

# RE-CITY

INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM  
FOR SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

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RAPPORTEURSHIPS "FACING CLIMATE CHANGE"

## "A NEW SOCIETY FOR A NEW CLIMATE"

SESSION WITH **ANA HUERTAS**  
**I ROB HOPKINS.**



# A new society for a new climate. The power of “what if”

Invited Speaker: Ana Huertas & Dr. Rob Hopkins, Transition Network

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This report is a synthesis of the debate carried out with Dr. Rob Hopkins and Ana Huertas in the conference series “Facing climate change” organised by Catalunya Europa Foundation in the context of the Re-City project. This session, entitled "A new society for a new climate", consisted of a public lecture, a seminar with participants from the academic sector of Catalonia and a lunch-debate that brought together personalities from the economic, social, political and local business sectors. The mentioned activities were held in Barcelona at the Antoni Tàpies Foundation on December 2018. The content order along the report is thematic, and does not represent the order in which it was exposed by Dr. Rob Hopkins and Ana Huertas. The conference series “Facing climate change” is developed in collaboration with BBVA, Generalitat de Catalunya, Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona and Barcelona City Council.

## Biography

**Ana Huertas** is part of the coordinating team for the Spanish Transition Hub and is the vice-president of the European Network for Community-led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability (ECOLISE). She has worked as an international cooperation technician for community development, sustainable agriculture and holistic education, and is also a trained Permaculture teacher and trainer for the Transition Movement. Huertas has conducted research on climate change, urban and rural resilience, group dynamics and participatory tools for social change.

Huertas has a BSc in international relations from the University of Plymouth and a first master's degree in 'international aid work and disaster management'. After working for two years in different countries in development projects (Morocco, Nepal, Bolivia, Argentina), Ana returned to university to deepen her knowledge about agriculture and undertook a master in 'sustainable agriculture and rural development' at Montpellier SupAgro. She has been involved in community-led projects since 2011, taking part in the European permaculture teacher's partnership, Transition Towns initiatives and ECOLISE. She currently supports the work of Jillian Hovey on regenerative systems design.

**Dr. Rob Hopkins** is the co-founder of both Transition Town Totnes and Transition Network. This grew out of many years' experience in education, teaching permaculture and natural building, and setting up the first 2-year full-time permaculture course in the world, at Kinsale Further Education College in Ireland, as well as co-ordinating the first eco-village development in Ireland to be granted planning permission. Hopkins lectures and writes widely on peak oil and Transition. Hopkins holds a MSc in Social Research and completed a PhD at the University of Plymouth entitled 'Localisation and resilience at the local level: the case of Transition Town Totnes'. More recently Hopkins was awarded Honorary Doctorates by the University of the West of England and the University of Namur. He recently became a Visiting Fellow at the University of Plymouth.

Hopkins is author of 'The Transition Handbook: from oil dependence to local resilience', which was voted the 5th most popular book taken on holiday by MPs during the summer of 2008. Furthermore, he recently wrote 'The Transition Companion: making your community more resilient in uncertain times', published in October 2011. He publishes the blog [www.transitionculture.org](http://www.transitionculture.org), recently voted 'the 4th best green blog in the UK'. He was the winner of the 2008 Schumacher Award, and was named by the Independent as one of the UK's top 100 environmentalists. He is the winner of the 2009 Observer Ethical Award for the Grassroots Campaigner category. In February 2012, Rob and the Transition Network were among NESTA and The Observer's list of 'Britain's 50 New Radicals'.

## Summary

"I invite you to imagine how many uses this object could have", environmental activists Rob Hopkins and Ana Huertas said, showing an abstract object to the attendees. "With this exercise, we invite the imagination to arise, because in order to fight against climate change we need a lot of imagination and a lot of energy" Hopkins explained. Like this, the conference "A new society for a new climate" began.

"Governments and economic powers have imposed the story that we live in a fantastic world and that there is nothing better, but it is not true, there are other alternative models of cities that are more friendly and respectful of the environment, without cars, that promote the local economy and where people is more connected to each other", explained Rob Hopkins, founder of the Transition Movement and PhD in Sustainable Transition Movement, summarizing the principles of the Transition Movement. This model wants to move towards a world much more sustainable, without oil and promoting other ways of imagining the future of cities.

"We must urgently react to climate change, it is a real climatic emergency, we do not think that this will be a problem for our grandchildren, but it is, and we have to act now." That's why the Transition Movement proposes other ways of living, with imagination and innovation, so we do not have to depend on cars, oil and polluting industries. We live in a moment of transition towards a new model of society, from which our movement starts", explained Ana Huertas, which is the coordinator of the *Red de Transición* and an expert in sustainable agriculture and community development.

The Transition Movement was born 12 years ago and has a presence in about fifty countries in a hundred towns. Among the ongoing projects, there are cases of "cities in transition" such as Preston in England or Liège in Belgium, where dozens of local economy experiences and social cooperatives have been developed thanks to the collaboration of city councils with citizens.

"We have to create spaces, so people can exchange experiences, establish connections and trust relationships that allow them to promote their own projects as a result of cooperation and real collaboration with local administrations", said Ana Huertas, who criticized the governments. "They often put obstacles in community projects and only speak of participation when it suits them, but they actually act without listening to the citizens". "We have to promote the associative fabric so that communities are owners of their own projects, we have to lose the fear of imagining and being creative", said Huertas, who gave the example of Mexico City, where the local government has created the figure of the creative consultancy and the so-called "Laboratory for the City", an office for the experimentation of new forms of collaboration and citizen participation led by the artist and journalist Gabriella Gómez-Mont.

In Spain, we also have many good examples grouped under the project "*Municipios en transición*", in towns such as Carcaboso (Extremadura), Orendain (Basque Country), Argelaguer, Cardedeu or La Garrotxa (Catalonia).

Finally, Hopkins vindicated the responsible use of new technologies so that they serve to develop community projects and not to isolate us socially pending at every moment of social networks that "take away time to think and imagine". According to Hopkins, the transition to another model of society is inevitable if we really want to stop climate change. "Climate

change is one of the greatest failures in the imagination of the history of mankind, because we have given up imagining other forms of life".

## Transition movement

According to the latest version of the IPCC it is imperative to keep the temperature increase below 1.5°C from the pre-industrial era (V. Masson-Delmotte, et al., 2018). However, if we maintain the pathway that we are currently experiencing, we will have an increase of 3 or 4°C. This urges governments, institutions, companies and communities to give a quick unprecedented profound response, as we have seen that most actions made up to now have not worked.

Transition started 12 years ago as a movement of communities that are reimagining and rebuilding the world, that seek to build community resilience in the face of peak oil, climate change and the economic crisis (Figure 1). Currently, the Transition Movement is present in 50 countries as a bottom-up kind of approach, because "if we wait for the government, it will be too late. If we try to act on their own, it will be too little. But if we do it with the people around us, it might just be enough and in time" Hopkins said.



Figure 1 Transition Movement poster to celebrate the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Retrieved from: <https://www.re-city.net/admin/assets/uploads/files/df7ff-presentacio-rob-hopkins-conferencia.pdf>

Huertas explained that they do not know exactly what they are doing but this is not important. What matters is that they are doing things anyway because they work with an imaginative vision of the future (i.e. they try to fill the gaps they see in the future with positive possibilities). These positive outcomes will arise through the enhance of the community approach and building resilience, i.e. improving our capacity to overcome future problems in a collective and creative way. Another way of doing that is through permaculture, that similarly to Transition Movement, aims to create systems that are ecologically-sound and economically viable, which provide for their own needs, do not exploit or pollute, and are therefore sustainable in the long term. There are also other movements and approaches with similar goals, like urban agriculture movements and renewable energy movements. However, Hopkins remarked that what matters is that all these movements are part of the same puzzle, that each movement pursues the same goal in its own way, and the name becomes irrelevant.

## **We are in a climate emergency, we have to act. We can no longer think that this is something that our grandchildren will have to deal with – Rob Hopkins**

Hopkins began his lecture asking to think of alternative uses for a certain object in pairs of strangers – i.e. two people that do not know each other. Conference attendees were able to mention many different uses. Afterwards, Hopkins revealed that the reason he likes to start by doing this activity is that the attendees become very engaged with each other and the imagination comes into the room. According to Hopkins, when the IPCC says that we need to see rapid, urgent and far-reaching changes to all the aspects of our society to limit the global warming to 1.5 °C, most people reacts with boredom and aversion. However, the reaction should be the opposite, similar to that shown by the attendees of this conference after doing the exercise.

### **The power of imagination in facing climate change**

Hopkins introduced a new book he just published, about imagination (<https://www.robhopkins.net/the-book/>), which for him represents the ability to see things as if they could be otherwise. He believes that if there was ever a time in history that we need to see things as if they could be otherwise, this is now. Hopkins was inspired by a researcher in America called Kyung Hee Kim, who did some research on imagination. She gathered all of the data from the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT), which is a creativity test, and concluded that imagination and IQ rose together until 1990, and then the IQ kept rising and imagination went into a steady and persistent decline (Hee Kim, 2011). The published paper appeared on the front page of Newsweek (<https://www.newsweek.com/creativity-crisis-74665>) and people began to worry about the economic growth and the artistic world, but no one in the climate change and social justice movement wondered what did that mean for them.

Hopkins pointed that climate change is the greatest failure of imagination in the history of our species. We are living in a time that imagination is decreasing. But why our imagination is not as strong as it could be? Hopkins believes that one reason could be that we spend less and less time in nature –our children spend less and less time playing in that kind of creative freeway.

Smartphones that are always on affects our ability to concentrate and our attention span, thus having all kinds of impacts on our imagination.

Hopkins remarked the relevance of the hippocampus: the imagination and the memory centre in our brain. When we are very anxious and stressed or when we had trauma, the hippocampus visibly shrinks, people lose their ability to look at the future in imaginative, hopeful and positive ways and get stuck in the present. This is very much like what is happening in our society right now. For this reason, Hopkins argued that when a fundamental model is broken and is creating division and dangers, as we see now, we need to be focusing on imagination much rather than innovation.

How the conditions where the hippocampus flourishes again can be created? Hopkins mentioned Rosie Summerton, who runs a project in Dundee called Art Angel which works with people with mental health issues, anxiety, stress, etc., and they work with art. When you come through their door, you are not a patient or a client, you are an artist who is preparing work for an exhibition and they support you with paints and paper. Summerton says that fundamentally they create safety and hope, which Hopkins believes is vital for us to be able to think more imaginatively about the future.

Hopkins also pointed the importance of imagination as the first step for the 'what if'. He met a research group who ask people to imagine a lemon. People can hold, throw, cut and smell the imaginary lemon, and hear the drops falling into the glass to make lemon juice. These researchers work with people who are overweight. If they help those people to imagine what it would be like when they are fit and exercising and feeling very good in a way that is multi-sensory, like they have done with the lemon, it is so much more effective in helping people reduce weight. Transition movement relies on trying to create this sort of imagination guide, in terms of sustainability. It is difficult to hear stories about how fabulous the place in the future is where our emissions are close to or even zero. According to Hopkins, we need to imagine that if we are successful in reaching this place, we could have better food, better conversation, better parties, cleaner air, cleaner rivers, etc. It is still entirely possible that we could create cities where we bring the wild and the biodiversity into part of our everyday urban life, with full of food being grown and people connecting around food, buildings built using the materials of our bioregion, and without any car, but we need to envision it.

As explained by Hopkins, what they do in the Transition Movement is to try to show that those futures alive now in the present, to give people a kind of a visceral taste of what that world could be like now, in their neighbourhood or in their community. No matter how small or big those projects are they show that a different version of the future is existing already in the present.

A challenge to be considered is how people is engaged to the transition in a society where many people feel that they do not have enough time. There is no time for imagination at work, at school and neither at home, as we fill our time with Facebook and Twitter when we could be daydreaming. In average, American people spend 900 hours a year on Facebook and 1600 hours a year in front of the television. While reading 20 books a year would imply just 417 hours. Therefore, we do have time to both do transition and to read books. If the Transition group wants to enable people to step up, get involved in transition and bring their imagination to this, they have to create spaces for it. These spaces have to make people feel safe and



supported. We have to bring the play, the safety, the nature connection, and the digital-free dreaming spaces back, and that is what the Transition group can do.

### Distilling the learnings from the Transition Movement

Some of the learnings from Transition Movement, now that recently celebrated his 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, are:

- **Be creative, playful and open: create spaces for the “what if?”**

One of the things that Hopkins loves about Transition is that it approaches topics that one might think of as being very depressing or intense and tries to bring playfulness and creativity on that. Transition does not see innovation as a novelty, but as a way to open our mind, to be able to use already existing elements in a combination or with a purpose that has not been used yet.



**Figure 2. The Tooting Twirl:** “let nobody say after today that it’s not possible”. Retrieved from: <https://www.robhopkins.net/2017/07/17/podcast-the-tooting-twirl-let-nobody-say-after-today-that-its-not-possible/>.

Hopkins shared the example of an area of London called Tooting, where the community has no shared space –there is no square or green area. There is one place it could be, which is normally full of buses. One day, the community took this space over. As it can be seen in Figure 2, they sent all the buses away and they turned into the community space that they had spent years dreaming of –there were food, music, coffee, dancing, drummers, things for kids to do, flowers, etc. Thus, people were wondering what if this was our space, and the conversation moved from “if” to “when” because they spent a day living as if that had already happened.

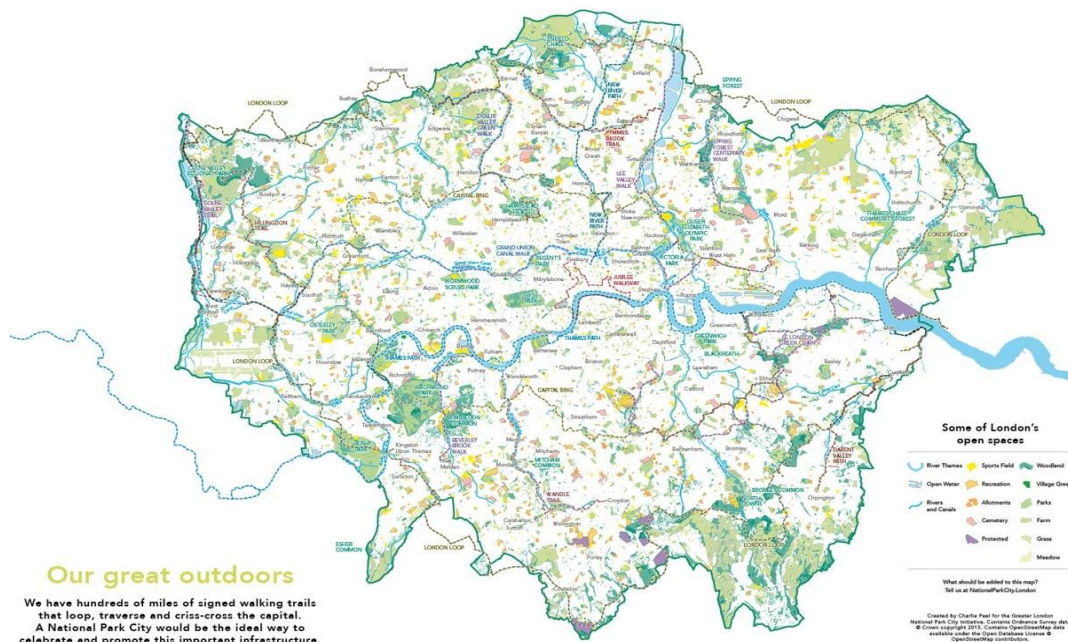
According to Hopkins, if we really want to create a space in which the citizens’ imagination can flourish to imagine and rebuild the world, we need to promote the space for the ‘what if’. He gave the example of Mexico City. There, Gabriella Gómez-Mont runs the Ministry of Imagination, called *Laboratorio para la Ciudad* (in English: Laboratory for the City), within the Mayor’s office. Her role is to sit within that local government and make sure that it is being as imaginative as it could possibly be.

- **Be entrepreneurial: fostering the bottom-up**

The idea of “if we want to see new economies, we need to create those ourselves” has been a big shift over the last six years in the Transition Movement. That’s why they propose to get started now and here with whoever else around us might be interested.

For instance, there is an event carried out in Hopkins’ town, Totnes, every year called The Local Entrepreneur Forum, where about 400 people gather together to support people that has an idea. “If you want to start a bakery and you need 10 thousand pounds, a building and someone to design a website, there you may find a person who have a building, 10 people who are willing to invest a thousand pounds each one, and a web designer” Hopkins said. This event has been going on for seven years and many businesses have emerged from it.

Hopkins showed many examples of how the citizenry can be entrepreneurial to do the transition. First, he mentioned a project in London called the Greater London National Park. This idea began when the geographer Daniel Raven-Ellison took his son all around the UK to visit all the different National Parks. When he came back to London, he looked at a map and realised that actually 47% and 2.5% of Greater London are green and blue spaces, respectively (<https://www.gigl.org.uk/keyfigures/>). Ellison thought that if they could just make another 0.5%, then Great London would be half green and blue. Raven-Ellison's idea (Figure 3) started off in 2015 with a single blog post (<https://geographical.co.uk/opinion/item/1314-park-life>), and after several years of advocacy grew into a successful crowdfunding campaign that raised more than £32,000, and eventually a partnership with the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan (<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/28/world/london-national-park-city/index.html>). Raven-Ellison’s idea is now a reality, since July 2019 the London National Park City is officially the world’s first National Park City (<http://www.nationalparkcity.london/launch>).



**Figure 3. Greater London National Park City Initiative.** Project ideated by Daniel Raven-Ellison in 2015. Retrieved from: <https://geographical.co.uk/opinion/item/1314-park-life>.

Another example of entrepreneurs are Dan Edelstyn and Hilary Powell, who are a filmmaker and a printmaker, respectively. They started a project called the Bank Job (<https://bankjob.pictures/>) when the bank closed in their neighbourhood, Walthamstow, in East London and they were seeing the impacts of austerity that the government had imposed over the last eight years. To fight against it, they turned the old bank into a printing press – they called it an act of citizen money creation– and they produced beautiful notes which are not a currency but limited-edition artworks (Figure 4). The people who they celebrate in their artworks are the people in their neighbourhood who are saving other people from austerity – they are the head teacher in the primary school where they have no funding for the arts, the directors of a project to keep young men out of gangs, a man who mortgaged his house to start a food bank and a Muslim family who feed 200 people 2 meals a day every day out of their own house. Dan and Hilary sell the notes and people buy them. They want to raise 50 thousand pounds to distribute half of that money between these charities drawn on the notes, and the other half will be used on the secondary debt market to buy a million pounds worth of debt and then cancel the debt.



Figure 4. Artworks of the Bank Job project, led by Hilary Powell and Dan Edelstyn. Retrieved from: <https://transitionnetwork.org/news-and-blog/hilary-powell-and-dan-edelstyn-on-the-bank-job-people-seemed-starved-of-making/>.

Hopkins highlighted once again the relevance of the **bottom-up** “what if” questions. His last example is about Preston (<https://transitionnetwork.org/news-and-blog/the-inspiring-tale-of-the-re-imagining-of-prestons-economy/>), which is a city in the north of England that is pretty economically unexciting place –lots of poverty, really struggling. They had a very conventional economic development model, and they wonder **what if** they did this in a completely different way and aimed to reactivate economics creating as many connections with different things as possible –to create cooperatives and spaces where the money can circulate and stay locally. Currently, people talk about the Preston model, which can be defined as a holistic framework for integrating community, cooperative, and public assets into a mutually supporting system of local economic prosperity.

- **Seize the opportunities that present themselves**

Current times can seem so much like a time when nothing is possible, that big companies have everything completely under control. Besides, one may think that it would be great to make an initiative that could be exportable to other places. According to Huertas, a local response does not have to be escalated in order to be sustainable. We do not have to pay attention to how to make profit from our idea or how to extend it to other people and places, as it limits what we are doing and takes away our energy. In fact, small initiatives can grow and spread only if we start them.



**Figure 5. The Brasserie Cooperative Liégeoise (a small brewery) and Les Petits Producteurs shop, which are cooperations arisen from *Ceinture Aliment-Terre* project, in Liege.** Retrieved from: <https://www.robhopkins.net/2018/03/26/a-delicious-taste-of-the-future-in-liege/>.

According to Hopkins, if we are creative there are possibilities. He referred to *Ceinture Aliment-Terre Liégeoise* (CATL, in English: Liege Food Belt) (<https://www.catl.be/>) as one of his favourite transition projects. They wondered **what if** in a generation time, half or the majority of the food eaten in Liege was grown on the land closest to Liege. Hopkins went to Liege in 2014 for an event where they showed this idea to academics, food writers, chefs, etc. Hopkins returned to Liege in March 2018 and, since his last visit, they have raised 5 million euros from local people, which have been invested in the creation of 14 new cooperatives –they have started two vineyards, a small brewery called Brasserie Cooperative Liégeoise, a farm, a business that delivered with bicycles around the city, and two shops called Les Petits Producteurs (Figure 5). In these shops, they give the price the farmer wants. In November 2018, they have opened their third one. The manager of these shops, called Pascal Hennen, believes that when they will have 10 shops, the supermarkets will start to fragilize. Further, Hopkins argued that we do not need to campaign against supermarkets –instead, we just need to start building something better and over time that becomes the new reality.

Hopkins highlighted that the exciting thing in Liege is that these projects started with them writing a plan and then about two years later their municipality were writing their vision document for the next five years of the area. Therefore, *Ceinture Aliment-Terre* which started as a small initiative is now the policy for the whole region.

- **Put community and ownership at the centre**

Hopkins thinks that when we do community activism, we tend to be focused on the target of how we reduce carbon emissions or other technical goals too often. He believes that we

should pay more attention to how we do community activism, to build care in a time that our communities are becoming more and more fragmented and isolated.

An example of so is Billinge and Orrell, a Transition Group of Wigan, in the north of England, that established the Greenslate Community Farm in 2012 (<https://greenslatefarm.org.uk/>, Figure 6). They took a farm, which their local government wanted to sell, into **community ownership**. They run it to provide care for people in the community through growing food and learning how to cook food.



**Figure 6. The Billinge and Orrell Transition Group of Wigan, in the north of England.** This group established the Greenslate Community Farm in 2012. Retrieved from: <https://transitionnetwork.org/stories/greenslate-community-farm-billinge-orrell-england/>.

Another example is a brewery in Totnes, Hopkins' town –he is one of the directors of the New Lion brewery (<https://www.newlionbrewery.co.uk/>). It is designed as a kind of a transition brewery. In September 2019, they are planning to sell the business to the community, so it becomes a 100% owned by the community. One of the things that Hopkins sees in a lot of transition groups is the creation of these models where people can fund projects –whether it is an energy company, a food business or a shop– rather than putting their money into banks, which most of them invest in questionable things. If we fund these projects, we will start to see the world changing in the way that we want to see.

Hopkins believes that another lesson from the Transition Movement is that if we want to make a very ambitious transition and change food, housing and energy systems of the places where we live in, it will require us owning assets –whether it is land, buildings, etc.

Hopkins gave the example of a project called Atmos Totnes, which has been carried out in Hopkins' town and has himself as one of the directors. It is led by Totnes Community Development Society (TCDS). The project began when an old milk factory, called Dairy Crest, closed in 2007 and 160 people lost their jobs. In that moment, the Atmos Totnes started a campaign to say that the community should own that place and develop and design what happens there. After campaigning for about seven years, an agreement was signed by TCDS, Dairy Crest and McCarthy & Stone –the UK's leading retirement housebuilder– on August 2014 (For more information, see: <https://atmostotnes.org/the-project/the-agreement-weve-reached/>).

Then, in October 2014 they ran a consultation for what should happen there –more than 5.5 thousand people contributed their ideas in a town of 9 thousand citizens. With the results, they produced a plan (<https://atmostotnes.org/referendum/>), which included housing that people can afford, workshop spaces, a new space for music, etc. The unusual fact of that

project is that for the first time they used a new community power, to get a planning consent through a referendum. Further, once it will be built, it will be in community ownership, which will give more control of where to go from there.

- **Support each other**

The idea of how we do things matter as much as what we do is an important approach in Transition. According to Hopkins, we have to pay attention to how the group works and how we support each other and reduce the risk of burnout and exhaustion.

There is a Transition Group in America, where they run a Repair Cafe (<http://www.transitionpasadena.org/repair-cafeacute-pasadena/november-repair-caf>). It is in Pasadena, so it is very close to NASA and Caltech. People working in the Repair Cafe repairs your devices, clothes, tools, etc. for free, but there is one condition –while it is being repaired, you sit in a chair opposite that person and you tell them a story about your life. According to Hopkins, in addition to repairing the object, it may also help in “repairing” people. It is a smart way to start reconnecting people.

Another example can be found in Totnes. There, people who are counsellors and therapists offer support free of charge to the people who are at the middle of the Transition activism. The idea is to support each other and reduce the risk of burnout.

(<https://www.transitiontowtotnes.org/groups/inner-transition/mentoring-wellbeing-support/>).

- **Weave your community together**

Hopkins gave the example of Ungersheim, a little town in Alsace, France. Ungersheim is a former mining town. However, in the mid-80s, all the mines closed, and everybody lost their jobs. The mayor of the town, called Jean-Claude Mensch, was a miner as well as his father was. In 2011, Mensch saw a film about the Transition Movement called In Transition 2.0, and he decided to do it in Ungersheim –they turned all the food in the schools to be a 100% organic, they created a market garden on 8 hectares to grow the food and to train local young people to become commercial growers of food, they created the biggest solar farm in the whole region, they created a local currency called the radis, they built a building to conserve the products coming out of the garden, they moved from a school bus into a horse, etc. (<https://transitionnetwork.org/stories/ungersheim-village-transition-france/>) (Figure 7). This story is celebrated in a film by film-maker Marie-Monique Robin called “*Qu’est ce qu’on attend?*” (in English: “What are we waiting for?”) (2016) (You can see here the trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwLvYV301MA>). As stated by Hopkins, the real power of these projects is that you see a community starting to wave itself, and people do not feel lonely anymore as they have more and more meals in each other’s houses or a glass of wine together.



**Figure 7. Transition actions taken in Ungersheim, France.** There are shown the solar farm, the building for the market garden to process and store the products, the horse powered transport system, a shirt of *La Semaine Solaire*, and the local currency called the radis. Retrieved from: <https://transitionnetwork.org/stories/ungersheim-village-transition-france/>.

- **Keep telling great stories**

Hopkins believes that story telling is an important part of the Transition Movement. He gave the example of Leo Johnson's story (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/wine/11528367/Leo-Johnson-making-wine-turned-our-street-into-a-community.html>), whose brother is the British politician Boris Johnson. Leo Johnson lives in London and he is a kind of sustainability consultant person. In May 2014, a woman was found dead at her home –she had been dead for seven years. Johnson wondered how many neighbours in Brent would come knocking on his door, and the answer was nobody. A month later, he severed his Achilles tendon and he was forced to walk slowly. During a walk in his neighbourhood, Johnson saw that there were people growing grapes in different places, and he never noticed that before. Johnson, thinking about his isolation and loneliness in the neighbourhood, asked an Italian old man in the street, called Paolo Sentini, if he knew how to make wine. Sentini answered: "the soles of my feet are still red from the first 29 years of my life". From there, they created a project to make some wine



**Figure 8. Brent residents with their wine.** Retrieved from: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/wine/11528367/Leo-Johnson-making-wine-turned-our-street-into-a-community.html>.

in the street and invite everybody on the street, and it worked (Figure 8).

Hopkins remarked that the point is to share stories about people who find new ways to come together, be creative, focus on taking care of the people, seize new opportunities and be entrepreneurial. Great stories must be spread so that transition movement can grow.

According to Hopkins, the big work for the next 2 or 3 years is to disseminate those learnings, those grate stories, because there is no time to reinvent everything from scratch again.

## Transition is already happening – Ana Huertas

As defined by Huertas, *Red de Transición* (in English: Transition Network) is the organisation in Spain that promotes all the approaches that Rob showed, as well as to bring Spanish's good practices to other countries.

### *Red de Transición* (Spanish Transition Network)

The Transition Movement is generally articulated by local transition initiatives, and a national or regional hub which offers network, support and visibility. In Spain, the hub is called *Red de Transición*, and offers support by giving visibility to local projects, connecting individuals and initiatives, amplifying the stories of transition, offering trainings and direct support, and connecting with sister movements. Initiatives do not depend on *Red de Transición* to do their work –only in the case they want some support or if they want to connect to other initiatives or movements such as the permaculture movement, or international networks like ECOLISE (European Network for Community-led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability).

Figure 9 shows total initiatives and current active initiatives in Spain. Since 2008, there have been more than 60 initiatives. In 2018, there were only 29 active initiatives. One may think that the transition is not working well in Spain, as many initiatives have disappeared. However, Huertas believes that nothing is going wrong. She argued that all the missing initiatives that are not currently working have not disappeared. Instead, most of them may have transformed into another movements or initiatives in which the transition approach does not fit that well, maybe they have completely reinvented themselves, or maybe their members have split up and have created new different projects. Therefore, Huertas emphasized the current initiatives rather than paying too much attention to projects that have disappeared.

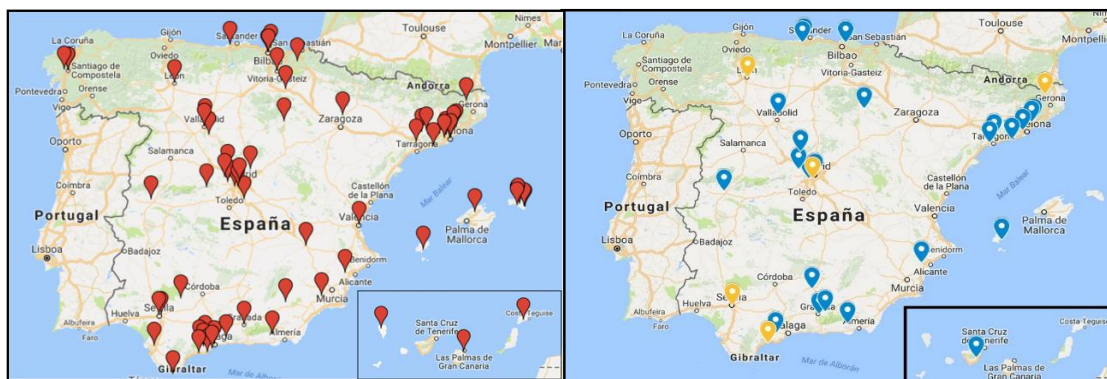


Figure 9. Total initiatives appeared since 2008 (left) and current active initiatives (January 2018) (right). Retrieved from: <https://www.re-city.net/admin/assets/uploads/files/dd4e7-presentacio-ana-huertas->



## Distilling the learnings from *Red de Transición*

In the following section, some learnings from *Red de Transición* in promoting a cultural shift to achieve the transition are presented.

- **To educate for a cultural change**

Society has an important role to play in mitigating climate change, as there have to be changes in our culture and consumption patterns. This social engagement may be the most difficult transformation to achieve because currently, as mentioned by Huertas, there is not much citizen awareness about climate change, unlike what happens with the economy. In this context, it is important to know the extent of this social movement about climate change mitigation in Barcelona, Catalunya or Spain.

There are many actions that have been developed locally. Nevertheless, for a long-term strategy such as educating for a cultural change, a global action by the governments is required. Besides education, governments also have the capacity to change the legislation and regulations. Thus, for education and regulation, it will be very difficult to act locally and independently from the governments.

Autonomic governments and national governments have to be aligned with the transition, and this can be achieved by mobilising the citizenry. In Spain, the transition is behind schedule. In Catalunya, half of our energy is still coming from a nuclear power plant, and this will not change until the citizens respond to activate the energy transition –**the citizens must urge the governments to act and make them feel that they have the citizenry’s support**. Further, citizen awareness can also push big international companies to do the shift.

- **To adapt to a new energetic reality**

Huertas stated that energy is part of the climate change problem we are facing. Nevertheless, focusing the debate only on energy constrains us very much. She believes that, from Transition, they have to state more and more firmly that we have to couple the concepts of resilience, sustainability and human development to the decrease of carbon emissions needed to face climate change challenges. If we are to have a chance to stay below 1.5°C, which is actually the only target worth having, we need to be cutting back on carbon emissions 10% every year. Which means that we cannot be sustained by oil and fossil fuels anymore. In this context, Hopkins pointed out that renewables have moved quickly. However, renewables cannot sustain the economic growth we are experiencing where we have a new iPhone every 2 years, we can all go on holiday to Thailand or we can go to New York for a weekend. For Huertas, transition is not related with degrowth, but is related with having a higher standard of living with a different pattern of growth. This leads us to wonder which other energetic realities we can create not to sustain our current way of living but to progressively decrease the use of the finite resources and to change the way we relate to them.

In this line, they said that GDP growth cannot be the main objective for social progress. This idea is also supported by The Club of Rome through its “Climate Energy Plan” in response to the latest IPCC’s outcomes (COR, 2018).

One of the initiatives that Huertas likes very much is the *Bicicine* (in English: Bicycle-cinema, Figure 10), in *Biocultura* in Barcelona. This approach allows people to realize about the importance of energy even in a simply and quotidian task like watching a film, and how would affect us living without energy. The *Bicicine* consists in watching a documentary film. However, the film only is reproduced when at least one or two people are pedalling.



Figure 10. *Bicicine* in Barcelona. Retrieved from: <https://www.re-city.net/admin/assets/uploads/files/dd4e7-presentacio-ana-huertas-conferencia.pdf>.

Huertas also mentioned *Planes de Energía Participativos* (in English: Participatory Energy Plans), inspired in *Planes de Acción de Descenso de Energía* (in English: Energy Descent Action Plans, EDAP), that are emerging in many sites of Spain. An EDAP is a process for preparing a regional response to climate change and peak oil, which has been developed by Hopkins. It is a method for communities to collectively confront the challenges related to decouple our society from fossil fuels and is based on the assumption that **we must dramatically lower our energy use**. Hopkins also proposed to embrace the opportunities of more local economies to stop climate change.

- **Media should generate awareness of the situation.**

Media should show frequently how the situation is going on to enhance social implication and collaboration as well as to promote the cultural change (to reduce energy and water consumption, connect with other people, to increase the use of renewal energy, diminish the anthropogenic degradation of the ecosystems, etc).

- **To have political agreement**

Huertas exposed that the transition requires a broad agreement to work. The transition to face climate change should be based on four areas –the productive world (goods and services), scientific and technical area, socio-cultural area, and political area. Therefore, different agents should be involved –economic and social agents that make their agreement, a political agreement and a profound transformation within the institutions.

We are in an historic moment of political consensus towards climate change mitigation. The agreement should be signed by all politicians regardless of their ideology, so it does not matter what political party wins because their goals about facing climate change are common. Further, a legal agreement is also required, this legal framework must be international and wide so that countries or firms will be willing to invest.

- **Citizenry participation in climate change action design**

Huertas also highlighted the importance of working at a local scale. In some cases, working at a local level is better than working with guidelines that come from “outside”. That’s why she believes that Governments shouldn’t work alone. Neighbourhood’s enterprises, associations and the government should be invited to a local debate of how to act, because then people become more engaged and committed to climate change mitigation action.

Huertas stated that it is useless to make a citizens’ agenda, as we have seen with Agenda 21 and many other programmes. Stablishing very strong guidelines from “outside” does not work in local people. What has worked is to identify what are the worries of the citizens and to create a space to discuss about it and find a solution collectively.

- **To work at a municipal scale**

Huertas wondered which the best way is to collaborate with the public administration and civil society in order to walk together towards the transition, because working at a municipal scale is the last part of the transition. Transition initiatives believe that if they could work with their city council, more actions would be possible. They do not expect city councils to come to their Transition events, but that they do not put obstacles or ignore them, that they encourage them.

During the last years, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon countries, the grassroots work’s approach has been widely considered. Activism and Transition works with this approach, which is based on social bottom-up work. On the other hand, there is top-down work, which is the one we tend to assign into public administrations. Hence, the Transition Movement wondered what would happen if they created a space where the difference between bottom-up and top-down approach had no sense, as they would gather all the actors from movements and organisations to start horizontal and more open conversations and collaborations, a space for the bottom-linked governance.

In order to find out how the collaboration among public administrations and civil society can occur, in 2016 *Red de Transición* made a study based on the pilot experience in 3 municipalities in Spain, which were Carcaboso (Extremadura), Orendain (Euskadi) and Argelaguer (Catalunya). In these three municipalities, the city councils were truly engaged with and participating actively in the Transition Movement. After one month of research, *Red de Transición* found more than 70 municipalities internationally where this collaboration was already happening.

Currently, this project has been replicated and expanded internationally through “**Municipalities in Transition**”. To allow the analysis of the situation of a municipality in respect to transition, as well as to allow conversation and collaboration, a common action

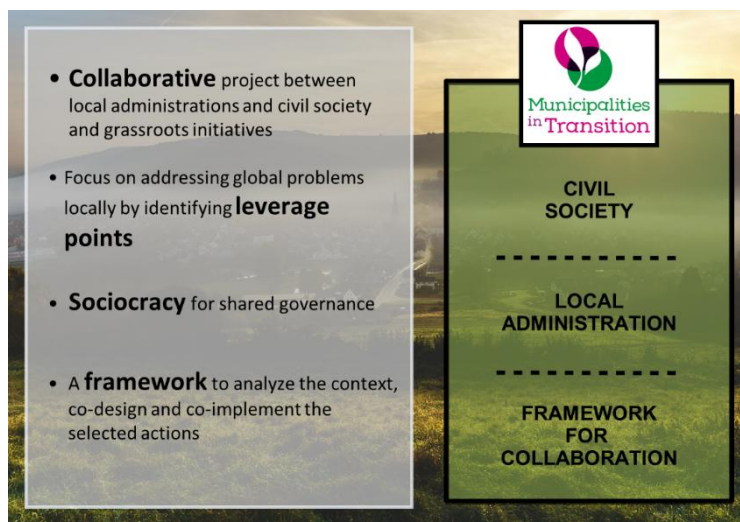


Figure 11. Framework of the Municipalities in Transition project. Retrieved from: <https://www.re-city.net/admin/assets/uploads/files/d4e7-presentacio-ana-huertas-conferencia.pdf>.

framework was developed (Figure 11). This framework is not a map that states the precise steps that must be followed to get from point A to B –instead, it offers different possibilities. In this way, municipalities combine the different ideas proposed in the framework and add some others that they think might be better.

The main ideas of the Framework of Municipalities in Transition are:

- Projects have to involve the community, the civil society and the administrations.
- Decided actions happen with the people which will be affected –for this reason Municipalities in transition use sociocracy as their governance model.
- Before starting a project an analysis of what is actually happening in the place has to be done –as our vision may be biased because of fake news, value judgements against collectives, etc. Listening to all kinds of opinions allows the identification of the leverage points where we should put our efforts and resources in order to have a major impact and to advance towards the transition.

Huertas highlighted the case of La Garrotxa as a Municipalities in Transition, as it is not a single municipality but accounts for 21 municipalities, which already have collaborated among them historically. Consequently, they are already organised in different consortiums, which have allowed them to make coherent decisions at a regional level, particularly in terms of politics. This situation has favoured them in terms of sustainability, resilience and community participation so that this participation not only happens between the political parties but also involves the citizenry. This causes that the type of action made reflects the real regional needs and not only what the political class thinks.

The main advantage of being a Municipalities in Transition is that it promotes collaborative work between actors not only to think and act but also to change the way we relate to each other. This type of relationships usually starts with many doubts and distrust towards other people, and this paradigm must change. If we transform the relationship among people, the rest of challenges go hand in hand with it –we change our perspective on surrounding problems and consequently how to address them. As a result, the new way of establishing relationships creates new ways of approaching local problems.

As stated by Huertas, Municipalities in Transition has many challenges to face such as funding processes instead of projects; working with groups at risk of exclusion - which still remains a big pending task here and in many other places-; not falling back to bad behavioural patterns like corruption; including private firms in the conversations and introducing this new paradigm in the bureaucratic reality of public administrations.

- **To feed the community**

In la Verneda, which is a neighbourhood of Barcelona, some neighbours organise “*la taronjada resilient*” (in English: the resilient orangeade). This event consists in making orange jam using the orange trees of the neighbourhood in the middle of February. They have this local resource very close and free of charge, and it creates community relationship.

In Santiago de Compostela, there is an urban garden within the university. Similar case can be found in Cardedeu, where Huertas lives. There, the *Incredible Comestible* project (in English: Incredible Edible) has cultivated an urban garden in the Joan Alsina square. Cardedeu in

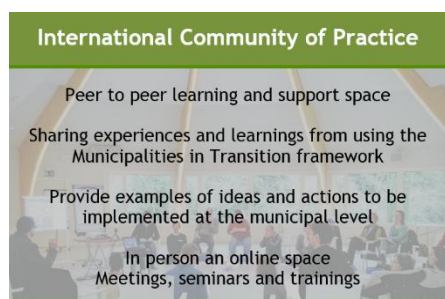
Transition discussed and negotiated with the City Council the pots, soil and other materials and tools required, and then the neighbours become the managers of the urban garden and cultivate the plants they want. Moreover, children from closer schools are invited to water the plants and help.

In Zarzalejo, Madrid, there is an initiative from *Zarzalejo en Transición* (in English: Zarzalejo in Transition) (<http://zarzalejoentransicion.blogspot.com/>) called *Agricultura Apoyada por la Comunidad* (in English: Community-supported Agriculture) that has been working since 2012. It is a neighbourhood and community initiative that favours the food security in Zarzalejo, reduces the environmental and social footprint of the food, improves health and strengthens the connections among people.

Finally, there is the collective design of *El Gallinero Feliz* (in English: The Happy Chicken Coop) (<https://granadaentransicion.wordpress.com/proyectos-en-transicion/cooperativa-de-huevos-ecologicos/>) that was created in la Vega de Granada by *Granada en Transición* (in English: Granada in Transition). This is a project based on the self-management, local consumption and animal respect, as eggs are collected from happy chickens that live freely and are bred respectfully in order to feed Granada's citizens locally.

- **To network, to connect, to conspire, etc.**

Huertas remarked the relevance of sharing our learnings not only to achieve the cultural change but also to enhance transition initiatives. However, how do we share them? Huertas argued that the best way of sharing the knowledge is by creating a space for it. Her group wanted to create an international community of practice (Figure 12) where there would be a



**Figure 12. Framework of the International Community of Practice.** Retrieved from: <https://www.re-city.net/admin/assets/uploads/files/dd4e7-presentacio-ana-huertas-conferencia.pdf>.

space of mutual support between people that are implementing this approach.

According to Huertas, the Transition Movement emphasizes the cultural change not only in terms of talking about issues that are currently not addressed but to create spaces where the extraordinary can happen, i.e. create spaces where incoming and outgoing concepts really make a difference. This approach of exchanging knowledge is promoted by both initiatives within the Transition Movement and within *Red de Transición*.

One of Huerta's favourite ways to do that is through *Meriendas en Transición* (in English: Transition Snacks), as she believes that celebration is important to get and keep people engaged and motivated. In Cardedeu, *Meriendas en Transición* are a space to have a snack with neighbours while attending to a talk about transition. These snacks are very useful for attracting people because they create spaces where people generate connections that otherwise would not have been possible.

- **To enhance a new local economy**

Local economies can be enhanced by using **local currencies** like it is done in Sevilla (Figure 13). Since 2012, a social currency called the Puma is used in the local pubs and restaurants of Pumarejo neighbourhood (<http://www.pumarejo.es/es/content/colectivos/moneda-social-puma>). The Puma is a mutual credit currency in which the currency used in a transaction can be created at the time of the transaction –this implies that creditors and debtors are the same people lending to each other. Within mutual credit, the Puma is a LETS (Local Exchange Trading System) type currency, which means that the cost of service is from the community for the community, there is no compulsion to trade, information about balances is available to all members, there is a equivalence to the national currency –one Puma is worth one euro–, and there is no interest. This currency is sold and bought using a bank book and the Community Exchange System (CES) (<https://www.community-exchange.org/joinexchange.asp?country=ES>), which is an international exchange platform born in 2003 where economic transactions in the social currency are made. This initiative promotes the community and local shopping, and creates synergies.



Figure 13. Neighbourhoods of Pumarejo, Sevilla, paying their food with the Puma, their local currency. Retrieved from: <https://blog.rtve.es/enprimerapersona/2013/03/la-moneda-social-el-puma.html>.

Similar cases are located Jerez de la Frontera, Badajoz, some places in Lanzarote, etc.

In Catalunya, the Cooperativa Integral Catalana uses the EcoCOOP currency (<https://cooperativa.cat/un-altre-sistema-economic/la-moneda-social/>) and Santa Coloma de Gramenet also has its own social currency (AjSCDG, 2018).

Huertas talked last year to Santa Coloma de Gramenet City Council and they told her that, according to their study, 70% of wealth generated through economic interactions was going out of the city. Obviously, they wanted their wealth to stay within the city, so that they could create new job positions and have abundant goods. For this reason, the city council created a local currency from its budget, called the Grama. At first, they invested 500 thousand euros in its currency, and if you wanted to sign up, you needed to be a citizen or a local business. During the first days, few people signed, but few months later hundreds of people were signed up.

The Grama has as a main objective to increase the impact of public spending (subsidies, salaries, purchases from suppliers) in the local trade and to augment money circulation among Santa Coloma’s businesses. One Grama is worth one Euro (parity). In fact, in legal terms, it is not a “currency”, but Santa Coloma City Council has established its own rules into its monetary system. This local currency is a digital payment system –through Internet and mainly through the phone–where balance transfers are done from a user’s account to another user’s account –such as in credit card payments.

It works as follows:

1. The city council pays a portion of the subsidies, salaries, etc. through the digital payment system (local currency).
2. Entities (subsidies), workers (salaries) and businesses (public procurement) make purchases using the local currency in participating stores.
3. Participating stores make purchases –as businesses and also as consumers– among participating stores, causing money to circulate more times and for longer periods of time within Santa Coloma de Gramenet.

This initiative was possible thanks to a collective effort of the citizens, the businesses and the city council, who decided to “break” the rules, which demonstrated Huertas and Hopkins’ calls for enabling imagination to shape our future.

Finally, Huertas explained that in April 2019 the *Foro para la Nueva Economía y la Innovación Social* (in English: Forum for the New Economy and Social Innovation, NESI) (<https://neweconomyforum.org/>) had its second edition. This forum is carried out every two years and its main goal is to co-create a more sustainable, collaborative, fair and democratic economic model. To achieve this, it gathers actors and actresses of the different NESI movements to think collectively of strategies to enhance the impact of our actions.

## Concluding remarks

Hopkins and Huertas do not know if it is too late to stop climate change. However, they prefer to share optimistic messages, such as Paul Hawken’s book called *Drawdown* (2017) where he puts together all of the things that we could do and are still possible. Hopkins remarked that although he does not know if it is too late, he knows that if he decides that it is too late, it will be a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is all about the way you talk about it –if you put possibility, hope, optimism and energy, then you can create extraordinary things. In parallel, Huertas pointed out that the change is already happening and encouraged people at the audience to start the transition by making decisions on how they use resources.

Hopkins finished his speech quoting Neil Gaiman, who is a children’s story writer: “We all – adults and children, writers and readers– have an obligation to daydream. We have an obligation to imagine. It is easy to pretend that nobody can change anything, that we are in a world in which society is huge and the individual is less than nothing: an atom in a wall, a grain of rice in a rice field. But the truth is, individuals change their world over and over, individuals make the future, and they do it by imagining that things can be different”.

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