, the authors considered the aspects of legitimacy, identity, and agency of both sectors in the process of shaping the world. Reaffirming the notion of bottom-up change through EDP they presented similar categories: *defiance*, *mimetic challenge*, *hybridized mimicry* and *axiorationality*. *Defiance* is related to the actions of *resistance* presented by Kerkvliet, when people are mavericks with social norms. *Mimetic challenge* and *hybridized mimicry* are also a kind of resistance, but adopting the dominant discourses to promote alternative agendas. These forms are a kind of “rhetoric entrapped” (Hobson and Seabrooke, 2007:17). And in the case of *mimetic challenge* it could be exemplified by the use of formal participatory mechanisms to achieve alternative development goals. *Hybridized mimicry*, in the same line of

the hybridization concept of Garcia Canclini, is related to the adaptation of hegemonic discourses to the cultural context where they have been received. The last, *axiorationality*, is a more supportive form and is associated with habits and actions chosen according to the information received from norms about their rationality and interests involved. These choices have a mixture of instrumental and value-oriented motivations, and are engaged and guided by legitimized social expectations.

Even, if this approach to politics allows the recognition of agency of people from the bottom-up, many critiques can be detected in the literature around the political character of everyday life, as well as EDP. Some gaps in these forms of politics are related to the issues of representation and abundance of subjectivities which limit the possibilities for access to formal power-holder institutions. In this sense, the possibilities to reflect contents of EDP in concrete policies become limited. Also some weak elements criticised are related to the ambiguity in the identification of direct claims of EDP and the mechanisms to raise awareness for larger amount of the population. Additionally, related to awareness and claims within EDP, there are the issues of media influence, effectiveness of these forms to achieve transformations and the long time required for change in the cases that it is possible. (Escobar, 2008, Gardiner 2004; Kerkvliet 2009)

Some answers to these critiques can be found in Hobson and Seabrooke (2007) who stressed the importance of open possibilities for the inclusion of alternative angles of knowledge and explanations about the dynamics of international political economy. In this sense, like Sousa-duSantos proposes it is important to construct an Ecology of Knowledge, where alternatives to the hegemonic discourse of power/knowledge can be validated. Therefore, a more open perspective in socio-political sciences to understand and connect power/decision dynamics with everyday life becomes a relevant step to include local, private and practical aspects in the examination of politics (Sousa-duSantos et al, 2007). Also, EDP is an important starting point of many social movements and more organized political groups that decided to exercise politics in advocacy forms. Thus, the dynamic of EDP is relevant for the understanding of Advocacy and Official politics. Moreover, the endorsement

of EDP can be pertinent for the promotion of self-consciousness about the relevance of our everyday discourses and acts for the reproduction or transformation of socio-political structures. In other words, “being conscious of politics as everyday experience makes us mindful of our relations with the people we live and work with and reflect on how our actions and relationships reinforce, amend, evade or contest the political system(s) of which we are part” (Kerkvliet, 2009:240).

Contained within this framework is analyzed agency towards greater environmental practices in the local experiences of TT. EDP is a significant scenario to examine the experience of TT practitioners, because for many of them everyday life has a political prefigurative character where daily actions are agency strategies to draw and embrace a desired future. In this sense, for the achievement of changes it is important “to act today according to the principles one wants to establish in tomorrow’s world” (Teivainen, 2008:136). Therefore, this EDP scenario is defined as actions “whether through negotiation, resistance or non-resistance, either incrementally or suddenly, shape, constitute and transform the political and economic environment around and beyond them” (Hobson & Seabrooke, 2007:15). In other words, from the concept of agency and politics presented before, it is possible to say that EDP is the exercise of agency through daily life, recognizing the agency of non-elites agents in the transformation of the World.

### 3.3 Understanding Change Process

*Nobody can go back and start a new beginning,  
but anyone can start today and make a new ending*  
Maria Robinson

The examination of Agency and EDP aims to explain how people who decided to act can achieve changes. Complementing this framework is important to look at factors involved in why people decide or not to act, or how people choose to exercise agency. Therefore, Theories of Change (ToC) are relevant to gain a better understanding of Agency and EDP. This section presents a brief compilation of relevant factors involved in change processes, having as a main focus the personal ambit. In other words, the relevant

phenomena around which people decide to transform or not their thoughts and behaviours. The examination of psycho-social factors linked to change is done around environmental agency and CC because the focus of this paper. The inputs from social-psychology have been selected because they have a strong correlation with the humanistic perspective chosen. Furthermore, this approach has significant contributions to the understanding of bottom-up dynamics. The section starts with a brief conceptual reflection about change, followed by the presentation of some relevant factors involved in the process of transformation that are associated with human reactions to environmental issues. At the end, there is a reflection on the relation of these dynamics of personal change within the ambits of politics and development.

From interpretative theories, including the social-cognitive perspective selected, change is explained in terms of circular dynamics of interaction between context conditions and subjective experience-interpretation of these circumstances by the individuals. This relevance assigned to the personal experience in the interpretation of contextual features holds the approach to the agency processes around environmental concerns. Common blocks on ToC are presented from an instrumental perspective by Jones (2011), who identified blocks around causal chains, dimensions of influence and actor-centred approaches. The causal-chain category is related to theories that elucidate steps or elements required for change through a variety of models mapping the process and the causal relations among the factors involved. Theories on dimensions of influence emphasize areas where it is possible to endorse change including context, actors or networks, information or social institutions. Finally, actors-centred approaches, as the name implies, include theories related to actors “as the key driven force for change” (Jones, 2011:4). To facilitate the presentation of this section, Lewin’s chain perspective will be used as an outline.

Kurt Lewin (1947) is perhaps one of the more referenced authors on ToC, who proposed a three-step model with the stages of *unfreeze*, *moving* and *freeze*. The first stage of *unfreezing* is the period in which alterations in conditions of equilibrium or comfort occur. Coupled with these alterations arise a kind of ‘alert’ which presses for change. Directly linked with this *unfreezing* stage,

Dyson (2006) reflect on circumstances around environmental issues, mentioning that it is possible to observe analogous patterns in the chain of human reactions to tough 'long' term situations like CC. At first it is a rapid advance of scientific understanding, which is followed by societal mixed reactions of "denial, avoidance and recrimination" (Dyson, 2006:11). Consequently, changes in behaviours are minimal until the damage is undeniably evident. This situation is noticeable in the lack of social reactions to environmental issues, which could be explained by the absence of visual effects and the time dimension involved (Dyson, 2006; APA, 2010).

People are concentrated on their daily lives, and the effects of events like CC seem to reside in a distant future. Also, authorities usually give priority to the solution of short run or immediate situations, more than long term difficult or complex situations like environmental ones. In this sense, changes required around factors affecting environmental conditions become unlikely, since the consequences of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and increase of temperature are not evident enough to elicit a response. Additionally, psychological studies have shown that human beings react better to concrete situations, and it is possible to observe a gap in the collective awareness about environmental issues, because they are not seen as 'immediate threats' (APA, 2010). Therefore, uncertainty and absence of concrete situations caused by environmental issues are factors connected with the persistence of habits and behaviours. Consequently, change is not felt to be necessary, due to the underestimation of risks and the lack of awareness about the facts or their consequences.

However, in terms of the environmental situation, humankind is in the stage where the effects of CC and resources scarcity are becoming more perceptible, starting to affect the 'comfort' of life. But, "the precise time and intensity of these events are unknown, for instance they are depend upon how people respond" (APA, 2010:14). Although, in terms of human responses "enabling change has always been the Holy Grail of environmentalist, but it has largely remained frustrating elusive" (Hopkins, 2009:84). From this examination, it is possible to conclude that the uncertainty that characterized environmental phenomena becomes a perfect shield for ignorance or

unawareness, mistrust, denial or avoidance, human reactions that at the first stage embody obstacles to generate change (APA, 2010).

Accordingly, few achievements have been realized in the second stage of *moving*, which is related to the transformations towards different ways of being. Within this stage, relevant elements are linked with the identification and selection of 'new forms' as from individual subjectivities, rational processes or structural contents in favour or against the change. Enriching the debate about factors associated within this second stage, Hulme (2009) presented additional explanations for factors of inactivity around CC. In his analysis of different narratives including science, psychology, media, religion, and economics he identified the significance of diversity of ideological and symbolic meanings of CC as a key obstacle for the realization of collective paths towards change. At the end, he presents four myths as the main narratives around CC, in which are evident the key roles of information, knowledge and meanings for promoting or impeding human agency.

The first myth relates to metaphors of *nostalgia* and implies a process of change towards the return to a wild stage of a fragile Nature that goes beyond human spheres. In this sense, renunciation of current comforts of life, as well as lost knowledge of life in alternative ways are becoming obstacles for further change beyond those particular persons or communities which have chosen to change or in extreme cases to return isolated ways of life within the nature. Values promoted by deep ecology movements are connected with this myth (Naess 1973, Holmgren 2002).

Discourses related to fear are located in a second myth of '*presaging apocalypse*' in which the scope for change is reduced by a kind of hopelessness around its achievements. The promotion of fear included in this type of discourse "frequently leads to disempowerment, apathy and scepticism among its audience" (Hulme, 2009:348). Also this myth is impeding engagement with processes of change, because as many psychological studies demonstrated, "people do not act because they perceive that they have little behavioural control over the outcome" (APA, 2010:67).

The third myth around CC is linked with the human feelings of *pride* from dominance and control of Nature through technology, which has two



interesting elements in terms of change. First, it reduces the scope for change to those promoted by scientific and technological knowledge, reducing the power range of common people's actions. Secondly, this pride myth contains a paradoxical perception of technological advance and its economic support as solutions for the same problems that are created by them. Also, this *technological-pride* myth could entail the 'Jevons paradox' related to the way in which people delete the environmental gains of their actions because of abusive use or consume of techno-ecological products. This situation is particular reflected and studied in terms of energy efficiency (APA 2010, Brookes 2000, Hertwich 2005). An example of this rebound effect is when consumption of energy increases because people rely in its ecological origin instead of people keeping or reducing levels of consumption. As well as in *apocalypse* myth, in the *technology-pride* main barriers for change are linked with feelings of fear, overwhelming, powerlessness and reliance on technological solutions.

At last, narratives related to *justice* are included in the last myth presented by Hulme (2009). Within this myth, environmental issues are seen as an opportunity and hope for mobilization of socio-political change. Changes around poverty, equality and other human injustices are associated with the requirement of change for environmental issues. However, this path of *justice* implies adjustment in our habits of life, which are established by social institutions based in ethos or values systems frequently in terms of the 'vested interest' of dominant groups. In this sense, the diminishment of the value of certain habits is required to open possibilities for change because "social habits usually are conceived of as obstacles to change" (Lewin,1947:32). In this sense, ethical values as well as "social comparison, norms, conformity and perceived equity" (APA, 2010:67) become justifications for inaction or stressors for change. In other words, social factors that influence change are generated from comparison with others, as well as the sense of fairness or task-sharing, and the social value assigned to such actions.

The third stage of Lewin's theory is called *freezing* and it is connected with the 'institutionalization' of the changes as new social rules. In terms of Foucault it is the normalization of new contents manifested in the exercise of

power in everyday practices. In this regard APA (2010) presented additional psychological barriers for change in this stage, associated with the 'perceived risk from behavioural change', meaning the risks felt by those who have decided to change. These risk perceptions are related to the practical functionality of the changes, sometimes physical dangers implied and the financial cost in contrast with its benefits. Also, there are perceived psychological risks in terms of ego or social reputation, risk from external rebuking and critics, or the feelings of wasted time in changes that do not necessarily bring benefits for people or their environment. Moreover, in relation to this third step, structural elements from development models become crucial in the analysis of environmental agency, because they establish priorities and conditions which support or define the scope of environmental actions.

At last, a key element for this *freezing* step are the levels to influence policy and engagement of policy-makers to achieve guaranties in "wider public value" (Jones, 2011;1). Thus, through EDP, advocacy-coalitions, agenda setting, community organization, or other forms it is important to achieve policy influence for guarantees in the promotion and continuity of changes within social institutions (Jones, 2011). This situation is particular relevant in the case of environmental activities, because in our current situation it is necessary to have a greater number of people acting in the same direction to protect and care for our habitat, while the Nature is allowed to carry out its recovery process. Also, as greater numbers of people are involved, many of the psychological barriers to change presented above could be diminished. Consequently, the option to validate local or more extensive experiences in larger networks and organization implies a strong possibility to ensure the institutionalization of changes for the long term.

## Chapter 4

### Findings: Experiencing through Agents' Voices

Seeking of clues to promote awareness and environmental agency is framed within the main question of the present research: *How are agents experiencing change towards greater environmental practices from Transitional Towns initiatives?* The following sections present findings collected in the interviews realized in Canada. Additionally, some secondary data obtained from TC-Website managed by Rob Hopkins from Totnes-UK is presented. This website was selected, because he is recognized as main leader of the TT proposal.

The group of people interviewed was contacted through a snowball effect, and they all end up being leaders of local TT initiatives. However, they were not a homogenous group in age and occupation; in terms of gender the sample interviewed was equal. Nevertheless in an ethnographic observation in a local market organized by one of the initiatives each Sunday, a prevalence of women was noticed. In TT initiatives the age usually is framed with “*the demography has been largely people in their 20s to 40s*” (Tim, 2010:interview). The interviews were distributed evenly in two main ranges: one of 20-25 years old and other of persons above 50 years old. A relevant common feature of the respondents is their university educational level. Additionally, even with differences in their economic status, their level of involvement in TT was parallel, and it was just determined by differences in professional occupations. It is worth noting that other groups involved in TT initiatives around the world have different levels of education, for example the case of Brazil where TT has been implemented in favela area. Also on TC-Website it is possible to find videos, letters and news about events connected with Transition Culture, which are produced for a wide multicultural sample of people, especially from English speaking countries.

This section of the paper is divided in three main parts related to incentives, constraints and some relevant contents for debates on politics and development. Within each part, the information collected from the

respondents it is presented in accordance with the blocks resulting from coding the data. It is important to note that in accordance with the validation of agency mentioned before, the findings will be presented as much as it is possible in the words of the respondents.

#### 4.1 Incentives for involvement within TT

When asked about their involvement in TT initiatives, the majority of persons interviewed mentioned a previous history or interest in environmental activities arising from personal or professional motivations. This previous interest was important to find and seek the first information about TT, which usually was received from other persons or via street posters. In this sense, the relevance of upon personal interest in environmental causes like a base to assume the engagement with TT is identified. This is the case of the “*ecovillage training in Filborn, Gaia University*” (Ise, 2010:interview) or :

*“I first hear just about the concept, the title of TT for a little way, but I did not know anything about it, until I went to an intensive training with Joanna Macy ... a group process to help people to move from the oppression generated by ecological damages... converting that energy into constructive action... So when I got back I contacted by TT network website the people in Guelph involved in the Muller initiative here”* (Sal, 2010:interview)

Particular in persons, but also in the internet it is possible to observe, that one main incentives to be involved in TT initiatives is the positive character of this proposal, which is a “proactive response rather than a reactive one” (Hopkins, 2009:15).

*“What got me interesting in TT is the way that it manages to keep a positive vision without pretending that things are not bad.... Because I thought that can give hope, but without making people feel that they have to do nothing”* (Ise, 2010:interview).

*“I came from a background of direct attack action, and doing things like putting my self in a wrong way... and becoming engaged with a project like this since I moved down here its been the single most empowering thing that I ever done. To go from say no all the time and having people hating you because you are blocking... to do something that is so greatly appreciated by everyone here...”* (Grow-Heathrow, 2011:video).

This quote from a participant, in the transformation of an old abandoned green-house into a communitarian social space, reflects how the positive vision

of TT is linked with the community character of the proposal. This aspect was mentioned in all the interviews evidencing the aim of TT to build changes in life styles towards ‘resilient communities’ (Hopkins, 2009). Also, it is an important motivation and gain to be involved in TT, the “community building” process. This is also present in the majority of the videos from local initiatives posted in TC-Website, where many comments are related to the appreciation of the community integration done through TT activities. TT is perceived as a *“real possibility for strengthen communities...”* because it is an *“inclusive model which invites everybody... to come and make their contribution”* (Paul, 2010:interview). Also, it is an incentive the promotion of “open-space” in TT that prioritizes *“equal participation and non hierarchical distribution of power”* (Ise, 2010:interview).

*“People start to experience, start to believe in their own power in solutions, in working together to find solutions... because people here are so rely in the experts of the government to do things... we have to rediscover our powers... it’s always amazing when I see that people are emerging this community power”* (Mic, 2010:interview)

Additionally, this ‘inclusive’ character marks a particularity of TT in relation to other environmental actions about its promotion to connect *“local existent groups and works”* (Ema, 2010:interview). Also, even if *“a lot of those thinks in TT are not new... there is a kind of master plan or framework to put many things together into action”* (Mic, 2010:interview). In this sense, many comments are related to the feeling of people around the match of TT proposals with their needs and their concerns around local environment. This feeling is also reinforced by the adaptability of this proposal, which is *“a constructive alternative in the middle of the old system”* (Ema, 2010:interview).

*“part of the beauty of the model is at first the recognition, the respect for local solutions and conditions. And secondly, the fact that no one is trying to say this is what it is and doing this way. Everybody is invited to find their own implementation”* (Sal, 2010:interview).

Nevertheless, it was pointed out by a majority the relevance of the current world’s circumstances like change drivers. It is the case of the explanation of high participation of people between 30 and 50 years, because they are the generations *“who sought the change”* (Mic, 2010:interview). But also, because the changes proposed by TT are ‘a need’ with regard to peak-oil, ‘mandatory’ due

to CC, and ‘useful’ to counter the economic instability and inequality (Hopkins, 2009). However, the focus of work is the local level, which works as incentive because people *“feel and see their contributions and changes... I don’t want to ask the government to do this, I want to do what I can at local level here”* (Ise, 2010:interview). In regards, the information collected shows that growing food is a significant motivation and practice in TT with collateral gains like reskilling, enjoyable use of time, economic savings, and collective work. For example in Coaticook and other towns in Magog area, one of the principal reasons to promote TT is the migration of manufacturing business out of these towns, because of which many economic and social activities had a strong drop off (Ber 2010, Mic 2010). Thus, TT has been used for recovering local networks and building socio-economic alternatives for the community.

Two additional logistical aspects that work as incentives in the case of Canada were mentioned. First, the easy access to information on internet and in the handbook manual. And secondly, the fact that some people applied for and got economic subsidies from the government or NGO’s to cover activities expenses or time dedicated to TT: *“...in Quebec is a program for people under 30... It’s calls Gent Voluntari and they give you money to do a project for few months... so that is the way I have time to spend developing the TT idea”* (Ise, 2010:interview).

## 4.2 Constraints experienced in TT agency

In terms of the constraints there was a common mention of time because *“people who are interested are busy individuals... a large proportion of people are often raising families, so they are working and their lives are very full”* (Sal, 2010:interview). But also in terms of the long time required to implement *“the whole model and put the initiatives together... plus summer breaks each year”* (Ber, 2010:interview). The time-factor is also one of the main critiques to TT, since the change proposed *“perhaps won’t be possible before it is really required... we don’t have much time, the planet is changing so fast”* (Ema, 2010:interview). Moreover, the lack of awareness and the requirements to ‘change people’s mentality’ make this time constraint more pertinent: *“I had an idea that social change happens slowly but this thing is far by hard*

*slow*” (Sal, 2010:interview). Some explanations collected around the lack of awareness are:

*“People are just too comfortable, and very hard to reach because they are just stuck in front of the TV and don’t want to hear bad news, they would rather deny what was happening outside than acknowledging to do something... we need to move ourselves from our boat of laziness”* (Mic, 2010:interview).

*“... many people are unaware. They believe money is real, and the monetary system is virtual... honestly, they are going to wake-up one day and it’s going to be a crisis big enough that they are going to feel that they need to change... I don’t believe it’s possible to sell the TT idea to everybody, I don’t”* (Ise, 2010:interview).

In this context, it seems that the ‘lack of awareness’ around environmental issues is maintained by comfortable conditions of life and the ‘monetary system’, which allow people to avoid information that they prefer to deny or ignore because is uncomfortable or not tangible in its consequences. If *“people don’t realize how vulnerable they are to peak-oil or economy instability”* (Mic, 2010:interview), they are not going to be active in building the resilience proposed by TT. It is also reflected in the minimal number of persons directly and actively involved, which usually is not more than 30 or 40 persons in each town, even when the mail list could bigger than 500 names. Additional factors identified as constraints for maintaining active participation are linked with necessities of ‘concrete projects’ and ‘hierarchical systems’, which are opposed to the Open-Space tool proposed in TT. So, people *“were disappointed because there wasn’t something ready to start right away. We did lose some momentum... people are so accustomed to a more hierarchical system where the planning is top-down”* (Sal, 2010:interview). Also, taking into account that the majority of people are ‘productively-busy’ it is necessary to find mechanisms to show people *“what kind of advantage the transitional model can bring”* to motivate them to *“leave time for something else more”* (Art, 2010:interview). Furthermore, the reliance on “voluntary work” of these initiatives is connected with the time-factor mentioned before. But also, it is determined by an agency capacity that reliant on personal projects and income. It is exemplified in the follow quote around possibilities of expansion of the model to other geographies:

*“In industrialized nations where a lot of these English speaking northern countries are, there is a demographic class of people like me who are economically comfortable, not prosperous but ok, and have disposable time and income, who’s basic needs are to a level*

*where I can think now working for the great of good, because I don't have to struggling to make ends meet"* (Sal, 2010:interview).

The economic 'system' is also identified as an obstacle due to *"its overconsumption that is addictive... we sold it to other countries through films... so people want to live in the way that we live, and we have to stop this way because it's so wasteful"* (Mic, 2010:interview). Besides, it was mentioned that *"one or maybe the biggest limitation for the TT is the price of oil, that doesn't help in the process of change people's mentality... with this cheap price it's so difficult to motivate people to change"* (Ber, 2010:interview). In this sense, it is possible to identify a contradiction between the 'good intentions' and 'personal interest' because *"people appreciate the garden that we have and everybody like the system in this house, but they do not apply that in their homes because it is too much work... and many people don't know how to do it"* (Ema, 2010:interview). In the same line:

*"...our major activity is the effort to launch an on-line market of local products"* but it had been so difficult because there is the *"competition with the prices of the 3 big supermarkets in town"* and the leader of TT *"has as his biggest motivation the local autonomy, but in the context of the globalized economy right now doesn't make sense... and he has some business with Europe"* (Ber, 2010:interview)

Additional constraints mentioned were related to the involvement of local authorities, which is an ingredient of TT proposal. Practitioners expressed difficulties to work with authorities, because *"it is too much political protocol and issues to launch something"* (Ber, 2010:interview). Also, due to the political interest of local authorities in terms of elections *"...If we manage to set-up something that really works they are going to come and knocking in our door"* (Ise, 2010:interview). Additionally to the lack of awareness, those interviewed indicated that the interest of local authorities could be increased by compulsory circumstances, meaning events that obligate the implementation of changes. At last, in terms of this ingredient of working with authorities, similar to the implementation of TT model, it is a common consensus of its appropriate applicability for local spheres:

*"it may work in small towns, but I don't know how it works in place like Quebec city for example, where the local government is too big, and doesn't care about peak-oil and climate change. It's detached, far from grassroots... we have to re-think how it works in big cities, perhaps at the level of neighbourhoods"* (Ise, 2010:interview).



A final main constrain commonly mentioned is related to the language barrier generated because almost all materials are in English. In this sense, the French community, that is the majority of Quebec province, has an obstacle to learning and to having materials for explaining 'TT' initiatives to others. In addition, issues like the lack of official trainers in Canada, or the excessive amount of irrelevant information on internet, are factors affecting the main activity of “raise awareness” upon which all these initiatives are currently working. This barrier is also presented as explanation of the limited expansion of the model through English speaking countries and Europe.

#### **4.3 Contents from TT experience related to Politics and Development**

Additional to the incentives and the constraints presented above, some elements relevant to politics and development debates were raised by respondents. In summary, these items are reflections around the economic model and the relevance of local level and inclusion of ToC for the success of TT proposal. Also, explicit comments have been made around issues for the expansion of the model to other latitudes and, the future vision of TT network and the desired world to achieve.

Economy in addition to being an obstacle as was mentioned in the section before, could be a factor to promote participation in TT proposal, because “*I don't see anything that could grab people's attention until, I think there is another cycle of economic hardship unfortunately*” (Ber, 2010:interview). In this sense, some respondents think that due to human vulnerability and the requirements for resilience “*relocalizing the economy is the biggest message of TT*” (Mic, 2010:interview). Others reported believing that when “*business' owners start to understand peak-oil and the truth after economical instability... they will become interesting in TT*” (Ema, 2010:interview). But also, it was observed that “*the biggest work or challenge for TT is trying to make people understand*” that a model of life based in an urban and industrialized economy “*is not the model to follow*” because it is disconnected and not belonging in “*work just for payment*” and having to pay for all (Ise, 2010:interview). And also, overconsumption “*doesn't bring any more happiness, or does not make life better, more than destroy our future*” (Art, 2010:interview). For the

majority of TT practitioners the economic “system” is viewed from a different perspective:

*“It is a lot of myths surrounded the economy, and people think that they are truth and it’s nothing else, they don’t really think about it. What are they using their money for? ... We need shelter, we need food, we need to be warm, those are not needs that have to be filled by shipping plastic goods that come from China... meeting your basic needs is possible, we used to do it. That’s what economy supposes to help you to do” (Ise, 2010:interview).*

*“We can live in a way that is preferable to what we got now, in many ways. More satisfaction reaches in economical down scale way of living... Like the strength from community, like relying one on another” (Sal, 2010:interview).*

The relevance assigned to the local perspective is beyond economy and it is considered a key for TT success due to the respect and inclusion of local actions and resources, but also because it increases possibilities for concrete visible changes:

*“It is important to work really in the micro-level... having people talk together about how each other experiences are use or not, depending in the own local context” (Art, 2010:interview).*

*“I don’t believe that I can change the whole world... but I hope to work with those ones interesting in it... I think I can have a small impact here in my neighbourhood... in this way, maybe local politicians will have interest in TT too” (Ise, 2010:interview).*

*“I deeply believe is that it is important to make sure that TT works here... I don’t want to ask all the government to do that, or pressure to do this, I want to do what I can at local level here... waiting for the government will take too much time” (Mic, 2010:interview).*

Moreover, a as key for the achievements of TT it is the inclusion of the psychology of change<sup>9</sup> in the training of TT. This aspect “means that you are aware of the fact that you need to know that is not one thing that is going to reach everybody... in general there are groups of people that are in different levels in their acceptance

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<sup>9</sup> “The Transition Handbook”, used as guide for trainings and implementation of TT model, includes a whole chapter about “Understanding Psychology of Change”, which presents a ‘Trans-theoretical Change Model’ developed by Carlo DiClemente. This addiction theory is envisioned for TT in terms of a system of life ‘addicted to oil’, because “addictions refer to stuck patterns of behaviour that can be difficult to change even when we know they’re causing harm” (Hopkins, 2009:86).

*of the fact that we need to change*” (Ise, 2010:interview). Additionally, even if *“some changes are happen so slowly and many people are still unaware of the need of move away from fossil fuel addiction... perhaps at the moment of social collapse”* TT will have some solutions to be presented (Sal, 2010:interview). In terms of the process of change for many TT practitioners the main goal of build resilience is not to change everybody now, but *“we have to have those models, we need to be able to see them”* (Klein, 2011:conference).

In this line, the expansion of the model to other latitudes is envisioned through the establishment of alternative models to be visualized by developing countries. *“There is a work to be done in terms of deconstructing the ideas, changing what people perceive as poor or rich, healthy or not”* (Ise, 2010:interview). However, it was also mentioned, that perhaps TT model it is not so functional in the Global South as it is in the Global North, because there is less dependence on oil and people still *“know how to make many things by themselves, so reskilling isn’t necessary”* (Ema, 2010:interview). Additionally, *“they already have kind of resilience, or part of what we don’t have here. I think northern countries have to learn a lot from southern countries.... Where people are poor, and they have to rely on each other”* (Mic, 2010:interview). It is worth to note that some initiatives have already started in South America overcoming language and internet access barriers. Also, the respondents considered an advantage of the model the adaptability to local contexts proposed, which gives possibilities for these initiatives to work towards additional goals like the strengthening of community or poverty reduction.

In terms of the future vision of the TT network, respondents recognize that ‘it is not a movement’ and many times it be seen more as a ‘group of friends’. There was mentioned that it is necessary to make some adjustments to the model because until now it is *“viewed as British centred”* (Mic, 2010:interview). In this sense, in addition to the translation of materials to different languages, it is necessary to identify strategies to include more people. It is the UK case where *“they are now working in the integration of other cultures, religions and ethnics groups... other design, communication and language of the model”* (Ise, 2010:interview). Also, due to the relevance the internet *“to keep informing people from different countries”* (Art, 2010:interview), it is important to strength the

mechanisms *“to inform about diverse local and regional initiatives that can work together, because many times we don’t know about other groups in the same town”* (Ema, 2010:interview). Furthermore, there are some critiques to the requirements to be an official initiative, because *“people are not getting anything from the official recognition, like all the resources of TT are in English... I doubt that many people is going to pay 200 dollars to get the [individual] official training”* (Ise, 2010:interview).

Finally as far as the end goal desired, there was a common reference to the visualization of the towns in 2030, which is one initial exercise in TT training, around which agreements, strategies and actions are defined. In this sense, reinforcing the ideas revealed in the interviews, the respondents made reference to an ideal town where:

*“everything that you need is available in walking or biking distance. In which if you leave your neighbourhood is because you want to, not because you have to”* (Ise, 2010:interview).

*“...is absence of this noise, I hear birds, I heard children laughing, but I don’t hear that noise coming from motors that are working to supply us with a way of life that is unsustainable... so we could ride of it and enjoy things more, and have more fun, more simply”* (Mic, 2010:interview).

*“... is a respectable instead of exploited way of living, closer to each other, with more communities, where people care about each other. And also, a way of living that is closer to Earth... a more connected way of living”* (Sal, 2010:interview).

## Chapter 5

### Analysis: Seeking clues for greater Agency

Returning to the settled concept of agency as the conscious process of engagement for transformation towards desired changes, from the findings it is possible to confirm the relevance of feelings, habits, and knowledge in our decision to counter environmental issues. In this sense, it is necessary that people review their attitudes of “*denial, avoidance, comfort or laziness*” to become agents of transformations. Findings connecting with the first *unfreezing* stage presented by Lewin (1947), indicated that in Canada, even when in terms of *capacity* there is a possibility for environmental agency, there are still many constraints in terms of the elements of *intention, awareness* and *choice* stated by Giddens (1979). It is reflected in observations suggesting people “*don’t want to hear bad news*”, “*don’t see*” or “*are just too comfortable*”, which also confirm psychological barriers to change mentioned in Chapter 3.

Many of these psychological barriers are usually paradoxically reinforced by narratives around environmental issues, as presented by Hulme (2009). However, counter to these unenthusiastic feelings, an important virtue recognized in TT is its positive character, which motivates agency and allows people to feel empowered to do something even if it is just at the local level. TT agents who are already in the stage of *moving*, mentioned the satisfaction of ‘*being doing a contribution*’. Perhaps, as the findings show, many people have a previous interest on environment. But also, many of them decided to participate in TT due to its features of social integration, community building, self-sufficiency, and realization of possibilities to concrete examples from everyday life within the current system.

In this regards, discourses of TT agents can be associated with environmental agency and the myths in environmental narratives as stated by Hulme (2009) as is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Narrative Myths in Discourses of TT Agents**

Myths	TT main discourses	Observations
Wild-Nature Nostalgia	...around Alternative Lifestyles rather than in Nature	... focus in Alternative Wellbeing sources, diminishing current habits as accumulation, consumption and materialistic- dependence. ... constraints agency because commodities of modern lifestyle. ... incentives agency because personal satisfaction.
Presaging Apocalypse	CC – Peak-Oil – Economic Crisis	... problems regarding to global level but possible to counter with local solutions as Resilience by grow-food and reskilling. ... incentives agency because economic crisis experienced and fear to those risks. ... constraints agency because scepticism supported in the lack of concrete facts around.
Technology-Pride	-----	-----
Justice	... reachable by Relocalization to counter hegemonic globalization	... reflected in Building and empowerment of Communities through self-sufficiency and collective activities, without hierarchical mechanisms. ... incentives agency because community-belonging, inclusiveness and control-decision-power. ... constraints agency because current facilities and individualistic priorities.

Source: personal elaboration from findings and Hulme (2009)

Accordingly, the environmental agency that began from personal interest is experienced through building a desired World more holistic and equitable, within community activities toward local resilience, increasing feelings of empowerment. These collective activities are designed around a visualization of the towns in 2030 generating significant emotional ties of “*belonging to the community*” and to the future, which motivate more participation and action, confirming the relevance of “belonging” in process of change (Lewin, 1947). However, this dynamic has a risk of endorsing the logic of limited intentional communities, the “*group of friends*”, which was also recognized as one explanation of the failure of ecological movements in the 70s. In other words, it is the risk of exclusivity and exclusion of local people who have different interest in the process due to their economic, logistical or emotional conditions for closer involvement. Overcome this constraint is important for the replicability of TT, but also for the institutionalization of this kind of proposals. Also, because we all are part of “the web of life”, and our actions are relevant for the achievement of environmental objectives (Capra, 1996).

Furthermore, as stated by Etzioni (2004), the willingness of the agents differs according with the sources of personal satisfaction –income, consumption or voluntary simplicity-, and the reasons behind action –self-motivation or achievement of basic needs. In this sense, the priority assigned to “*values and beliefs*” around economy and material comfort as “*real*” pillars of welfare is a significant constraint for enlarging awareness and agency. This “*unaware*” circumstance is also reinforced by the lack of concrete threats in close locations, through which ones people can recognize the risks of the current environmental situation. In this sense, respondents indicated environmental and economical “*crisis*” as the only circumstances to generate awareness and motivate change, because in Canada many structural factors sustain this lack of awareness such as “*cheap price of oil*”, comfortable economic status, easy availability of natural resources and uncomplicated settings of everyday life.

Accordingly, agency in *unfreezing* and *moving* stages is particular determined by particular features of the context like time, economic resources, or social acceptance. In this sense, there are aspects related to the valuation,

functionality, satisfaction, and cost-benefits that are relevant for the continuity of the alternative habits implemented. In other words, personal emotions, knowledge and conscience to be involved in 'TT' are facing structural constraints from local, national and global levels, such as information, economic systems, political interest and socio-normative frames, which are demarcating attitudes to value, support or reject 'TT' activities. Therefore, development model becomes important because “the challenge is to translate these insights into political strategies that incorporate multiple modes” (Escobar, 2008:297). It is exemplified in the competition with prices and facilities offered by current everyday-practices, and in other conditions like subsidies or “*politician’s interest*” that facilitate or constraint the local individual or agency.

Additionally, this structural influence is evidenced in the elements mentioned around the expansion of 'TT' to other latitudes, which include economic conditions, abilities current used by people, and existent relations within communities, and of them with the natural environment in different contexts. Comparatively, differences with the UK were mentioned to explain the greater practice of 'TT' in this country first due to the awareness generated by historical factors around CO2 emissions, and second by geographical conditions around boundaries of natural resources. Also, the UK case can be explained by a reduction of psychological barriers related to social reputation, because perhaps 'TT' is already socially acceptable, and reinforced by its extended practice, which increases appreciation of alternative values and habits<sup>10</sup>. And for the replicability in Southern countries, was identified the influence of the motives and will of agents and politicians, which could have stronger basis in economic rather than environmental factors. A comparison among motivations for 'TT' practice in Northern and Southern countries can be an interesting topic for further research.

However, the call for relocalization and the priority assigned to local context in 'TT' are important inputs that allow manoeuvring space to deal with

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<sup>10</sup> Habits as recycling, food production, local markets, reskilling and LETS



structural challenges of everyday agency. Also, strength to counter structural challenges in TT initiatives is correlated to factors which increase within local dynamics. This is the case of motivations from feelings of “belonging”, empowerment to act, and visualization of self-sufficiency via building positive resilience from local conditions. Consequently, there is a wide spectrum for adaptability and identity, which are decisive factors to exercise agency (Escobar, 2008), countering the tedium generated by universal paradigms.

Relocalization is also a main concept of alternative development literature enused by many authors<sup>11</sup>, because it facilitates empowerment and participation in decisions. Accordingly, “the neighbourhood, the local community, is the proper place and frame of reference for responsible work” (Berry, 1996:412). But also, within the local scale it is possible to assure levels for self-sufficiency and control of resources in sustainable forms, as stated by the key principle of Swadeshi in Gandhi’s philosophy, which means “local self-sufficiency” for “the economics of permanence” (Kumar, 1996:418). This relocalization is the major structural claim from TT, not just about its politico-economical implications, but also because it is the central axis of the changes and activities proposed in TT. It is reflected in Tables 1 and 2, but also in the large amount of “Practices” related to relocalization presented in Table 4, where it is presented a correlation of TT with EDP categories.

Within this breakdown is possible to identify the political contents and forms involved in agency from TT. First, the majority of EDP forms used to achieve changes are in the line of subtle transitional forms as *Hybridized Mimicry*, *Mimetic Challenge*, and *Modification*, more than single straight forms rejecting the current socio-political models. However, a general frame of *defiance* and *resistance* is created by the main structural claim towards relocalization of life and economy using post-carbon justifications and discourses. Third, the environmental component of TT is defined from the concept of sustainable development, and not from environment protection as

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<sup>11</sup> Among others: Escobar 2008; Friedman 1992, Heinberg 2004, Holmgren 2002, Norberg-Hodge 2001, Schumacher 1973.

it self. Lastly, there is still an inconsistency in the everyday life of the agents between their current-formal-practices and the discourses and practices related to TT, which is related to structural forces that are evitable just in isolated communities.

In this state of the affairs, the agency exercised by EDP in TT faces considerable limitations in terms of its effectiveness<sup>12</sup> to achieve remarkable social changes in short term. Changes in habits such as oil-dependence or consumption patterns toward the substantial practice of reskilling, local trade and relocalization, are highly dependent on structural conditions that allow their consolidation; clearly not a priority of the current hegemonic power-holders. As it stated by Goldsmith, “the process of globalization and development has also been the process of removing from the local economy, the community and the family the abilities to sustain themselves free of state and corporate domination” (Goldsmith, 1996:501). The clash of development and environment is analogous to the clash in the principles that sustain the logic of structure and agency: global-local, individuality-community, dependence-self-sufficiency, domination-autonomy, life aiming to accumulate-to joy, and materialistic welfare opposed to holistic well-being and voluntary simplicity.

However, Kerkleviet (2005) presented how the influence to authorities and structure from EDP is determined by the power of persuasion generated through relational factors such as consumption patterns or massive numbers of people moving in the same direction. Consequently, if agency networks<sup>13</sup> grow in numbers of agents and their strength promoting the same alternatives, the possibilities to achieve changes grows. In this regard, it is also important that

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<sup>12</sup> The word “effectiveness” was chosen because even if everyday actions are meaningful without win, in terms of social change the influence to decision-makers and policies is a strategic political goal to achieve. Therefore, effectiveness here is related to the extensive time required to achieve it.

<sup>13</sup> “The political, economic and social networks with which we associate ourselves provide us not only with meaning about how we think economic policy is made, but also constitute vehicles for how economic policy, both at home and abroad should be made” (Hobson and Seabrooke, 2007:1).

agents have a clear “flag” of desired outcomes (Rai, 2008), even if it is not a feature of EDP (Kerkleviet, 2009); because it will facilitate the understanding by authorities of the changes promoted by EDP. Also, it can help to overcome communicational constraints between agents and governance, which in addition to the divergence of interests, are related to the features of discourses used by agents and decision-makers. These features are linked with informal-formal, subjective-universal, emotional-rational, timeless-efficiency, and guarantees around basic needs or economic growth, among others.

At last, a significant element of analysis is to be aware of the possibilities to build new political and environmental arrangements, if we assume the responsibility and task to create alternative development forms. It is possible as theories and findings presented in this paper illustrated, because from a socio-constructivist perspective, we can be ‘conscious’ builders of our socio-political institutions.

## Closing

Current settings of governance are concentrated in economic interests seem as an exclusive space, where political and economic institutions are managing the world through normative frameworks focused on trade and economic growth. The globalization process increased even more this trend, reinforcing structural elements that constraint environmental agency. Also, minimal decisions and agreements have been reached in governance spheres to resolve anthropocentric causes of environmental concerns, while at same time claims of some people and scientists around human impact and risk are ignored. Individual and collective agency seems to be in a disempowered position of being passive receptors of established structures.

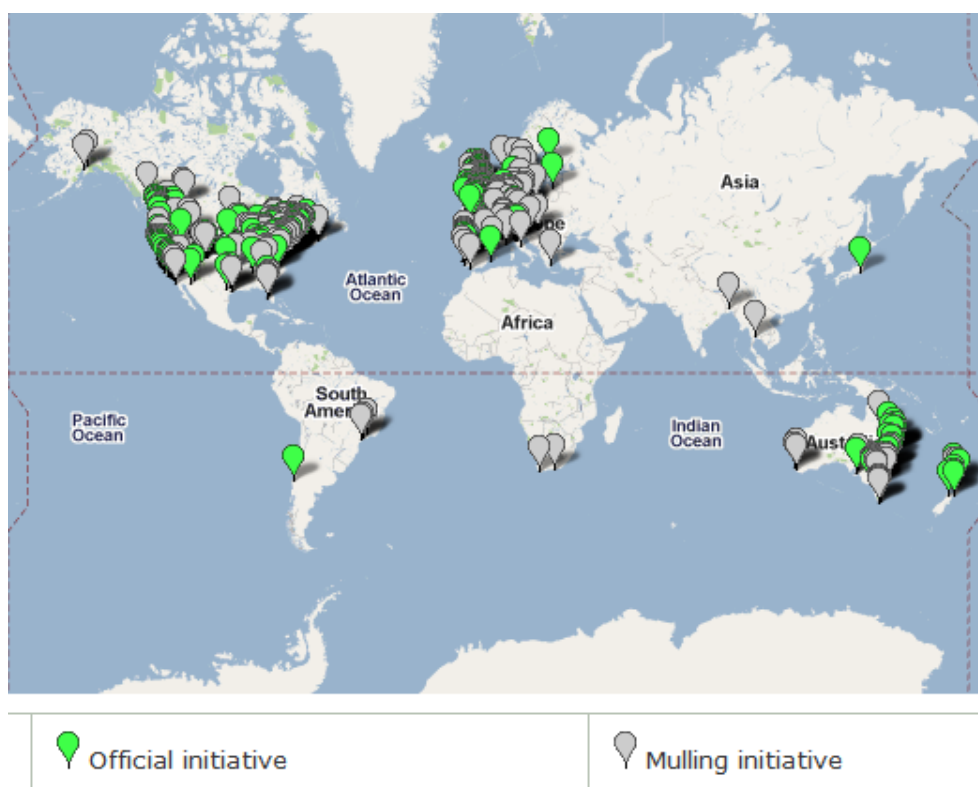
Contrary, even if it is difficult to conclude around a transitional process like the one started by TT just in 2005, to close this paper the author just wants to vindicate the trust and the hope in this kind of proposals. Because the more we are, as greater is our possibility to influence governance decisions towards more equal development for all beings including humanity and the Nature. In this sense, TT has some striking elements such are the international scope, and the implementation of environmental practices in urban areas. Furthermore, the fact that the majority of these initiatives are located in the Global-North, can contribute to an interesting combination of factors favourable for greater impact and influence among inhabitants of our planet and decision-makers.

Proposals around alternative ways of everyday life such as TT retain the benefit of the doubt as far as their possibilities to offer a life more joyful, healthy, and environmental sustainable for us and future generations. In this sense, these alternatives are guides in the pathway to build more harmonious models with enormous potential for greater achievement of well-being in more holistic forms beyond its current boundaries of income and consumption. In the worse case scenario, if changes are just going to be motivated by the increase of current critical situations:

*“When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable” (Friedman, 2002:xiv).*

## Annex 1: TT initiatives around the World

Map 1: TT initiatives around the World



Source: Transition Network website: [www.transitionnetwork.org](http://www.transitionnetwork.org)

Also according to the register of the Network, the number of initiatives is as follow:

As of 6th April 2011, **on this website**, there are:

360 Official initiatives

373 Muller initiatives

In 34 countries

## Annex 2: Differences of Transition Approach

**Table 3**  
**Differences of TT Approach**

<b>Conventional Environmentalism</b>	<b>The Transition Approach</b>
Individual behaviour	Group behaviour
Single issue	Holistic
Tools: Lobbying, campaigning and protesting	Tools: public participation, eco-psychology, arts, culture and creative education
Sustainable development	Resilience / relocalization
Fear, guilt and shock as drivers for action	Hope, optimism and proactivity as drivers for action
Changing National and International policy lobbying	Changing National and International policy by making them electable
The man in the street as the problem	The man in the street as the solution
Blanket campaigning	Targeted interventions
Single level engagement	Engagement on variety of levels
Prescriptive – advocates answers and responses	Acts as a catalyst – no fixed answers
Carbon foot-printing	Carbon foot-printing plus resilience indicators
Belief that economic grow is still possible, albeit greener grow	Designing for economic renaissance, albeit a local one

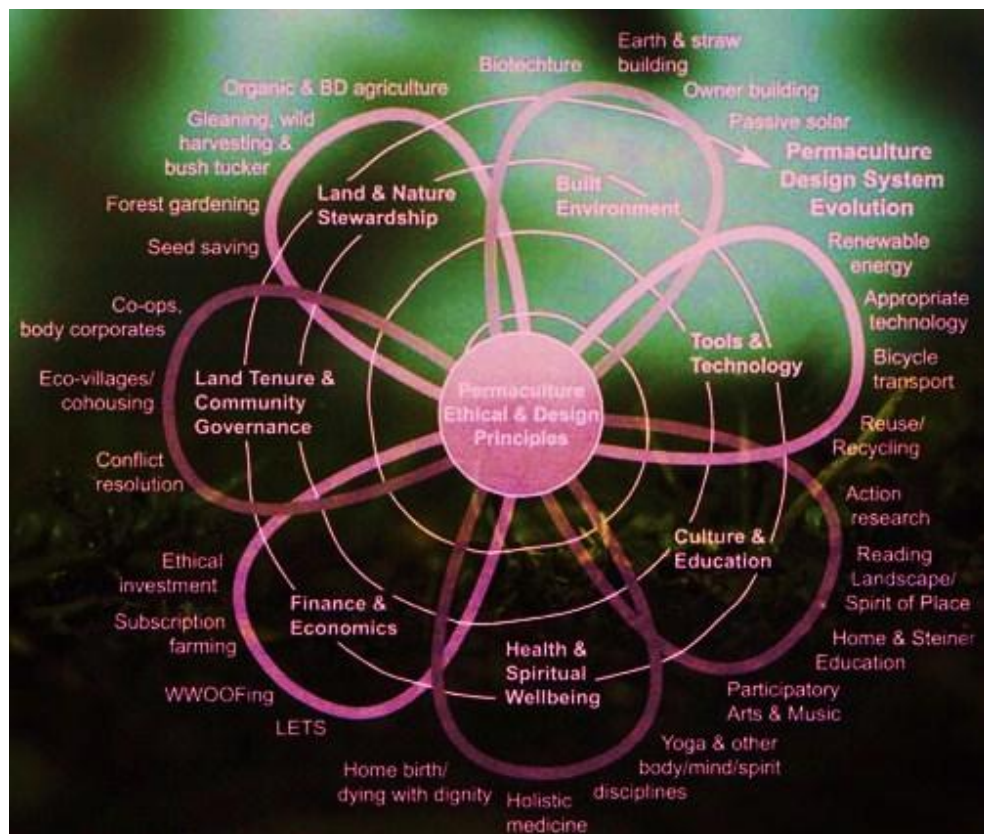
Source: "The Transition Handbook". Hopkins, 2009:135

## Annex 3: Permaculture Principles and Model

### Permaculture Design Principles:

1. Observe and Interact
2. Catch and Store Energy
3. Obtain a Yield
4. Apply Self-regulation and Accept Feedback
5. Use and Value Renewable Resources and Services
6. Produce No Waste
7. Design from Patterns to Details
8. Integrate Rather than Segregate
9. Use Small and Slow Solutions
10. Use and Value Diversity
11. Use Edges and Value the Marginal
12. Creatively Use and Respond to change

**Figure 2**  
**“Permaculture Model”**



Source: “Permaculture: Principles and Pathways beyond Sustainability”. Holmgren, 2002:XX

## Annex 4: EDP categories of TT discourses and practices

**Table 4**  
**EDP categories of TT Discourses and Practices**

Ambits	Themes or Practices of Agents in Canada	EDP category used in relation with current hegemonic development
Current everyday life and practices	Regular Job Private Transport Regular Houses Shopping in regular shops	Axiorality Support/ Compliance Modification
Discourses Used in justifications and Actions	Climate Change Peak-Oil Resilience Re-localization Alternative Welfare Sources Environment Sustainability	Hybridized Mimicry Defiance / Hybridized Mimicry Mimetic Challenge / Modification Defiance/Resistance & Modification/Evasion Defiance/Resistance & Modification/Evasion Hybridized Mimicry / Modification
Practices towards changes proposed	Building Community Use of Open-Space Growing own food Local Markets and LETS Re-skilling EDAP	Modification / Mimetic Challenge Defiance / Mimetic Challenge Defiance/Resistance & Modification/Evasion Hybridized Mimicry / Mimetic Challenge Modification / Mimetic Challenge Hybridized Mimicry/ Defiance/Resistance
Practices to set-up conditions for implementing changes	Raise Awareness Form working Groups Visible practices implemented Presentation and bridge to local governments	Advocacy / EDP category according to arguments and claims Hybridized Mimicry/ Mimetic Challenge EDP according to the examples implemented Mimetic Challenge / Advocacy

Source: personal elaboration from findings and EDP theories



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