

Review of Shaun Chamberlin's *The Transition Timeline for a Local, Resilient Future* (2009, Green Books)

This is a companion book to Rob Hopkins' hugely popular *The Transition Handbook* and represents another contribution to the growing work in fleshing out in more detail what the localised, resilience focused vision of a low/post-oil future in a climate changed world looks like from a Transition movement perspective. *The Transition Timeline* is an extremely readable, beautifully produced and well laid out book, and began its life as part of an Energy Descent Action Plan, which is one of the significant milestones for any local Transition initiative. According to the author this book "is a first sweep at uncovering the true possibilities of our near-future, and perhaps also a balm for those who are starting to wonder whether hope is now found only in denial" (p.15). The book is divided into 5 sections – 'Cultural Stories and Visions of the Future'; 'A Deeper look at the Transition Vision'; 'Making best use of this Timeline'; 'Global Context – Climate change/Fuel Depletion'; and 'UK Context'. The book is, as Rob Hopkins writes, "designed to be of use to those planning for the future of their communities, in particular those engaged in using the Transition model" (p.91).

Of particular interest is the book's focus on the psychological and cultural dimensions of transition, which to my mind is as, if not more, important as the compiling of compelling statistical and empirical evidence for the necessity and desirability of what the Green Party's minister for Energy, Eamon Ryan has termed, 'the planned retreat from fossil fuels' and the inevitable (and I stress inevitable) transition to a low carbon and low energy future. The book outlines four scenarios for the near future 'Denial' (Business as usual and ignoring the evidence); 'Hitting the Wall' (acknowledging the issues but continuing with business as usual); 'The Impossible Dream' (utopian techno-optimism and ignoring the evidence); and 'The Transition Vision' (cultural shift and confronting the challenges). In each scenario we are given a 'View from 2027' outlining the headline issues/developments. For example, in the 'Denial' scenario the view from 2027 includes 'global population crash' '30% of all species are extinct' accompanied by warfare, social unrest and "much of our fossil fuel infrastructure lies unused and rusting" (p.26), while the view from 2027 from the 'Transition Vision' talks of "carbon drawdown" techniques, especially in agriculture" and the exponential growth in alternative energy technologies (now known as 'cool technology') and the emergence of 'Tradable Energy Quotas' as a way of incentivising energy saving. Most chapters follows the same structure beginning with 'Present position and trends'; 'cultural story change' and 'looking back from 2027'

The vexed and controversial issue of population growth and size is addressed: "Our aim, then, must be to find means of stabilising population other than misery, lest we find ourselves working to spread ever-dwindling resources among ever-growing populations" (p.46), with an emphasis on voluntary limiting of family sizes and looking back from 2027 on the mainstreaming of this once taboo subject and political parties and public discourse engaging in finding ways of reducing population growth as well as per-capita ecological and carbon impact. An interesting feature of the view from 2027 here is a shift away from 'internal migration' as people tend to now stay in the area they were born

and structured policies aiming for zero net migration (citizenship to climate change refugees but less to economic migrants) – both of which are worthy of greater debate since neither are uncontroversial.

This book, perfectly in keeping with the ‘realistic optimism’ of the Transition movement, offers a sort of SWOT analysis or ‘future proofing’ of the UK in relation to key drivers of its future – energy, climate, water, food, population, land-use etc. This book also continues to develop the Transition vision to a ‘war time’ mobilisation trope in its appeals to ‘grow you own food’, greater community solidarity (‘Community Land Trusts’ and local ‘convivia’ groups of the Slow Food movement) with a trademark permaculture focus with the objective of increasing national self-sufficiency in food. Here, recent talk in Ireland of the need for a ‘Food Security’ task force and policy finds particular resonance. Perhaps above all else this book, and the wider Transition movement, underscores the simple but powerfully obvious fact that a key, if not the key, to any successful transition is the re/creation of ‘community’ and the mobilisation of the collective energies of people around collective, publicly shared ends and projects.

The attractive and empirically informed vision of a Transitioned future outlined in this book of its great achievements: to present practical, achievable and eminently possible futures for ourselves that are within both our current range of technological innovation and imagined ways of being and living. In other words, while of course a society or community that has made the transition away from fossil fuels and high-impact consumption-lifestyles is clearly different from dominant current ways of life, it is not so different that people can neither see these transitioned lifestyles as impossible or unimaginable.

For example, on transport the Chamberlin puts it eloquently “while what we actually desire is accessibility (the ability to access the goods and services people travel for), UK transport policy to date has focused on increasing mobility (the ability to travel further and faster)” (p.72) leading to a re-orientation of policy towards maximising accessibility while minimising mobility. While the vision of a resilient transitioned community – “A tight-knit, innovative human community, well-adapted to its local environment and holding a wide range of skills, resources, stories and available responses” (p.85), “facing challenges together and unearthing our communal power” (p.152) is one which is being played out ‘on the ground’ as it were as communities in the UK and Ireland and beyond engage in the transition process themselves.

There is a welcome (though rather short) link of the TT movement to the ‘Green New Deal’ on p.87 and I am probably not alone in wishing there was more of this ‘joined up’ thinking – linking the grass-roots, localised vision of TT to macro-economic and national societal level changes such as outlined in the GND. But, one cannot do everything in one book and I hope Shaun Chamberlin along with Rob Hopkins and others in local Transition initiatives in the UK, Ireland and elsewhere-- are exploring these links from the micro to the macro. In particular, I am perhaps not alone in being interested in the economics of the Transition process. It is good to see here in this book a focus on limiting conventional economic growth (pp.88-89) and a recognition that “Any system that

depends on continual economic growth is doomed” (p.89). The timeliness of Chamberlin’s statement that “our economic system as currently designed fails without continued economic growth” (p.125), leading to “end of our current energy-intensive way of life” (p.128) can also be found in a report published in April by Prof. Tim Jackson of the UK’s Sustainable development commission *Prosperity without Growth* (<http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=914>) which offers further empirical and normative support for the broad transition vision.

Aspects of the book I thoroughly enjoyed were the brief quotations in the margins of each page - a great source of inspiration! - and the section written by Rob Hopkins outlining a variety of innovative ‘tools’ for developing an EDAP – ‘The 2030 school reunion’; ‘Backcasting’; ‘Transition Tales’; ‘Visualising the Future’; ‘Resilience Indicators’; ‘The EDAP in 2 hours exercise’ (p.98-112). In keeping with the open space approach central to the Transition process, the book is being updated and seeks contributions from readers at: <http://transitiontowns.org/forum/forum.php?id=22>. This is a book to be read (ideally alongside Rob Hopkins’ *The Transition Handbook*) and shared with others (ideally fellow members of a local Powerdown course). *The Transition Timeline* is an invaluable contribution to those of us engaged in Transition Initiatives in our communities and the designing of Energy Descent Action Plans as the final step in the transition process. It offers practical ideas for planning for a healthier, better world with less fossil fuels and a great contribution to the further development of the Transition movement.

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