A Just, Fair, Inclusive Transition

7 Ingredients

Guide

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Introduction

Between March 2010 and September 2011, Transition Network's Diversity Co-ordinator Catrina Pickering traveled around the UK delivering workshops and trainings. She collected tools, stories, and activities to help Transition Initiatives become better at supporting diversity and inclusion. This guide captures her insights, aiming to educate, inspire, and support anyone working to create more inclusive environments. It provides concepts, case studies, strategies, tools, and references to help individuals and organisations address systemic inequalities and engage in meaningful change.

By combining lessons learned with practical applications, this guide is for anyone looking to advance diversity and inclusion – which are key for any Transition activities, especially as the Transition movement continues to grow. My deepest thanks to Cat for so clearly and accessibly laying out the challenges involved as well as providing some fantastic first steps for how to address them. – Rob Hopkins 2011

Acknowledgements

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1. Listening

What's the point of trying to give someone the skills to mend their clothes if you don't listen to them, and find out that they'd actually rather learn to mend their bike? Why help someone get a solar panel on their roof if you don't listen to them and discover that what they actually need is to stop their roof from leaking and letting out all the heat? You listen to understand and to learn.

> "By listening first, we can find common ground, common concerns, and common needs, as well as discovering what gifts each community member has to offer. And how to honour those gifts in a way that will encourage them to keep giving. To do otherwise, due to a sense that urgency is more important than connection, would be to lose everything that the Transition movement is about."
> – Victoria Austin, Creekside Cultural Centre Transition, Pennsylvania

All too often, people are not listened to. They are not asked what they want or need. Because of this, time and again, communities – particularly vulnerable communities – have things done to them rather than with them.

If you are passionate about the Transition movement, it can be hard to listen to someone saying, "Yes, that issue you describe is important, but it's not at the top of my list right now. I've got to find the money to feed my kids." Taking the time to truly listen can help you to find common ground with where people are at. And it may mean getting prepared to be changed by what you hear.

Transition Training event. Photo: Sophy Banks.

Case Study: Helena, Montana, USA

The founders of the Transition Initiative Helena 2020 first made a list of those in the community who were working on similar issues. They aimed to understand what the landscape looked like in the community – who was already working toward community resilience (and may have been doing so for some time). They considered how to build partnerships and coalitions (see How to Create Partnerships, see Identifying People and Groups to Help You), and conducted interviews, asking questions like:
'What does the term resilience mean to you?'
'How can Transitioners help you or your organisation with what you're already doing?'
'Do you see climate change as an issue that affects our community or region – how so?'

> "The interview itself was a highly connective piece of the work. When you are asking these kinds of questions and really listening to the answers, it can be very powerful. With an interview, you also become aware of the words people prefer to use, and you can uncover barriers and assumptions that might hinder the work later. The initial steps are key to understanding the complicated web of a community and all the assets we have, which is related to transitioning away from business-as-usual."
> – Jesse Peterson, Helena 2020

Case Study: Glasgow, Scotland, UK

"Lower-income people tend to be ready and resourceful enough to embrace resilient ways to thrive, despite their problems with poverty, health, and employment. Things like growing and cooking their own food, or fixing and reusing electrical and household items. Lower-income folks often need skills and confidence to turn hobbies and volunteering into paying jobs. They are concerned with investing in people so that their future can be more self-sustaining. Transition is well-designed for revealing the needs and resources of a

community to plan, adapt, and implement together how to truly thrive. Networking with similar projects across the region can help share ideas fast (see Regional Networks, see How to Build Networks). People don't have to reinvent the wheel every time. They can share skills and resources, building rapport and confidence whilst saving valuable time and money. They learn that you don't have to do it alone; you can share the burden and the rewards. The six groups participating in our cross-regional network were:
Dumbarton Road Corridor Environmental Project (west Glasgow)
Love Milton (north east Glasgow)
The Concrete Garden and Depot Arts (north Glasgow)
Playbusters (east Glasgow)
Urban Roots (south Glasgow)
Govan Together (southwest Glasgow)."

– Luci Ransome, Scottish Communities Climate Action Network

Community garden Milton, Glasgow. Photo: Luci Ransome.

Tool: A Coaching Approach

The New Economics Foundation uses a 'coaching approach' to encourage grassroots community engagement so that people feel ownership of the resulting ideas and actions. Rather than imposing solutions, this approach is based on genuine collaboration and facilitating deep listening. The starting point is an attitude that each and every person deserves respect, since everyone is "creative, resourceful, and whole." The aim is to listen to the collective voice of the group rather than simply the dominant voices; to "follow the energy of the group" by listening for the real interests and passions of the group, and supporting them. It is best viewed as a learning process, not about what is 'right' or 'wrong.' You can trust that any 'better' pathways will eventually become clear. The opposite of

"following the energy" is when all the work seems to be generated by you, and it feels like you are pushing something uphill. For more info, try:
Three Principles of a Coaching Approach - Open University
Asset-Based Community Development (2022) - Communities at Work

2. Meeting Everyday Needs

Manfred Max-Neef described nine basic, fundamental needs that all humans ultimately share: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity, freedom. Many people are not able to meet their fundamental needs. How can lower-income people even begin to think about building community resilience for the future when their fundamental everyday needs are not being met here and now?

Anyone on a fixed or low income typically struggles with ever-increasing costs of living. How can they get better insulation in their homes to reduce their high winter heating bills? So they don't have to choose between staying warm or staying fed? How can parents, doing all they can to keep their children fed, worry less about the unsafe neighbourhood that their kids go out to play in?

Luci Ransome asks: What if Transition's starting point were much broader? What if Transitioners were concerned with helping people to have affordable fuel bills? Or decent play areas for children? Or access to nutritious food? Or sustainable and affordable public transport?

Community allotment on the platform of the Kilburn underground station. Photo: Chris Wells, Transition Kensal to Kilburn.

People who do not have their needs met are also often the people most vulnerable to effects of climate change. How can Transitioners work with both patience – ensuring that resilience is built from the starting point of everyone's present-day realities – and with urgency, acting quickly to prevent catastrophes? Even though balancing patience with urgency can sometimes feel like walking on a tightrope!

In 2001 the United Nations officially defined poverty as "a human condition characterized by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security, and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living." Poverty can seep into every layer of your life, and eat away at your capacity to meet your fundamental needs. Poverty can affect your attitude about money, your access to health, education, good food, and the freedom to choose where you live.

And yet it can also bring a kind of pragmatic resourcefulness and creativity which can develop into networks of cooperation and mutual aid. Oxfam UK reports that, compared to more affluent areas, people in lower-income neighbourhoods are much more likely to engage in mutual exchanges like child care, do-it-yourself repairs, or sharing information and advice. Transitioners can learn lots about resilience from lower-income folks.

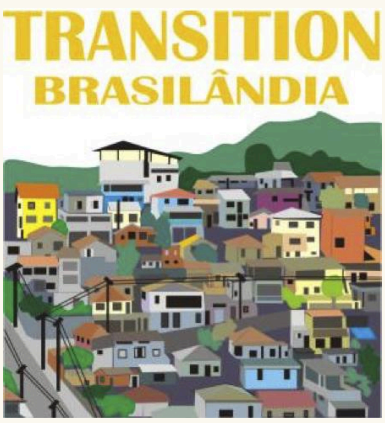
Community orchard in Brockley Park, London. Photo: Alex Crane.

Case Study: UK Fuel Poverty

Rising energy prices continue to threaten to push more households into fuel poverty. In 2011, fuel poverty in the UK was defined as spending more than 10% of your household income on home energy bills such as heating and electricity. At that time, due to poorly insulated housing, each year more people died from the cold in the UK than in Siberia. People on lower incomes tend to live in some of the most energy inefficient homes and often cannot access the best energy prices.

Several initiatives have been developed to address this. Transition Belsize offered ongoing free workshops on how to insulate against cold draughts from windows and doors, which can save a lot of money over time. The Transition Streets initiative brings neighbours together to learn about energy efficiency and saving money in the home, following an easy-to-understand workbook with simple ways to change how you use energy, water, food, packaging and transport. In Totnes, Transitioners helped a group obtain government funding for household solar panels across the town, including many households with lower disposable incomes.

Case Study: Transition Brasilândia, São Paulo, Brasil



Brasilândia consists of 17 favelas (slums) in the northern part of São Paulo. In 2011, according to the Human Development Index (HDI), it had the highest rate of vulnerability among young people in São Paulo. Brasilândia was an early example of a Transition initiative happening in such a vulnerable area.

The heart of Transition Brasilândia is community engagement. Representatives from the health, education, culture, economy, and environmental sectors gather regularly to dream, plan, and implement local solutions, while also focusing on global challenges like climate change.

The initiating group began by mapping the territory and conducting a needs assessment. They created a network of local stakeholders who shared information about their assets as well as socio-economic and health related activities. After identifying local peoples' needs and aspirations, working-groups were established to address them. Nine months later, a celebratory 'unleashing' event, including memorable guest appearances, launched the initiative. This led to a number of practical projects on the ground, including: seven new community gardens; projects to strengthen the local economy; an active zero-waste initiative; and practical sustainability education (see Developing Practical Projects).

Mr Quintino, president of the Ousadia Popular Movement that works to protect the rivers, waterfalls, and forests of Brasilândia, often posts short videos on Youtube showing local environmental degradation. Because of the efforts of Transition Brasilândia, he believes more people can understand the importance of his work and have begun to help him. "This was only possible because we have this movement of Transition, which helps the people to mobilise for things," he says. The initiative has raised awareness, bringing more knowledge about sustainability and resilience. "I grew up here and this is the first time I've seen things happen for real," says Thamires Ribeiro, an environmental agent from the neighbourhood.

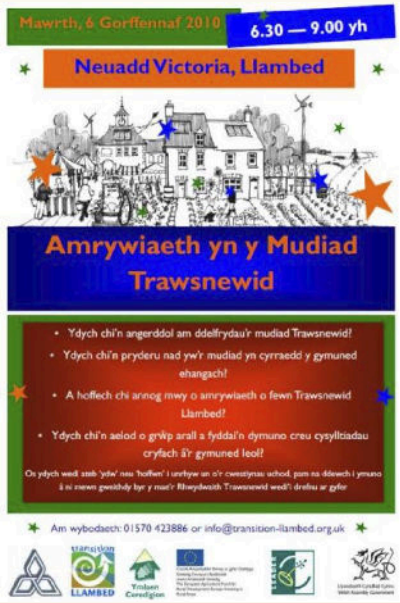
3. Deepening Inclusion

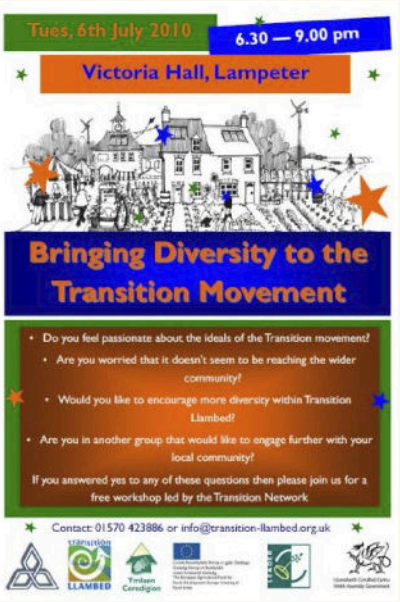
Many people have felt that it is difficult to participate in Transition initiatives. For example: one wheelchair-user was interested in attending local Transition meetings, but was physically unable to get into the building. She didn't feel comfortable asking the group to change the venue, so she spent many months waiting for there to finally be an event with good physical access before she went along. People may also feel excluded because of their class, race, age, or other such factors.

Raising awareness about inclusion and exclusion can involve considering physical accessibility, language barriers, cultural stereotypes, and unconscious bias (see Enhancing Cultural Competence, see Unconscious Bias, see Respect for Diversity). Even if you are personally committed to ideas around diversity and inclusion, your group can form a culture that feels exclusive to 'outsiders.' It is very common for your group culture to be based on the culture that is dominant in society. Those who feel excluded from your group are likely the same people who tend to have less power or privilege in society (see Power and Privilege, see Oppression and Power, see Mainstream-Margin in Groups).

"It's quite hard being the only not-white person. I'm not always very eloquent in my speech. I have really good ideas but I'm not always that great at saying them and putting them forward. So I definitely didn't always feel that comfortable. It wasn't because of any specific people, but it was just like... I didn't feel like there were many people like me. I felt like if I brought my family, they would be disapproved of. Or would be looked at as if they're not serious, or they're not doing things in the right way, because they're not taking notes... I don't think Transition Stoke Newington would have welcomed a whole new way of doing things. If you're, say, working class and you're around a lot of middle class people, it makes you feel really stupid. Especially when those people aren't that aware. So often we just wouldn't say anything."
– member of Transition Stoke Newington

Inclusion is about first understanding and then breaking down the barriers that prevent people from belonging and participating. Rather than creating a homogeneous culture that all too often assimilates people into the dominant culture, it's about creating an environment in which all cultures, and all ways of being are welcomed. One of Danielle Cohen's interviewees said: "Transition should perhaps not be seeking to include others, but should be seeking to be included by them."





Transition Llambed (Lampeter) produced posters for the same event in both Cymraeg and English.

Tool: Accessibility Checklist

☐ **Venues:** Are the venues you use physically accessible to all? Would someone of any background, faith, race, or culture feel OK about the venue? If you like to meet in pubs, might you do that only for some meetings or social events, rather than for ongoing meetings?

☐ **Language:** Do you try as far as possible to communicate using language that is easy to understand, like plain English? What other languages are common in your area? How might you engage translators or interpreters to be more inclusive?

☐ **Meeting style:** How might your meetings be more participatory and inclusive – maybe with more break-out sessions, or working in pairs? How might your group rotate positions of authority, like taking notes, managing money, or facilitating decision making sessions?

☐ **Welcoming new people:** How are new people welcomed into your group? Do you try to find out what their interests are, why they have come? How can they find out how they might get more involved?

☐ **Group process:** Do some individuals in your group tend to dominate, while others rarely speak? Is there a smaller group within your group who hold a lot of power, or rank, and always get their way?

(see Language Justice Tips, see Style Guide for Disability Language, see How to Run Effective Meetings, see Effective Groups, see Facilitating Meetings, see Leaderfull Groups, see Working Together Well, see Building Trust, see How to Get and Keep People Involved, see Pivoting Away from White Supremacy Culture, see Transition in Group Culture, see Power and Privilege, see Re-Framing Conflict, see Conflict Styles).

Case Study: Wisdom in Nature, London, UK

"Wisdom in Nature (WIN) is a contemplative ecological and community activist group, grounded in core Islamic principles. We have found that it is only when the walls that separate us can be softened, that it is possible to begin real dialogue. This process has the potential to be deepened further, so it becomes easier to look at the world from another's viewpoint, and a 'group mind' begins to form. One newcomer described this as the group "seeming to have a mind of its own." And then the answers naturally arrive.

Contributions emerging from this place bring with them a quality of inclusivity and carry a deeper truth. After meetings we can feel energised rather than depleted! We begin to value one another as our collective wisdom is enriched by the presence of each person. Diversity becomes a strength that we naturally welcome.

We use basic ground rules, or group agreements, that welcome deep listening and a diversity of viewpoints (see Group Agreements). At each meeting, after we have settled a little, we join together for a couple of minutes of silence, to let go of some of the mental baggage we have each brought in! At key meetings we can also bring in active exercises. These can be as simple as asking a question or two, "What are the qualities that bring us to the group?", or "How do we see the state of the world?" We open it up to allow for all ideas, including seemingly conflicting ones, and ensure each is acknowledged and noted – visibly on a flipchart paper or whiteboard. This makes it easier for each person to step into another's shoes (see Building Trust). The process of developing a group mind is under way.

As part of our 'Islamic Community Food Project' in Tower Hamlets, in which we attempted to integrate social organising with connecting to the land, we used an exercise that involved throwing the following statement to the group: "It is selfish for the middle class to think about the food they eat when millions of people are starving." Participants were then asked to position themselves in the room according to how much or how little they believed the statement to be true. The different voices were then drawn out and participants were also free to move should their perspective shift." – Muzammal Hussain
www.wisdominnature.org

Photo: Wisdom in Nature

Tool: Clear Language

Language that is clear and easy to understand is more inclusive. How might you explain complex concepts (such as climate change or circular economy) while using language that is accessible? The Plain English Campaign offers several tools for how to communicate in clear,

accessible English. Tips include: use shorter sentences; use everyday language instead of jargon; and imagine you are talking directly to someone. Examples of re-phrasing include:

Before	After
High-quality learning environments are a necessary precondition for facilitation and enhancement of the ongoing learning process.	Children need good schools if they are to learn properly.
If there are any points on which you require explanation or further particulars we shall be glad to furnish such additional details as may be required by telephone.	If you have any questions, please phone.

4. Building Bridges

It is common for any group, including Transition Initiatives, to have a degree of unconscious bias (see Unconscious Bias, see Enhancing Cultural Competence). This can create categories of 'us' and 'them,' in-groups and out-groups, those who belong and those who do not. Often 'we' are dominant, and 'they' are subordinate. For example, when 'we' talk about bringing 'outsiders' into 'our' group, to work on 'our' agenda, it rarely results in genuine engagement. It is usually only a one-way process of converting 'others' to whatever 'we' believe. Such forms of 'othering,' typically create separation by focusing on what sets people apart rather than what binds people together.

Any kind of transition relies on building trust and counting on people's goodwill. How can you build enough trust to bridge all the perceived barriers that separate people? In reality, people have so much more in common than whatever they believe separates them. Everyone, no matter what their background is, needs to have clean air, water, and nutritious food; to express grief when loved ones die; to feel a sense of contributing and belonging.

Case Study: Local Initiatives for Faith and Environment

In 2008, Rebecca Brewin, founder of a contemplative Christian-based community in Vauxhall, London was teaching yoga to a group of Muslim women and found herself wondering how she could build on these relationships to foster inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue. Working closely with Sadaat Yusaf, one of the Muslim women from the group, she began to build connections with Transition Brixton, a local food foraging project called Invisible Food, the local council, and a church lay preacher. Out of this emerged LIFE (Local Initiatives for Faith and Environment), a project aimed at building bridges between women of different faiths by exploring the local environment in the London borough of Lambeth.

From 2009-2011, a small creative core of women from Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and ecological backgrounds emerged. A web of connections and friendships started to form through the forum of monthly themed events which introduced a widening circle of women to a range of topics: reforming old tetrapaks into colourful purses; the fascinating history of common land; visits to existing food-growing projects and community gardens. The sharing of food, spirituality, and a growing sense of inter-connection formed a central aspect of each meeting.

LIFE revealed that hearing personal stories about people's relationship with the environment was a vital place to start. Inviting people to contemplate how their sense of connection or disconnection related to their psychological and mental well-being made a significant difference to the way they related to the project. As the project developed, LIFE explored how action that improves the environment, and your relationship with it, affects how you perceive others and your own life. An increasingly secularised culture has fragmented or split the 'spiritual' and the 'sensual'. As the women grew in confidence, they began voicing how they experienced this split as 'not belonging', and how digging a plot of land, or learning about recycling, or wild food-foraging changed their relationship with this feeling for the better (see Connection to Self Others World, see Self-Care: Nature).

LIFE has resulted in grounding friendships and a new shared vision. One participant said "I've been living in South London all my life, and yet through the LIFE project, I've got to visit places I've never been to before and got to meet people I never would have met". Future Plans might include: securing a local community garden; getting funding to support other groups across the UK to build their own LIFE groups.

Photo: LIFE

Activity: Mapping Connections

This activity for mapping the existing connections you already have (see also Identifying People and Groups to Help You) is best done in small groups of 4-6 people.

- Each small group takes two different coloured markers and a piece of large paper.
- In the centre of the paper, write your names or the name of your Transition initiative.
- Using a spider diagram format, in one colour write down names of groups, institutions, or initiatives that you know of in your area. These might be places of worship, schools, the council, a sports club, tenants groups, co-operatives, and so on.
- Using a different colour, write down any individual you know in any of those groups who might be a likely contact or 'bridge' to your Transition initiative.
- You may be surprised by the number of connections you already have. Take a step back to look at and appreciate what you've done.
- Then discuss which connections you'd particularly like to follow up on.

Activity: Making Contact

Having done the activity above, if you'd like to connect with a group but don't have a bridging person to connect you, here are some things you could try:

1. Identify a group you would like to connect with.

2. Find out a bit about them. For example, to connect with a local mosque, first find out a bit about Islam – research the religion, the organisational structure of a mosque, the local activities it is involved with. You don't need to know everything. If you don't know what to do in a situation, it is usually not offensive to simply ask. For example: "Shall I take my shoes off or leave them on?"

3. Contact the group and ask if you can meet up to begin a dialogue with them. Tell them who you are and what your initiative is interested in. Make it clear that you want to hear from them too.

4. At the first meeting, bring your curiosity, along with an open mind and heart. Listen and ask questions. Reflect together on possibilities for shared activities or projects.

5. Go back to your Transition initiative and reflect on the ideas or options you have co-created.

6. Keep the connection alive through ongoing communication and activities (see How to Create Partnerships).

5. Celebration

Celebrations can be wonderful ways to bring diverse people together. In different ways, you can celebrate things that people hold in common, revelling in life, creativity, and sometimes even stepping a little outside of your comfort zone.

Some celebrations have historical roots in injustice and inequality. For example: to mark the end of slavery, in 1834 a celebratory carnival was held on the Caribbean island of Trinidad. Generations later, in the 1950s, the Caribbean community in the Notting Hill area of London experienced racial tensions, poor housing, and lack of work opportunities. In response, they envisioned the Notting Hill Carnival, a celebration to uplift the community, which began in 1966 and has continued ever since. The celebration encourages people of all backgrounds to gather together in the streets and express themselves socially as well as artistically. It has become quite a famous celebration, attracting hundreds of thousands of people each year.

Drawing on these ideas, some Transition initiatives organise celebrations recognising diverse cultural heritage. The Tooting Trashcatchers Carnival in London sparks creativity by inviting participants to craft a diverse array of costumes and decorations made entirely from waste or recycled materials. Transition Llambed's Christmas Lantern Festival invites parents and children to fashion their own colourfully creative lanterns and parade around the town.

Trashcatchers Carnival 2010. Photo: Simon Maggs.

Lantern procession. Photo: Transition Llambed.

Case Study: Winter-faith Festival, Transition Leytonstone

"At the beginning of February, South Leytonstone's Epicentre Community Centre was the venue for a faith-inspired weekend celebration of sustainable living, with food, participatory activities, and entertainment. Transition Leytonstone hosted the two-day event in partnership with Sacred Roots, a Muslim-led organisation promoting interfaith dialogue through arts and culture.

Aiming to make the events programme socially inclusive, culturally varied, and engaging, we strove together to deliver a mixture of environmental information and entertainment. On

both days, there was a seed sowing table and stalls selling eco-books, home-made jam and marmalade, olive oil and other products from Palestine, and Fairtrade goods. We ensured that children were catered for, with a special workshop provided on both days.

Day one featured well-received talks by Polly Higgins ('The Planet's Lawyer') and Jagdeesh Singh from the Sikh Environment Network, both of which focused on the vital importance of planetary custody for all. The Mayor of Waltham Forest visibly enjoyed himself and assured Polly that Earth Hour (a day in March each year in which millions turn their lights off for one hour to take a stand against climate change) would be observed at Walthamstow Town Hall.

Later in the day we had a story-telling session; a book launch: Green Spirituality by Chris Philpott from Transition Leamington Spa; and a screening of A Farm for the Future. These were followed by a vegetarian buffet provided jointly by the Hornbeam Organic Café and The Star of India, a Leytonstone restaurant now sourcing organic vegetables locally. A concert in the evening featured our own poetry group: E11 Eco, and another local performer, 'EnviroMentalist' Other Theresa, alongside well-known musicians from diverse cultures, including Ameer Khan, On the D, and Flux Collective.

On day two the focus was more on food! Anton Rosenfeld from Garden Organic spoke about growing 'exotic' vegetables in the UK. Gillian Livingstone from Transition Crouch End told us about their food-growing and apple-picking projects. Afterwards we held a series of informal round-tables on food choices – a chance to find out why people eat Halal, Kosher, vegan, organic, local, or Fairtrade.

The day culminated in a multicultural feast with vegetarian food provided by a variety of local people. Many of the ingredients were sourced locally from OrganicLea, a food growing co-operative based in Chingford. It was a sitdown meal, and the menus were a 'feast of conversation', with starter, main, and dessert topics to choose from. I've no idea how far this was followed, but I didn't hear anyone talking about football!

Overall the event was described by one participant as having a 'lovely community feel, with so many people joining in and offering performances - music, poetry, story-telling.' Another said, 'I loved the mix of people, music, poetry. More of this, please!' " – Ros Bedlow, Transition Leytonstone

Climate Action Day 2021.
Photo: Transition Leytonstone

6. Exploring Rank and Privilege

What is rank? Rank can be described as the sum of a person's privileges (see Power and Privilege). It can be conscious or unconscious, learned or inherited, and it can change with each situation (see Unconscious Bias, see Oppression and Power). Gary Reiss and Julie Diamond describe rank as being made up of four factors:

Social Rank: you have more or less rank based on whether or not you identify with or are seen as part of a dominant group in society. Race, gender, age, class, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, education, health, and language are all factors that determine your social rank.

Structural rank is often found in groups with clearly identifiable leadership structures such as director, manager, team leader, and so on. However, structural rank can also be unspoken – you know who leaders are, whose opinions are respected and whose are disregarded.

Psychological rank is developed independently from culture. It is a sense of feeling secure and cared for that you can work towards or acquire. It comes from surviving suffering and coming out stronger and more compassionate. People with more psychological rank tend to have greater-than-average awareness, self-knowledge, or self-esteem. They are often able to speak and express themselves, even in the midst of those with more social power, and can tolerate tension without falling apart (see Empathy and Compassion, see Personal Reflection, see Compassion for Challenging Behaviour).

Spiritual rank is also developed independent of culture, family or external factors. It comes from an internal sense of being connected and centred with a sense of "justice on your side". People with more spiritual rank are often community-builders with a remarkable ability to bring groups together. They may radiate a sense of well-being and calm that relaxes people (see Connection to Self Others World, see Mindfulness - Re-Centering).

While collaborative groups can express a kind of collective genius, it is also common for groups to be affected by rank (see Working Together Well, see Effective Groups). In the absence of awareness-raising, groups can unconsciously continue to support habitual leadership patterns based on rank. Process worker Arnold Mindell says, "Any power, good or bad, if not recognised, can become oppressive and harmful." At different times, and often from moment to moment, a group can benefit from different individuals leading the way. This can be a kind of transition in group culture away from socially conditioned passivity toward acknowledging that everyone can be a leader (see Leaderfull Groups, see Transition in Group Culture). Becoming aware of whatever rank you have and recognising it is a good first step.

Activity: Reflecting on Your Rank

By yourself, or in small groups of up to 5, reflect and discuss:

- What are some of your sources of rank, power, and privilege? Peggy McIntosh's exercise "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" explores this further.

- How do you feel your rank makes it difficult for you to speak out or to be heard?

- How might you use your rank in relationships, in groups, in daily interactions, to transition towards a more sustainable world, or towards a more liberating group culture?

- What issues around rank, privilege, and power are present in groups you are involved with? What could be done to help people recognise and use their rank for everyone's benefit?

Image: Thanh Nguyen from Pixabay.

Tools: Transitioning Group Culture

Here are some ideas to try for transitioning away from a more dominating group culture toward a more collaborative or liberating group culture (see the Cultural Transformation Circle's website for more ideas).

1. Practice noticing who attends group meetings – what kinds of rank do people hold and how do they use it?

2. Notice the culture of your group – in what ways does it reflect the dominant culture of society? For example, if the dominant culture is white and middle class, does everyone in the group, regardless of their background, relate to one another through this culture? How might your group begin to embrace more diversity, or many different cultures at once? (see Pivoting Away from White Supremacy Culture).

3. In group meetings, count how many times you speak compared to how many times other people speak. Also keep track of how long you speak compared to how long others speak.

4. How often are you actively listening to what other people are saying? Contrast this with how often you are not really listening, maybe waiting your turn and thinking about what you'll say next. Try keeping a notebook to write down your thoughts, so you can better focus on what other people are saying (see Guide - Mentoring).

5. How many times do you put ideas out to the group? How often do you support other people's ideas? Practice asking more people what they think about events, ideas, actions, strategy, and vision.

6. Whose work and contributions to the group get recognised and appreciated? Is there a reason for this? How might people feel whose contributions are not usually recognised? (see Feedback Culture, see Offering Appreciation and Gratitude).

7. "Be aware of ways you might think you are always needed, in every discussion, in every work group, to make sure things go right. Be aware of how this may impact other people's participation. Struggle with the saying, 'you will be needed in the movement when you realize that you are not needed in the movement.' Humility and encouragement of others, along with appreciation of your own unique gifts and contributions, are key ingredients for successful leadership." – Chris Crass

Image: Cultural Transformation Circle/TNi

7. Embedding Diversity

Regularly considering diversity can become an embedded approach and way of working, affecting nearly every aspect of a Transition Initiative, its projects, events, and conversations. For example, Transition Town Tooting has found many ways to cross divides and work with the diversity of the community, so it has become embedded in the very fabric of their group culture.

Members of TTT with local MP Sadiq Khan at the annual Tooting Foodival with some trial 'Toots,' a proposed local currency. Photo: Transition Town Tooting.

To build a truly inclusive and equitable Transition movement, how might you begin to embed a commitment to diversity and social justice in everything you do? In January 2020 Transition Network (TNi) staff and trustees made a careful collective decision to make social justice, as well as environmental justice, more explicitly central to the work of Transition (see Transition and Social Justice).

Case Study: The Conservation Volunteers

In 2001, after going for about 40 years, The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) started talking about diversity and inclusion. At that time, the organisation focused on rural areas, mostly involving people who were already interested in conservation. By 2008, a much higher percentage of the people they worked with came from more diverse backgrounds. Their focus shifted from being primarily a biodiversity organisation to being 'an organisation that uses biodiversity as a vehicle for broader sustainable development activities that benefit people.'

In 2011, Development Director Miles Sibley said that many environmental organisations like TCV partly struggle with inclusivity, and partly do not. They may be concerned about inclusivity; but not concerned enough to actually do something about it. By 2020, TCV had "committed to promoting Equality and Diversity within its workforce."

"We are dedicated to fostering a culture of equality, diversity, and inclusion within our organisation. Our commitment means actively reflecting on and addressing issues related to these principles in every aspect of our operations. We strive to identify disparities and take concrete, effective actions to reduce inequality. This includes creating policies that promote diversity, offering training programs to enhance awareness and understanding, and establishing support systems to ensure an inclusive environment for all employees. By prioritising these values, we aim to build a workplace where everyone feels respected, valued, and empowered to contribute their best. We welcome applications from anyone regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, heritage, gender, sexuality, religion, or socio-economic background." – TCV equality statement

Image: The Conservation Volunteers.

Case Study: Transition Finsbury Park

The Finsbury Park area of North London includes ethnically and culturally diverse populations of lower-income folks, immigrants, and people from several religious backgrounds. It has a long history of urban deprivation, with many residents considered 'economically inactive.'

Since its founding in 2008, Transition Finsbury Park has sought to embed throughout its work a social justice, diversity, and inclusion approach. Rather than start food-growing projects far away from the heart of the community, they promoted guerrilla gardening in accessible places: the park, the church, the library, the school, the train station, the local doctor's surgery. They built relationships with mosques by holding workshops for children that explored their relationship with the local area. They initiated an annual, family-friendly Well Oiled Festival; and at the local primary school, they set up a cycle training workshop (mostly attended by Turkish mums).

They also set up Edible Landscapes: a social enterprise aimed at increasing the availability of affordable local food and skills around food growing, partnering with a local college to involve adults with learning disabilities or mental health needs. The aim was to educate people about low-maintenance food growing with free informal sessions twice a week. Passers-by can wander in from the park to see a well- labelled showcase bed, or find out how to get more involved. This can help satisfy the urge to grow for local people who are already familiar with gardening but who may not have access to their own growing space.

> "When getting people involved, we were always reluctant to go for the 'low lying fruit' – the traditional environmentalists. It was obvious that this would be a barrier to proper inclusion. It is still a struggle to find people with the time, capability, commitment, and enthusiasm to take part. Our approach has been partially successful. We have a couple of people taking on leadership roles who aren't from the traditional mould. And we manage to include a good diversity of people at our events."
> – Jo Homan, founder Transition FInsbury Park

Photo: Transition Finsbury Park.

Experiment: Embedding Social Justice

What are some things that your group could do to begin embedding diversity and social justice throughout your activities? Here is a thought experiment contrasting what a group would be like with and without embedding diversity and social justice.

For this example, imagine you are part of a 'building and energy' project helping local residents to reduce the overall carbon footprint of their homes by installing insulation, saving money on energy costs, and setting up community renewable energy.

Without diversity and social justice being embedded:

Your project might decide to focus on homeowners for several reasons. Homeowners in your town make up 52% of the population; they tend to have more agency and money available to invest in energy improvements to their homes; local banks are very likely to help them with financing; they seem like an easy population to persuade, or 'low-lying fruit.' Your project might support homeowners to take advantage of a government programme which enables people to be paid for extra energy they produce from the renewables they install. Your project might disregard or downplay the unpleasant fact that the programme results in higher energy bills for lower-income residents who can't afford renewables.

With diversity and social justice embedded:

In addition to helping homeowners your project also tries to involve private tenants and social tenants. This is due to recognising several things: people who don't own their homes – particularly private tenants – are often at higher risk of fuel poverty; they often live in not-so-energy-efficient homes; they usually pay more for their energy proportionally; they typically have less agency and fewer financial resources to do anything about their situation.

Your project listens to and works with both homeowners and private tenants to explore: putting in place community-scale renewables; accessing grants for insulation; encouraging local landlords to invest in energy improvements. Your project tries to be inclusive of many different kinds of people: fixed-income pensioners living in draughty homes; people in rural areas just outside of town who are off the grid; anyone living with old energy intensive equipment who may be at risk of fuel poverty; anyone paying rising prices to heat their homes with fossil fuels like oil or coal.

Retrofitting a house in France using straw bales. Photo: Yannick Molin.

Conclusion

How do you begin to create a just and fair Transition initiative by embedding diversity and social justice in everything you do? You might begin with two commitments. One could be to a personal journey involving honest conversations about limiting beliefs, old habits, fears, sensitivities, and preferences. Another commitment could be to begin listening to people who are different from you; then exploring how to build partnerships with groups different from your own (rather than expecting them to come and join you). Ideally this will enable both your initiative and your partners to grow stronger and to accomplish more together than separately. Remember to share some stories about what you are trying, including your successes and failures which can be wonderful learning opportunities, both for you and for others (see Sharing and Celebrating Failings).

Related Resources

Resources: Just Transition and Social Justice
Cultural Transformation
Practising Transition
Introducing Just Transition
Cultivating Just Transition
Climate Justice and Global Just Transition
How to Create Partnerships
Identifying People and Groups to Help You
Regional Networks
How to Build Networks
Developing Practical Projects
Enhancing Cultural Competence
Unconscious Bias
Respect for Diversity
Power and Privilege
Oppression and Power
Mainstream-Margin in Groups
Language Justice Tips
Style Guide for Disability Language
How to Run Effective Meetings
Effective Groups
Leaderfull Groups
Working Together Well
Building Trust
How to Get and Keep People Involved
Pivoting Away from White Supremacy Culture
Transition in Group Culture
Re-Framing Conflict
Conflict Styles
Group Agreements
Connection to Self Others World
Self-Care: Nature
Empathy and Compassion
Personal Reflection
Compassion for Challenging Behaviour
Mindfulness - Re-Centering
Guide - Mentoring
Feedback Culture
Offering Appreciation and Gratitude
Transition and Social Justice
Sharing and Celebrating Failings

References

Organisations

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Black Environment Network (UK)
Civic Square (UK): Neighbourhood Transition
The Conservation Volunteers (UK)
Earth Hour
Edible Landscapes
The Equality Trust (UK): Income Inequality
Encounters Arts (UK): creative processes
Flux Collective: music
Friends of the Earth (UK): Environmental Justice
Garden Organic
Groundwork (UK): Just Transition
Hand to Earth - Rebecca Brewin
Hornbeam Organic Café
Invisible Food
Joseph Rowntree Foundation (UK): Race, Ethnicity, Poverty
National Communities Resource Centre (UK)
New Economics Foundation
Notting Hill Carnival - website
Notting Hill Carnival - history
OrganicLea
Ousadia Popular Movement
Oxfam (UK): Poverty and Inequality
Plain English Campaign
Scottish Communities Climate Action Network
Tooting Trashcatchers Carnival
Transition Belsize
Transition Brasilândia
Transition Brixton
Transition Crouch End
Transition Finsbury Park
Transition Kensal to Kilburn
Transition Leytonstone
Transition Llambed (Lampeter)
Transition Stoke Newington
Transition Streets initiative
Transition Town Tooting
Well Oiled Festival
Wisdom in Nature

Written Materials

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or to the Transition Network international website www.transitionnetwork.org

Transition Network international