MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

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Building Happy and Resilient Communities in the North of the European Union
A case study on Transition Movement in Sweden and its relationship with the EU

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I, Vanessa Cardona Shokotko hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “Building Happy and Resilient Communities in the North of the European Union. A case study on Transition Movement in Sweden and its relationship with the EU”, submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within this text of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the bibliography.

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Signed  ..............................................................................................................

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Abstract

When the world becomes drowned in multiple global problems and citizens do not see any real progressive solutions from their governments, they take the initiative in their own hands and start changing the world on their own. The Transition Town movement was born this way. It is a social movement which aims at building resilient local communities in response to climate change, peak oil and an unfair ecologically destructive economic system which is probably soon to break down. As a potentially strong actor of future social change, it is worth studying emerging local movements in Europe, and hopefully identifying new potentials for success of these grass-root innovations.

The study, thus, aims to investigate the relation between the participants of the Transition Movement Sweden and the supranational/intergovernmental entity EU, which plays one of the key roles in economic, environmental and social aspects of Swedish citizens. By conducting interviews with participants of the movement in several Swedish cities, the nature of this relationship is being explored. Using the theory of Multi-Institutional Politics Approach the case study explains the connection between the movement and the EU.

Key words: Transition Movement, peak oil, social movements, Sweden, EU
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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Currently Sweden is involved in a sound debate about alternative life style which could decrease the impact on the environment and increase the level of happiness and satisfaction in its society. Terms, such as circular economy, sharing economy and bio-economy are becoming more widespread, especially among civil society movements. One of such movements is known worldwide as the Transition Movement (TM, also known as Transition Network) or in Sweden - *Omställningsrörelsen*. A previous research shows that *Omställningsrörelsen* has a strong potential to transform the existing society into a happier and more sustainable community by altering the existing economy, among other things. It is visibly becoming more popular and is increasingly growing in Swedish cities, such as Gothenburg and Malmö. Erik Edquist, researcher at Uppsala University, identifies four principles on which the movement is based: alternative view on economy, spiritual change (inner transition), a stronger local community and increased awareness.

As the EU aims at increasing its ability to trade freely within its borders and outside, the movement seeks to be as local as possible. The concepts of free trade and single market are based on the Single European Act (the Treaty of Rome), the Maastricht Treaty, the EU’s Customs union and other Free Trade Agreements, such as Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement with Canada (CETA). This economic activity coordinated by EU

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1. Translation from Swedish: Transition Movement
3. Ibid.
institutions allows goods to move more freely and easily across continents while resulting in serious impacts on the climate.

On the contrary to EU’s founding principle of Pan-European free-trade economy, trading within European borders and with the rest of the world, the Transition Movement is strictly focused on developing a local economy. To decrease food miles, for example, more and more citizens of European cities try to grow their own vegetables or buy from local producers instead of importing from another European country or overseas. Moreover, participants of the Transition Movement are motivated to practice local food consumption to support the growth of local economy instead of supporting profit-oriented food corporations.

However, the European national governments in which the TM operates “are an integral part of the EU’s governance structure” and the environmental protection is a shared competency of the EU and its member states. Thus, despite, the TM’s determination to function on a local level it seems inevitable to not be affected by EU policies. This apparent contradiction raises the need to explore whether there is a possibility of co-existence of the EU and the movement and a potential co-operation or a threat to each other. The study aims to investigate socio-psychological and political relationship between the participants of the Transition Movement in Sweden and the European Union. By socio-psychological aspects of the relationship the case study means motivation, perception, attitudes and the sense of belonging to the European Union.

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9 Ibid.


1.2 Problem Statement

In the past decades analysing social movements has been dominated by political process theory. The political process theory, which attempts to explain social processes and dynamics of social movements, argues that the state plays the most vital role in social change and is the primary social institution targeted by social movements. By doing so it “fails to capture the ways that power is distributed in society and cannot capture the range of activity designed to challenge the ways that power operates”\(^\text{13}\). The theory is mainly concerned with “mechanisms and processes – the how of collective action” but ignores actor motivations and consciousness.\(^\text{14}\) With the rise of new social movements, such as environmental and feminist movements which do not fit under the theoretical framework of political process theory, an alternative explanatory theory, the multi-institutional politics approach to social movements was developed. In one of its aspects the approach argues that besides the state other social institutions, like culture, play a very significant role as well. It is possible to extract from both theories that political institutions are important for making a social change and all “collective challenges to constituted authority\(^\text{15}\)” can be defined as political.

The international Transition Network, however, has claimed to be apolitical and rather culture and lifestyle change-oriented. An Assistant Prof. at Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies, Mine Islar, in her recent field study of citizen movements in Barcelona made an observation that “it is very easy for many people to be ecological in their personal life, say by buying organic, or by being part of a food cooperative, but a widespread problem is that they do not want to become involved in politics themselves.”\(^\text{16}\)

Along with Elizabeth Armstrong and Mary Bernstein, I argue that in order for agents of change to make a social transformation it is important that they participate in transforming both the political institutions and culture. It does not mean that not challenging the state


\(^{14}\) Ibid., 80.

\(^{15}\) Armstrong and Bernstein, “Culture, Power, and Institutions.”

politically, makes the movement irrelevant, but “targeting different institutions while difficult, may increase chances for social change”\(^\text{17}\). This case study aims at investigating whether the Transition Network in Sweden is political and particularly to what extent its participants aim at challenging the supranational institutions (the EU) in proportion to culture.

By providing insights into the movement’s targets, motivations, perceptions, strategies and goals – “the why of collective action”\(^\text{18}\) – the analysis helps to determine legitimacy of the Transition movement and its contribution to making social change from the perspective of multi-institutional politics approach.

### 1.3 Research Questions

The thesis is explorative in its nature with a rather open research question in order to avoid prejudice or being affected by previous assumptions. The core questions of this study are therefore, what is the Transition Network in Sweden; how political is it and what is its relationship (interaction) with the EU? As we talk about a relationship it would be reasonable and fair to look at the perspective of both sides and explore to what extent they impact each other’s existence and activities. However, due to the limited scope of this case study, the focus lies on the perspective of participants of the TM. The relationship or interaction in its turn will be expressed by the notions of perception of the EU, political participation and political engagement. Therefore, a more precise research question is:

*How do participants of the movement perceive the EU in relation to their environmental activism?*

The following sub-questions will help me conduct the case study:

*What attitudes, perception do participants of Transition Network in Sweden have towards the EU and the economic system it supports?*

\(^\text{17}\) Armstrong and Bernstein, “Culture, Power, and Institutions,” 87.

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid., 80.
What motivates people in Sweden to be part of Transition Network and how optimistic are they about their activism when it comes to being part of the EU?

1.4 Purpose of the Case Study?

The primary motivation for conducting this case study is raising awareness about the movement and further investigating the potential legitimacy of the movement and its activity. Instead of passively waiting and hoping that their governments together with the EU institutions will take care of the environmental problem the activists take initiative in their own hands. However as stated earlier, the role of the EU in the environmental issue concerning the movement is crucial and inevitable; as well as the role of civil societies in European countries. I am deeply interested in the socio-psychological aspect of how participants of the movement perceive the EU and its contradicting aim to constantly expand the European trade, often unsustainable and useless, according to some environmental activists, across the EU member states and the rest of the world. Evidence from literature suggests “that there is a need for a better understanding of ‘the internal dynamics and external factors that limit and enable success’ of grassroots innovations” to “effectively trigger socio-technical change in response to environmental change”\(^\text{19}\). It is, therefore, relevant to conduct this study and explore the internal dynamics of the movement and hopefully see whether there is a potential for improvement of the relationship between the TM and the EU; whether there is a possibility of a better cooperation which could contribute to success of this socio-technical change.

Also, the study aims to contribute in the fields of social movement and environmental humanities.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

In the next chapter, a brief presentation of the phenomenon’s background and the contextualised information about the Transition movement in Sweden will be given. Chapter 3 consists of revised literature on the Transition Movement in the world and the issues identified with it. Chapter 4 presents clearly identified relevant theories used in the study followed by Chapter 5 on methodology which will explain in detail how the empirical data was collected. Finally, Chapters 6 and 7 will present the reader with the analysis of key findings and conclusion.
Chapter 2. Contextualisation of Research

This chapter introduces the reader with a brief description and explanation of the phenomena. Firstly, the movement’s history and basic concepts are explained. After that a short scientific framework used by the movement to justify its existence is presented. Finally, the Swedish context of the movement is described.

2.1 History and Key Characteristics of Transition Movement

Inspired by the permaculture movement (self-sufficient, permanent and high-yielding agricultural systems), which emerged in Australia in 1970s\(^{20}\), the Transition movement appeared in 2005 in the British town of Totnes (Devon). The leader of the movement, Rob Hopkins, initiated development of a resilient community in response to energy descent related to a twin-problem of peak-oil and climate change. According to the movement’s official website the definition of transition is “passage from one form, state, style or place to another; or a period of transformation.”\(^{21}\) The definition indicates that the aim is to transit from a fossil-fuel dependent society to a resilient and low-carbon society. Researchers of grassroots innovations claim that the term transition is “increasingly being used to combine different forms of transition – lifecourse, environmental, and political-economic.”\(^{22}\) They also identified three principles of transition: philosophies, policies and practices.\(^{23}\) The movement consists of finding community-led solutions that aim at increasing self-sufficiency and reducing the potential effects of economic and social instability due to the above-mentioned problems. In short, the movement argues for the shift of focus from sustainability to local resilience, which, in short, refers to “the ability of individuals, communities or

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\(^{22}\) Feola and Nunes, “Success and Failure of Grassroots Innovations for Addressing Climate Change.”

\(^{23}\) Ibid.
nations to be able to adapt to weather shocks”.

In the context of TM and in a broader definition, resilience means:

Rebuilding local agriculture and food production, localising energy production, rethinking healthcare, rediscovering local building materials in the context of zero energy building, rethinking how we manage waste, all build resilience and offer the potential for an extraordinary renaissance – economic, cultural and spiritual.

According to *The Guardian*, there are “more than 1,000 Transition initiatives in more than 40 countries”. But updated information on the official website, Transitionnetwork.com, claims that the movement has spread to more than fifty countries and instead of taking a firm organisational form it appears in a fluid form in diverse groups, such as towns, villages, cities, universities and schools. Various groups try different approaches and if the idea is successful – it spreads across the network. The initiatives taken up by the groups consist of developing self-sufficiency in food, energy, housing, community building and other. Taking initiatives at the *local level* is the key feature of the movement.

The simplest way to briefly explain on what elements the TM operates is to outline the seven key ingredients published in “The Essential Guide to Doing Transition” by the leaders of the movement in 2016.

Point number four is particularly interesting for this case study as it focuses on such terms as collaboration:

1. Healthy Groups: Learning how to work well together
2. Vision: Imagining the future you want to co-create
3. Get your community involved in Transition: developing relationships beyond friends and natural allies
4. *Networks and Partnerships: Collaborating with others*
5. Practical projects: Developing inspirational projects
6. Part of a movement: Linking up with other Transitioners. Every revolution needs its banners: the role of creativity in Transition
7. Reflect & celebrate: Celebrating the difference you're making

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27 Ibid.
28 “What Is Transition?”
The key characteristic of the movement with regard to which all these ingredients should be applied is the local scale. All initiatives are to be done locally. One way the TM promoted making the economy local for ecological solidarity, was by inventing local currency. One of the most famous transition currencies is a Bristol Pound; in Strasbourg, for example the TM participants use local currency called Stück, which is only possible to use in stores that sell locally produced goods.

2.2 Peak Oil and Planetary Boundaries

One of the movement’s core values is respecting resource limits or in other words – planetary boundaries:

The urgent need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, greatly reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and make wise use of precious resources is at the forefront of everything we do.\(^{30}\)

Oil is one of the key fossil fuels that the movement is based on. In the Transition Handbook – from Oil Dependency to Local Resilience, Rob Hopkins describes our society’s dependency on oil for the past 150 years and how we have designed our living style in a way to be completely dependent on it\(^ {31}\). In fact, all the key elements of our society, such as “transportation, manufacturing, food production, medical systems, heating and air conditioning, construction – are highly dependent on oil”\(^ {32}\).

But what is peak oil? The geologist Marion King Hubbert in the 50’s developed a theory which argued that the maximum capacity of oil extraction will eventually reach its peak after which it will rapidly start decreasing and result in a drastic rise in oil prices (see Figure 1)\(^ {33}\). The TM assumes that we are already or very near experiencing the peak oil; and it is not


important when it happens, what is important is that “it is inevitable”\textsuperscript{34} and something has to be done about it. This is why the movement and its initiatives are focused on the four principles:

1. That life with dramatically lower energy consumption is inevitable, and that it’s better to plan for it than be taken by surprise.
2. That our settlements and communities presently lack the resilience to enable them to weather the sever energy shocks that will accompany peak oil.
3. That we have to act collectively, and we have to act now.
4. That by unleashing the collective genius of those around us to creatively and proactively design our energy descent, we can build ways of living that are more connected, more enriching and that recognise the biological limits of our planet.\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Demonstration of Peak Oil.}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 136.
Similarly, to peak oil the movement is concerned with other Planetary Boundaries that humanity is surpassing. The concept of Planetary Boundaries was developed in 2009 listing “nine global priorities relating to human-induced changes to the environment”36. Figure 237 shows the nine boundaries including four that have been crossed: climate change, biogeochemical flows (phosphorus and nitrogen), land-system change and loss of biosphere integrity (genetic diversity).

It is not a surprise that human activity causing boundary crossing has an irreversible effect on all organic life on Earth. According to professor Will Steffen, researcher at the Centre and the Australian National University, Canberra, “transgressing a boundary increases the risk that human activities could inadvertently drive the Earth System into a much less hospitable state, damaging efforts to reduce poverty and leading to a deterioration of human wellbeing in many parts of the world, including wealthy countries”38. Based on this, the transition movement is dedicated to finding solutions for building a resilient life within the planetary boundaries.

2.3 Transition Movement in Sweden

In Sweden, the movement was initiated two years after the Transition Town network in Totnes by organisation Hela Sverige Ska Leva39. Not surprisingly, the aim of Transition movement in Sweden attempts to achieve the same aim as the original Transition movement: to challenge the peak oil and climate change by transitioning Sweden on a local level to a resilient society through social and environmental initiatives. Re-ruralisation of Sweden is another important focus of the organisation.

37 Ibid.
39 Translation from Swedish: The whole Sweden Will Live
A qualitative study on discourse of the TM Sweden done by Erik Edquist\textsuperscript{40}, researcher at Uppsala’s University Institute for Geoscience, identified four central principles promoted by the movement:

- **Changed view on economy** (away from a growth-based economy, less energy and resource use, and build resilience);
- **Spiritual change** (inner transition away from the consumer culture, social relations, focus on health, life quality and life content, global justice, stronger relations with nature);
- **Stronger local community** (local shared economy, social belonging, decreased mobility);
- **Increased awareness** (about peak oil, accentuate a positive future).

However, all the four central principles are identified through analysing the official written discourse produced by the mother organisation to *Omställningsrörelse* “Hela Sverige ska leva”. Finding out what the actual participants of the movement feel about these principles was one of the challenges of this case study.

In addition, when looking at the four principles, the political relevance does not seem to be taken much into consideration. Generally, politics play a key role in all of those four principles, especially the first one, with managing economy, energy and resource use; and the latter three mentioned areas are under the mutual EU and member states’ responsibility. The attempt to highlight significance of the political aspect for this movement’s participants is one of the purposes of this case study.
Chapter 3. Literature Review on Transition Movement

Founded in 2005, the Transition Movement is a relatively new social movement. This is why not much research on the topic has been carried out. However, various researchers in environmental and social sciences looked at the phenomenon from different angles. Nick Stevenson, for example, looks at the sub-political potential of the Transition Movement.41 He critically analyses both positive and negative features of the movement and discusses terms such as cultural citizenship, critical pedagogy, localization, globalisation in relation to the movement. Overall, he reviews to which extent the movement is successful through notions of cultural democracy.

Anneleen Kenis and Erik Mathijs analyse TM’s discourse on localisation through post-foundational political theory which differentiates the terms “politics” and “the political” (“an order of representations or discourses through which society is given meaning, and these discourses can evidently manifest themselves outside the sphere of politics itself”).42 The article investigates “to what extent Transition Town’s concept of localisation contributes to the politicisation or depoliticization of peak oil and climate change, and what is its effect”.43 In the debate, the local mostly receives a positive connotation, especially in favor of environment but it is also portrayed as a “destructive force of globalisation”44. The results of the study show that the movement has a strong tendency to idealise the local and “is liable to fall into the local trap”, which is “primarily a post-political trap”.45 After reviewing academic literature on localisation debate and gathering in-depth interviews, the authors conclude that “rather than being a new grassroots environmental movement that tries to tackle the twin problems of climate change and peak oil through building resilient local communities, […], it appears as if Transition Towns is first and foremost a localisation movement which refers to climate change and peak oil to reinforce its case.”46 In other words, they conclude that the

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43 Kenis and Mathijs, “(De)Politicising the Local.”
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 177.
46 Ibid., 181.
local is officially depoliticised by the movement which, however, makes the term post-political since the existence of conflict, power and division is hidden or ignored in the discourse.  

Mena Grossmann & Emily Creamer in their urban case study of the Transition Town Tooting (TTT) find that it was unable to achieve diversity and inclusion, despite of these being the key ingredients of a transitioning community. Instead the TTT gained a white, middle-class identity which is not representative of the city’s community.

Miina Mälgand et al. in their study of a Danish transition village uncover three main themes: community, ideology and individual impact which create the constructed landscape of the village and influence place attachment. They found that community and strong social ties were significantly predominant in shaping place attachment. Transition ideology and environmental awareness were less pronounced but vitally influenced the sense of belonging and empowerment.

In Giuseppe Feola’s cross-sectional study on success and failure of TM, the key finding showed that the most successful initiatives were cooperating well with other actors, such as local governments or businesses. However, they also find that most unsuccessful transition initiatives were in urban areas where local-attachments are weak.

Fulvio Biddau et al. conducted a case study on the socio-psychological aspects of grassroots participation in the Transition Movement in the Italian context. The case study used psychosocial model of community participation proposed by Campbell and Jovchelovitch which identifies three fundamental socio-psychological dimensions: shared social representations, shared social identities, and shared conditions and constraints of access to power. The conducted interviews showed a great support for shared social identities and shared social representations. The study also showed that member’s identification with the

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47 Kenis and Mathijs, “(De)Politicising the Local.”
50 Feola and Nunes, “Success and Failure of Grassroots Innovations for Addressing Climate Change.”
Transition movement contributed to politicization of their social identity and to development of place-based social identities. Interestingly, the study confirmed that Transition Movement has an ability to collect different alternative identities and individuals with different cultural background under one umbrella. Another evidence from the study showed the presence of socio-political and economic engagement through cooperation with local governments and local business owners. The authors indicate in their results that the strong link between identity and a sense of community which emerged in the findings is relatively overlooked by the literature on social psychology and should thus be paid more attention to in future research.  

Chapter 4. Theory

Previous research has indicated several relevant socio-psychological and political theories that are related to political relationship between the movement and the EU. However, the theory that was deemed the most relevant for the study is the multi-institutional politics approach.

4.1 Multi-Institutional Politics Approach

The multi-institutional politics approach arose as a result of critique towards the political process model which “assumed that domination was organized around one source of power, that political and economic structures of society were primary and determining, and that culture was separate from structure and secondary in importance.”\(^{52}\) The theory developed by Elizabeth Armstrong and Mary Bernstein attempts to redefine the dominant definition of social movements modelled by political process and contentious politics approaches, introduced by McAdam 1982 and to outline the goals and targets of such movements.\(^{53}\)

Unlike the political process approach, the multi-institutional politics approach recognises the new social movements, such as Transition Movement and its efforts to seek cultural change and change in the rules of the game, in addition to policy change. By using the model as analytical tool it is possible to answer whether and to what extent the Transition movement in Sweden attempts at targeting the EU, as a supranational institution in proportion to targeting culture.

More precisely the case study of this social movement is considered under the framework of multi-institutional politics approach because it allows to look at the movement’s targets, motivations, perceptions, strategies and goals which could manifest the relationship between the movement and the EU. Unlike the classical political process theory which defines social movements exclusively in terms of its relationship with a nation-state, this theory aims to explain social movements through power relationship between civil society, state and other

\(^{52}\) Armstrong and Bernstein, “Culture, Power, and Institutions,” 74.

\(^{53}\) Armstrong and Bernstein, “Culture, Power, and Institutions.”
institutions, including supranational. In other words, the multi-institutional politics approach is more relevant to analysing a transnational movement like Transition Network. According to the authors, the theory “may be particularly helpful in explaining the rise of new transitional social movements” because “examining the role and power of states, other institutions, and relationships among states and other institutions – both supra- and subnational – is of critical importance in the study of these movements”.

In addition, the authors of the theory claim that through the lens of the theory it becomes clear that institutions, including state institutions are producers of cultural meaning. Hence, to change a cultural meaning it would make sense if the TM would also target various institutions. Once again according to this theory the nation-state is important but not central to the analysis.

Overall, the multi-institutional politics approach offers theoretical tools which help to investigate “the shifting nature of domination (both material and cultural) in both governmental and non-governmental institutions and collective efforts that rise in response to different types of domination.” These tools are demonstrated in Table 1 which compares the theory with political process theory.

Table 1. Comparing Political Process and Multi-Institutional Politics Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political Process</th>
<th>Multi-Institutional Politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model of society and power</strong></td>
<td>a. Domination organised around the state</td>
<td>a. Domination organised around the state, other institutions and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Culture as secondary</td>
<td>b. Culture as constitutive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition of social movement</strong></td>
<td>a. State as target</td>
<td>a. State, other institutions and/or culture as targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Seeks policy change, new benefits or inclusion</td>
<td>b. Seeks policy change, new benefits or inclusion, cultural change, or changes in the rules of the game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition of politics</strong></td>
<td>a. Related to governance, formal political arena</td>
<td>a. Related to power, as it manifests itself in the state, other institutions, or culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

54 Ibid., 93.
55 Ibid., 91.
56 Armstrong and Bernstein, “Culture, Power, and Institutions.”
57 Ibid., 76.
### Social movement actors

- a. Those excluded from the polity
- b. Those disadvantaged by rules organising any institution
- c. Distinction between members and challengers breaks down
- c. Actors constituted in part by the institution(s) challenged

### Goals

- a. Seeks policy change, new benefits or inclusion
- b. Grievances taken-for-granted
- a. Seeks material and symbolic change in institutions or culture; identity maybe a goal
- b. Grievances in need of explanation

### Strategy

- a. Outside of conventional political channels
- b. Considered “instrumental” if seeking policy change, “expressive” if seeking cultural change
- a. Depends on logic of institutions: domination reinforced by multiple institutions is difficult to challenge, and institutional contradictions can be exploited
- b. Instrumental/expressive distinction irrelevant

### Key research questions

- a. Under what conditions do challenges originate, survive and succeed?
- a. Why do challenges take the forms that they do? What does the interaction between challengers and target tell us about the nature of domination in the society? Under what conditions do challenges originate, survive and succeed?

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**4.2 Theoretical Gap**

The overview of previous research indicates that this case study attempts to fill the academic gap consisting of the link between the movement and its relationship to EU which theoretically plays a strong role in the TM’s legitimacy. Moreover, the previous international research showed that there were several case studies that were carried out in various European countries but none in Sweden.
Chapter 5. Method of Research

To be able to answer the research questions a conceptual framework based on the previous research and the particular interest of this study was clearly defined. First of all, the relationship between the movement and the EU had to be operationalised by specific concepts and ideas. The case study’s operationalisation and analysis was, therefore, formed around socio-psychological and political concepts of motivation, perception, attitudes, representation, and sense of belonging to the European Union.

It is possible to speculate about imaginable answers to this case study’s research questions, however, only through interviewing would it be possible to uncover the underlying ideas and feelings of TM activists about being part of the supranational organisation such as the EU and at the same time a part of a new social environmental movement that advocates for localisation.

5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted using a snowball sampling. Initially two big cities, Stockholm and Gothenburg were chosen due to having the highest concentration of activities and initiations of Transition Movement. However, as the first interviewee was identified using social networks, such as Facebook, on a group page for the Transition Movement, the origin and place of residence of interviewees in the sample became random. This did not affect the initial choice of cities as most of the Sweden can be characterised by high interest in sustainable development.

The snowball sampling was preferred due to a fluid structure of organisation of the TM in Sweden and in general, which does not have a rigorous central administration but is instead organised by separate individuals. The number of interviews was five people which is considered sufficient for a small-scale in-depth case study.

By conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants and initiators of the movement I was hoping to find answers to the posed research questions. The semi-structured interviews are the most common type of interviews used in the social sciences. Since the topic of the case study is of exploratory nature, the semi-structured interviews method was chosen due to its openness which allows for new ideas to be raised and its flexibility, which allows for adapting, changing order of questions, or asking extra unplanned questions to explore and clarify the interviewee’s responses.\(^{59}\)

An interview schedule (see Appendix 1) which includes the main topics to be covered and some indicative questions for each topic was developed prior to data collection. First, concise data on personal information about each interviewee and also about their role and main activities in the movement was gathered. Furthermore, it was important to identify whether participants of the TM were interested in politics at all because it may directly affect their views and opinions about the EU. Then it was appropriate to measure their perception and attitudes towards the EU regarding the environmental, economic and social policies and actions. Finally, I posed to the interviewees several questions regarding their sense of belonging to the EU and to what extent they felt represented by the EU.

Due to limited time and financial resources most of the interviews were conducted and recorded over Skype. Some interviewees were met in person and introduced to the study prior to Skype interviews.

5.2 Interview Schedule

As the study employed semi-structured type of interviews the interview schedule acted as a guiding tool during the interview and was a subject to change depending on individual responses. However, the themes that were aimed to be covered are the following:

1. Information about the interviewee
   - Sociodemographic characteristics

- Social aspects

2. Transition Movement, motivation
   - Participation in the Transition Movement
   - Role in the TM and role in the world

3. The TM participant and the EU
   - Perception and attitude towards the EU in areas of economic, environmental, social aspects and policies
   - Representation
   - Belonging

4. Free time
   - Open subject (something that the interviewee would like to add).

5.3 Research Ethics and Points of Consideration

Ethics were carefully considered in this case study as the study is based on data collected by interviews. Before each interview, a verbal consent was requested and all standard rules of procedure associated with it were followed. That is, confidentiality, data protection and respect of people participating in the case study were thoroughly followed. The names of interviewees were all changed for these reasons.

In addition to the above ethical aspect considerations, Huntingdon’s Effect and the researcher’s bias was attempted to be limited by conducting a pilot interview prior to the actual interviews took place.
Chapter 6. Findings and Analysis

6.1 The Transition Movement in Sweden “Is a Network, not an Organisation”

While doing the initial field research and looking for potential interviewees it became clear that many people in Sweden seem to take up eco-resilient initiatives which could be considered as Transition Network initiatives, for example growing their own tomatoes on a balcony. However, not every such individual activist belongs to a specific environmental movement and is often unaware of the Transition movement itself. That is why the movement in Sweden appears to be at its developing stage, where it tries to spread awareness of its existence and unify people with resilient life styles or interests under one network, Omställning. One of the interviewed participants explains this to be a reason for his communication and coordination work for the movement. The main tasks of the participant are to spread information about the movement and reinforce it by uniting people with similar ideas and aspirations:

“Mainly my role is to talk to people who are kind of interested in the subject and I point to them that we have a course in this and inform about the Transition Movement. And also, turn to people who are already transitioners, doing stuff and talk to them that there is Transition Movement that we can join under, not “under”, that's not good but join forces, work together.”

The unstructured nature of the movement, according to several interviewees, plays a big role in the activities they pursue: networking and communication activities. At the same time, the participants express desire to make the movement better structured and better organised. One participant claims that TM is “a network, not an organisation” while another participant reflects that:

“(…) it's very limited at the moment, I think that, like with many organisations, it's not been, there have not been clear goals from when it started from the first day. And I understand now, it's going through a period of transition itself, the TM is in transition. What could happen is that it involves into being a multi-, no I don't want to say a multi-national, an international organisation that actually is directly contributing to changes on the ground. It’s directly contributing to you know a, not only a supporting a different way of living

60 Lucas, interview respondent, April 7, 2017, Sweden
through publicity but actually directly creating ways of living, as an international network and I think that's essential.\textsuperscript{61}

The interviews showed once again that improving the nature of the organisation of the movement would play a key role for the movement’s growth at the EU level:

“(…) If it gets itself together at that scale, you know I think there is no reason why the TM can't be a big, yeah regional and global agent for change but it's all about the organisation. It's all about having that agenda and having the correct mechanisms to be able to manage a regional scale development, much likely the EU requires that kind of organisation.”\textsuperscript{62}

The fluid dynamics of the movement allow many people to be part of transition initiatives without knowing it. However, this possibly poses a challenge for the movement’s expansion as some transitioners believe that a better organisation is key to improvement and a more convenient way to achieve cooperation with the EU.

### 6.2 Characteristics of the Movement’s Participants

The interviewed participants’ age ranged between twenty to sixty which indicates that the movement is attractive to various age-groups. Interestingly, all interviewed participants or even potential interviewees were residing in Sweden at the moment of conducting the study but many of them had a foreign background. It is not a surprise that several of them had started their experience with the transition movement in the UK, the founder country of the movement. Table 1 gives a brief introduction to each interviewed participant and their socio-demographic characteristics.

#### Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of interviewed transitioners and their role in TM.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>name</th>
<th>Lucas</th>
<th>Markus</th>
<th>Erik</th>
<th>Jessica</th>
<th>Maria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>origins</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>Brighton, UK</td>
<td>Sweden/Denmark</td>
<td>Russia/Kazakhstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>Started as a mechanical engineer but dropped out after almost the whole</td>
<td>Studied science, became a science teacher and after moving to Sweden</td>
<td>Studied physics in Bachelors</td>
<td>MA degree in journalism studies from a UK university</td>
<td>First degree is in printing technologies and graphic design</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{62} Erik, interview respondent, May 2, 2017, Sweden
### Role in the TM

- **Project and network coordinator for transition movement in southern Sweden**
- **Ran the social media side, when first started working with the Transition Movement in Sweden. Now works on the Ecovillage project**
- **Main activities have been outreach and recommendation of different activities and projects that could be part of the Transition**
- **First lived in the UK when the movement began, working with organisations such as the Soil Association, Sustrans, the Centre for Alternative Technology, the Eden Project. As the founder of Resource Media in Bristol, she was in many ways already a part of the movement. When she first heard of the transition movement, she knew she was already a part of it.**
- **Initiates and coordinates projects of the NGO RELEARN, which are usually international projects in the areas of non-formal education for youth and adults, regenerative development, international cooperation and resilient communities. The tasks differ from research to networking, from educational programs to experimental appropriate technologies.**

### Activism

- **“In my work, I had combined some of the activism and environmental activism; but in environmental movement usually we think like Green peace activism or Friends of the Earth and I have been with them as well because I didn’t go as a member but I went to COP21 in Paris, went to the demonstrations and I guess that I was with the Friends of the Earth people and also the Ende Gelände, the coal mines in Germany. But I often tend to stand without any affiliation with a specific group but I join the causes and persons”**
- **“So, I am part of the Commons Movement, so what we are doing is there is a city of Ghent. There is a Commons Project that’s going to go on in May in Ghent and what they are going to do is do an inventory of commons projects there and try to get a feeling of how large the commons is as a phenomenon and also to get an idea about how the local government could help Commons initiatives.”**
- **“I’m not a member of any party, but I’ve always supported the cause of socialism and I’ve always seen that environmental movement, the understanding of ecology has been a part of that.”**
- **“As a child, I joined the scout movement and early learned of respect for nature. A teenager, I discovered the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and was outraged at the social injustices. I campaigned for the freedom of Nelson Mandela and had a major fall out with my family over political differences. Later, I worked for an NGO in the UK (Community Recycling Network) and campaigned on resources issues, became a lobbyist in Brussels (on European waste directives) and worked as an environmental journalist.”**

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63 Translation from Swedish: Environmental studies programme.
64 The German social movement to stop coal mining and protect the climate.
65 Lucas
66 Markus, interview respondent, April 10, 2017, Sweden
67 Erik
I have also carried out lobbying on culture and the arts in Sweden as well as social enterprise. I am also engaged in the Author’s union in Sweden, as I am a published poet.”

**Motivation**

Motivation of the participants to join and to be part of the movement could be measured from different angles. One of the perspectives would be looking at why the participants were motivated to do transition by simply asking them “why”; on the other hand, looking at the history of participants’ social and political activism (see table 1) could also give an insight in their motivation to join the Transition Movement.

The chosen angle to measure the motivation was by asking interviewees if they felt whether they made a difference with their transitional work. All participants answered positively to the question. Lucas says that the work he does with the movement is enough to make him feel that he makes a difference:

> “I am fortunate to feel that way I guess, but I do. I have like in my job met people, or like we have these courses in Transition, like beginner courses and then we have reached people who didn’t have the context and they were looking for the context and we matched people with the need and satisfied the need with people so that's enough to feel like I make a difference.”

Erik feels successful with his work by helping others to clearly understand issues related to transitioning:

> “I feel like on a personal level, on an interpersonal level when I have conversations with individuals in some small groups, that I have helped people bring clarity to the thoughts that they are having. I feel like a lot of people are having, particularly young people but also older people, are having similar thoughts at the same time, but you know. I think a lot of people have one part of the puzzle, like they have a lot of technical knowledge, or they have a political background or they have a global focus or they have only a local focus and I feel through conversations with them I helped people to join the dots together. And that's been and there is, and I've always felt the ends of these conversations that there has been this energy and this excitement in the other people going like right, ok, ok, that's let me kind of see some specific part of

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68 Jessica, interview respondent, May 4, 2017, Sweden
69 Lucas
the head now. Um, and I, you know I don't feel that I have all the answers but I do feel that my work has joined a lot of these dots together so that's how I feel like I am being successful right now.”

Jessica also feels like she is making a difference with her work but she hopes that her projects with inner transition will inspire others even more:

“I am hoping that the projects that I have already started will gain momentum and that I can utilise my current position in public service broadcasting to bring change in the ways that I can. As a writer and poet, I work to change people’s mindset and as a practitioner I try to inspire others to grow and change.”

Although Maria attributes her action of making a difference to collective action, she feels like her actions make an impact:

“I think yes, we do, I don't also like to talk on behalf of myself because I always consider my work or whatever we do as a part of the collective, so seeing the people coming for example to our place, staying for a few months, especially young people, living these totally different intentions, totally different sense of being active agents in their lives, yes, I would like to say that we do make difference on a certain level.”

Satisfactory life as motivation

Another type of motivation that was observed in the case study was their reason to continue working with the movement, since many of the participants are involved in the movement full-time or nearly full-time. It was found that for all of them the motivation was “living a good life”.

Lucas’s motivation to work with transition full-time is to have a fulfilling life which does not negatively impact the environment, animals but contributes to saving the Earth:

“(…) some of my fuel or the way into this transition thing, someway it come from let's say like, I want to save the Earth and I want save, so that animals don't go extinct and stuff like that but that's also why it so nice because it's combining my well-being: how do I want to live to be happy, what is missing in my life and in my mental life, my social context and what is missing in the more psychological terms and that's also a fuel because I know that we want to have more power, be more involved in our own life, to be more connected to the people close to us, local people, local surroundings, miljö. So yeah, it

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70 Erik
71 Jessica
72 Maria, interview respondent, May 11, 2017, Sweden
73 Translation from Swedish: environment
comes from many places, spiritually I would say, to feel that you live a rich life.\textsuperscript{74}"

Maria associates good life with freedom which does not effect the natural surroundings in a negative way:

“All being home [in the ecovillage], yeah, I would say it's a sense of freedom, it's sense of personal freedom, deciding for yourself how you want to live and what you want to be part of in your life and what you don't want to be part of in your life.”\textsuperscript{75}

Markus’s motivation of being part of the movement is briefly described as: “It's, it's a better life, you get a better life from being better to nature.”\textsuperscript{76}

\textbf{Political participation}

In order to answer the political question of the case study (political relationship of the movement and the EU), it was important to identify whether the participants were at all interested in the political mechanism. One way to do so was to figure out their political participation. The political participation in the EU elections differed slightly among the interviewed. Most of the participants who were citizens of the EU member states considered it very important to politically participate at the EU level by casting a vote at the EU Parliamentarian election. One participant’s response to whether they vote at the EU level, distinguished itself significantly from the rest:

“No, unfortunately not, no, I vote in the local elections here in Sweden as a Swedish resident, but I can't vote in the national elections. I can vote in the national elections in England, but I've kind of, not really done that or been involved in it because of my own personal feeling that left and right are really two sides of the same coin really and we need, we need to stop this.”\textsuperscript{77}

Lucas, despite voting at the EU level was not sure whether the party he votes for is against or pro-EU, however they were certain about the party’s hostility towards the EU:

“Yes, the EU-valet yeah. Left party and the left party, that’s the hard question, the left party they want to, they are very hostile against the EU, I don't know if

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{74} Lucas \\
\textsuperscript{75} Maria \\
\textsuperscript{76} Markus \\
\textsuperscript{77} Markus
\end{footnotesize}
they want to leave the EU but almost, they didn't want to go in the EU, the Swedish Left party from the beginning and still they are very very against it. But I am not sure if they want to leave the EU, actually I don't know, but I voted for them yeah.”78

What is important is that the interviewees do participate at the EU elections which partially shows their interest in political development at the EU level.

6.3 Hope and Motivation to Change the Addictive Culture and Oppressive System

One of the movement’s main goals is to alter the culture of our society. This was shown in previous research and furthermore confirmed by the interviews. The type of culture that the participants were talking about is the post-industrial Western culture of society. They feel the need to change it because it is a “neo-liberal”, “capitalist” and “consumerist” culture which does not correspond to post-materialistic values79 but destroys the environment and people. In addition, it promotes a very unfair relationship between the Global North and South.

All participants unanimously criticized the culture of the society we live in. By culture they meant different social characteristics, such as ways of living, treating the nature and different economical aspects, including consumption. Some participants specifically mentioned the role of Sweden, as a state, in relation to the environment and the motivation to take transition initiatives. Even though Sweden is internationally known as a leading pro-environmental country, Markus is concerned with the way environment is seen by the Swedish state:

“You know like, Sweden, we've got this thing talking about culture. Sweden has said "we're going to be fossil-free, by 2030 or 2055". They won't go out and say we are going to eradicate poverty by then and you have to ask yourself "what's important". And talking about the environment in this way is very technocratic and also very elitist, it's really quite frightening because it's not very human, you know. You get into the point where it's almost neoliberalism way of seeing the environment. You know, let's make money on... you know "let's go fossil-free", you know and it's like, it doesn't matter if you know half the bloody population is starving, at least we are environmental.”80

78 Lucas
80 Markus
He goes on about Sweden being one of the most industrialised societies in the world and its influence on the environment:

“And then of course the leaders in this whole thing [the industrialism] is Sweden today. Sweden has come so far that Sweden is, I would say, furthest on to what is described in Aldous Huxley's novel Brave New World. If you want a Brave New World look at Sweden. You can read the book and just compare where Sweden is, it's very close to Brave New world, it's the closest of any other countries that I know of. Sweden is almost completely industrialized, it's almost completely people living in towns, in terms of the state bringing up children, you know state is still in charge of education from a very early age, very very early age, number of people working still high in participation rate. When I came to Sweden in 1979, 85% of the population were working. When you go down to Europe it's like 65% and then in Sweden it's like corporations, it's like whenever you buy anything in Sweden it's likely to go to one of eight corporations, you know, so you have a completely dominated, you have a dominated society which is like what do you call it, it's a class society really but you don't realise it, you don't see it, it's the invisible class society has grown up with your homeless people on the streets and your beggars. Just like the Brave New World.”

In addition to being the most industrial country in the world with elitist view of the nature, Stephan believes that Sweden has destroyed its rural infrastructure and this is what gives the movement another reason to exist in Sweden:

“(…) I mean, let's face it, rural Sweden is dead. It's been going like this for a very very long time. I mean this has been happening since the 1950's. And that's what I mean about Brave New World, it means Sweden has gone farthest with destroying any sort of rural infrastructure it once had. There are no, there are no Transition Towns really, in Sweden, because there are no Towns, there are just places that have got international or at least Swedish chain stores in a Town centre and they've got municipal services but they are not really what you would call towns in the way you think of a town which has an identity, you know people know each other.”

Erik also motivates the necessity of the movement in Sweden. Despite its reputation as being an environmentally sustainable country, Erik does not think it is transitional in itself:

“What I found is that a lot of Swedish people think that the Swedish state is more or less a transitional organisation, all the objectives of Sweden as a progressive nation are transitional. But I don't think that's true.”

81 Markus
82 Markus
83 Erik
The respondents see the need for the movements’ grassroot initiatives because they do not believe that the state can make a sufficient change. One of the differences between the movements’ and states’ view of saving the environment is resilience versus sustainability. Markus defines the term resilience used by the movement:

You know, like we are talking in environmental terms we talk about resilience, not sustainability but resilience. Resilience is the ability to resist outside shocks.\(^{84}\)

He explains the resilience’s role in culture and the irony of “the industrial capitalist” culture also being resilient to change:

“But actually, the industrial capitalist culture, the neoliberalism culture that we are living in, the extractive culture that we are living in is resilient. Anyone who's tried to do anything will tell you, it's like head against a brick-wall. And I know many politicians who would say the same thing. Who went into politics really wanting to make a difference and saying it's like a wall, it's compact, you can't get through it, everything you try is just like “knock in the air”. The good thing about human society is that it's resilient, but the bad thing about the human society is that it's resilient, human culture is resilient.”\(^{85}\)

As we live in the “extractive culture”, according to Markus, oil consumption as one of the most significant targets of the movement was mentioned in the interviews in its relation to culture. According to Markus, oil makes our society’s culture addictive and describes the way used by the movement to target and change this addictive culture:

“(…) Oil is addiction we realized. That the world is actually addicted to the oil and addiction is a sickness. In the beginning, a lot of transition stuff was based on steps to get away from addiction, cause like, first of all you have to admit you are addicted to it otherwise you can't break it. And that's why within transition we just work with people who are open to talk about fact that we might be addicted to oil or that we might be having some really kind of weird thoughts that aren't really functional and you know if you say that to someone who is not open to that - they really think you are weird.”\(^{86}\)

Markus’s commentary explains why the movement not necessarily targets all members of the society but particularly focuses on the ones already open for the discussion about destructive and addictive oil extraction and consumption. More importantly, the participants

\(^{84}\) Markus  
\(^{85}\) Markus  
\(^{86}\) Markus
of the movement have an opportunity to meet other like-minded dedicated people who make changes on grassroots levels and give hope. In other words, the movement and its participants inspire and motivate each other to change things through action and despite the lack of funding or desperation of other people. Maria describes the frustrations she encountered while studying at university and wanting to foster change but not knowing how to until she met active transitioners who gave her inspiration to act instead of being frustrated:

“(…) Why I in general see myself belonging to TM, in your words, or grass-root initiatives? In general, when I was studying in university it was many people around who deeply believed that the world should change and they did want to take an active part in it, but the thing is that nobody was telling how and ways that activity, what should you do to actually help to contribute to the transformation of society at least at some point. So, it was a lot of frustration, I had quite a lot of frustration just from seeing what is happening in the world and that we are not doing anything and basically you [are] sort of trapped in society where you must buy things, where you must use your consumer power in a way that it contributes to the keeping the system as it is. And so, at that point for me to get to know people from eco-village network, from transition town movement, from permaculture movement. That was a huge inspiration just in a first level, because you suddenly start to see people who don’t just complain and feel extremely frustrated and very often angry about kind of system as it is, but who just says yes, we are here to do things different and we are here to build a new house because the house which we have now is burning and people living in it don’t see it, but ok we take the initiative to build a new model. And that was very inspiring, people actually, because I met people who were acting instead of just being frustrated. And that basically, this is what you can see in grass-root movements, a lot of it is us and peoples' dedication. Dedication even if there is no funding sometimes, even if we have to fight legislation, even if sometimes you have to oppose your own family because your family says: “well the system is as it is, and you cannot change anything.””

The interviews showed that the participants are highly critical of the whole economic system and even the Swedish government’s role in sustainability. But they remain hopeful and it motivates them to work independently of political entities by challenging the existing post-industrial culture.

87Maria
When talking about culture, the participants most of the time straightforwardly used the word “culture”. Another way to refer to the identified culture among all interviewed transitioners was to call it “the system”. Maria talks about how she is often met with desperation of other people to change the system. Despite that she is full of hope and strongly believes that it is possible to change the system, she supports her argument by giving several historical examples:

“I mean there are many things which come to the mind, but from the disparity between North and South, I mean the global sort of disparity to in general values behind our system. But also, I, how do you say, when you are working on a local project, some small-scale things when you try to address something, most of it, you quite often can hear something like “well that's the system how it is and it's not possible to change”. I think this is the silliest argument I have ever heard because we as humanity have changed so many times completely in many very different ways, when the paradigm was shifted just upside down, whether it's an example of moving from geocentric to heliocentric system. Yes, we were believing it at one point that we all are just moving around, I mean the whole universe is moving around the Earth and this was the truth. And basically, the world which we live now in, functions in a similar way, that we believe in complete nonsense which we created ourselves. We didn't get it as something inherited or given like this is the truth which exists universally, we have invented the system ourselves and we believe that this is the only way how it can be. I think it's quite ridiculous, no matter if we find the better way to kind of live together on the planet or we don't, or we find a worse way, but it will change for sure. The same as many other cycles as we, we also believed at a certain point that it's only mechanical, mechanic physics which rule the world and then we discovered quantum physics and "oh wow, the whole world changed"! And we still hear the arguments, oh this is the system that will never change.”

When using the term “system”, the participants, however, emphasized the economical aspect and often referred to it as capitalism, capitalistic system or simply the economic system. Maria, for example, like all other participants was very concerned with the consumerist feature of the economic system and its effect on the world problems and the system itself:

“I had quite a lot of frustration just from seeing what is happening in the world and that we are not doing anything and basically you are sort of trapped in

88 Maria
society where you must buy things, where you must use your consumer power in a way that it contributes to the keeping the system as it is."\(^89\)

The relationship between the consumerist economic system/culture and nature has long been discussed by environmental activists. Erik discusses this relationship and hints at the fact that unless the system is fundamentally changed nothing will help to save the nature:

“(…) the economic, dominant economic system that sort of sees money as God, money before anything else, it's never going to allow the genuine human passion for the rest of the natural world to manifest itself. So, like that's just, it's a complete dead end or it always will be part of the system, it will always be patching up the problems that it's creating and then creating new problems and then trying to patch them up and etc.”\(^90\)

When the participants were asked if the economic system was satisfying for them, without any hesitation all gave a definite “no”. Jessica ironically stressed that it is only satisfying for a disproportionally tiny amount of people which is extremely unfair for the Global South:

“I think our current global economic model is satisfying for the sixty individuals that own as much as the poorest third of our global population. (…) I think that our economic system is designed to exploit the vast majority of people. The south-north divide is indefensible.”\(^91\)

Erik’s opinion about the system and its economical aspect was expressed emotionally and showed how furious he is about the situation:

“It's utterly parasitic and colonial and imperial. It's fucking awful! You can quote that directly. You know we are talking about centuries and centuries of oppression that continues to this day and it takes different forms. It's very subtle, you know, lots of the oppression is done through economic you know monetary mechanism rather than a military force but also like there are more slaves today than there were, you know apparently when Europe was supporting slavery. You know it's just millions and millions more slaves now than ever before in history. So like, it's completely awful, unfortunately, and the small, you know, what the Global North does offer in terms of development, you know aid packages, I think are for the most part, very specifically intended to maintain this inequality in the boat. Um, so it's not liberating, it's not. The people of the Global South do not have empowerment, they do not have an equal voice or fair voice in the world. You know, which would be more because there are more of them and so only a radically different form of international relationship can possibly bring any kind of justice in the world. That's how I feel.”\(^92\)
The aim of the movement in Sweden appears to target the culture and the economic system as they are interdependent entities, according to the interviews. The culture and economy should be transitioned into a local, self-sufficient, not based on mass consumption.

6.5 The Process of Changing the “Oppressive Culture”

From the interviews, several strategies to change the culture and the system were identified:

1. Inner transition: Personal life style, consumption, the feeling of making a change
2. Resilient local economies: being a glocal
3. Initiatives: ecovillages
4. Alternative economic system (e.g. the commons)
5. Policy change and decentralisation

Change of the culture happens through inner transition

Despite the visible influence of European Union on capitalist culture, the transitioners foremost focus on altering the culture itself at the grass root level instead of trying to influence policies. The transitioners’ way of changing the culture happens, primarily, through inner transition which refers to a personal world view and belief system which impacts the perception of challenges facing this planet.93 The TM uses psychological models, such as addiction models and models for behavioural change in order to alter the existing beliefs and “avoid unconscious processes sabotaging change”94. In other words, by using the models of inner transition it is possible to alter the way we think about the world and thus alter particular aspects of our culture.

94 Ibid.
By definition of one of the participants, culture “is everything, it's the way you think, the way you feel, it's the paradigms you are carrying in your mind, as well as the traditions and practices you have”. He explains the close relationship between this definition of culture and the transition movement:

“(…) And this fits very well with the transition movement, because transition movement is trying to create a culture of a healing and healthy society rather than trying to put forward the latest technical idea or even economic idea of how to handle the situation we are in.”

And this possibly explains why the culture should be changed through inner transition in the first place. Moreover, the transition movement enables people to realise this inner change together with like-minded people. Lucas thinks that “In this new movement we can, yeah because it can be very troublesome and weird to be to take steps and be like anti-, not anti-society, yeah it's kind of leaving one culture and going into another culture mentally, as well”.

The popular saying used by the agents of change “to make the change you should be a change yourself” fits perfectly in the context of the transition movement. From reading the transcribed interviews it can be assumed that participants mean inner transition as a way to change culture through a conscious change of one’s own mind-set and behaviour, in particular the consumption behaviour. The transitioners try to consume consciously to make the least impact on nature by using the least resources they can. All interviewed participants confirmed that they either already live a low-impact life style or they are aiming at doing so. Most of them consume locally-produced organic food, second-hand clothes and use environmentally friendly transport. In his low-consumption life style, Erik feels satisfied about having a small material world:

“I generally live a low-consumption style. You know, for example, most of the stuff I buy is second-hand, you know, nearly all the clothes that I have are second-hand clothes. I really only try to buy good-quality things that I know will last a long time and I also try and share everything where I can so my

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95 Markus
96 Markus
97 Lucas
material world is quite small and I mean I think I'm lucky and lots of us who feel this way right now are lucky in that.”

Jessica describes her “modest lifestyle” in a similar way which she appears to be satisfied with and even tries to be example for others:

“I have a modest lifestyle. Our family is vegetarian, I avoid flying and using our car which we do own, but rarely drive as we now live in a town with good public transport, which I use on a daily basis. I have a classic/minimalist wardrobe and buy most of my things second hand. We grow a lot of food ourselves and I try to lead by living a modest and nice life with the least impact that I can.”

At the same time, the respondents confess about not always being strict with their consuming rules, sometimes they allow themselves to live “conventionally”. Erik emphasises about being content with buying things mostly out of necessity and only ecological products, but nevertheless, he mentions his conventional pleasures of going into bars and restaurants:

“And it's possible to build up, yeah, quite a cheap life in that respect. I don't really buy many kind of products, like cosmetics and things like that. I always buy ecological versions of things when I need them, like washing-up liquids and clothes washing stuff, I, you know I try and just, I generally feel aware of my consumption of energy and resources and I yeah, I'm very content with using quite little. Oh yeah, I don't fly, I don't have a car, I, yeah, I cycle and get the train everywhere. I, what else can I say, I like, my largest kind of standard convention is probably going out during, you know into bars and restaurants. Drinking and eating. So that's kind of my one, that's the one way in which I kind of live more conventionally, but I always try and look for ecological products.”

Similarly, to the others, Lucas tries to buy mostly organic food and second-hand clothes and technology but occasionally he buys new things which he considers to be bad:

“I try to buy mostly organic, I am not sure how big percentage it is but it is that like maybe half or a little bit over half in food is organic and also try not to buy stuff that comes from other continents and yeah try to be opportunistic in many ways: dumpster diving or getting food from other people and stuff like that, I don't know. And clothes and stuff, like electronics and clothes I just buy, I think I buy pretty seldom, not that much and always electronics I always buy second-hand, not every electronics, like headphones maybe I buy new ones, but yeah Blocket. And also, same with clothes, but sometimes I am not strict, I am very

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98 Erik
99 Jessica
100 Erik
not strict person, I don't set up rules, so I can sometimes do, buy just bad shit, yeah sometimes I buy new jeans or new sweaters but not that often.”

Finally, Markus honestly explains why he owns a car and admits that he flies and lives in a flat but that his goal is to avoid this by moving into an ecovillage he started some years ago:

“Well, it's kind of like two pedals, because I've got the ecovillage, I really felt I needed, and we were building eco-houses and to build eco-houses you have to have a car because you have to get there so I had to buy a car and so I've got a car, I try not use it very much and it's old, but I still got it and I live in a flat. But the aim, is to get to the ecovillage in a long term. I have a building plot there and I have possibilities to live there full-time. We are planning that and we are also talking to a farmer about producing our food, but in reality, just now, I don't think I am different than anyone else, really. Except I try to buy organic food. But I mean I fly, I drive a car.”

In conclusion, it seems that low-consumption life style brings satisfaction in life of the respondents because it gives more space to more-valuable human needs, such as connection with other humans and nature. All respondents try to make a change by being conscious consumers with a low-impact on nature. Nevertheless, all interviewed low-impact consumers still have some conventional needs that they try to reduce but are not always too strict about.

Resilient local economies: being a “glocal”

What is more important for the participants of the movement, the local or the global geopolitical level when it comes to making a transition? Which level is more efficient and motivates them better for doing the transition? When the participants were asked about what level they considered more important - global or local – the answers at first pointed in the same direction. The local was definitely important and at some point, it even seemed to override the importance of globality. Lucas’s answer exemplifies this:

“I can answer with my intellect and say of course the global is the most important because everything is connected then most people, most plants and animals are happy, but no I will like [to answer] spontaneously and the most important is the local and I don't like to watch the news, I barely watch news, I don't follow what is happening in the global world and maybe that's a sign why I think local is the most important.”
However more interviews indicated that both levels are significant for the participants’ motivation to do transition. Erik states:

“Both, I am a member of my community and I am a human being and part of humanity in the world. And we mustn't get lost in the local details and at the same time we mustn't get disconnected from our community and get lost only thinking in big, for example, big numbers, big indices, global indices, that will, not be enough for itself.”

Erik also mentions the political power of each of the levels. According to him he is equally interested in both levels, but as he sees it now the political power should be redistributed into local communities through decentralization:

“I think how the world is arranged today, there is a certain amount of power at each one of those levels that you've just stated. And I want to be able to work at each order of magnitude with what exists but at the same time working to redistribute the power between those levels as well. So, I think communities need to be very much empowered in the world, and most of the power I think should be much much decentralized. And then, almost equally I am interested in the global level, there are those communities, ah, empowered communities can be united globally through different institutions and mechanisms.”

Not surprisingly the local level was very important for all of the participants but an interesting term appeared in some answers. “Glocal” is a term that several participants used and that could give an explanation to Erik’s answers and Jessica’s claim: “my community is global”. The term was extensively used by the social justice movement and represents the idea: “think globally, act locally”. The definition given by Oxford Dictionary outlines it as a “seamless integration between the local and global; the comprehensive connectedness produced by travel, business, and communications; willingness and ability to think globally and act locally”. The importance between the two levels also seems to merge when it comes to the transition movement and Maria confirms the definition:

“There is no separation, and no dichotomy, I mean you, whether you focus on local actions but still keep in mind the processes and movements going on a global level, you already act globally. And at the same time trying to make changes at the global level without being connected to some local action group, that's very abstract and very often people talk beautifully about things which

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104 Erik
105 Erik
106 Jessica
they don't actually understand, so for me the right word would be "glocal". (…)\(^{108}\)

However, in the framework of the term “glocal” Maria's answer seems to put more emphasis on the importance of local actions. According to her, if there are no local actions or commitment the work on a global level can lose its potential or risks to become abstract. She considers that local action is the best way to achieve goals of the transition.

“(…) meaning that you are acting locally but within the broader global or regional umbrella organisation or movement. So, this is also what we do in our lives, basically if you are conscious about your own. Well let's be correct down to earth, if you are conscious about your consumption - you kind of act in your own life, but at the same time you do it within the broader movement around Earth to reduce our negative impact or to change our patterns about the consumption and so on. You don't just, I don't know, change the plastic to some renewable resource, you actually become a part of something global. So, you know, it's basically it's all the matter of mind-set. (…)\(^{109}\)

Markus exemplifies some of such local actions that TM helps participants to realise:

“(…) But the idea of course, (…) to help other people come in and engage them, get them through the thinking about it into management, turning that action into something which is local economy and local culture positive.”\(^{110}\)

He continues to explain that “in transition it's good to do anything, really, it's good to do something rather than nothing, and there's a lot of emphasis on food, and growing your own food, food security, and stuff because it's something that touches everyone and everyone can do it”\(^{111}\). This is how the local economy can develop according to him:

“(…) And then from there we are going to the next stage in working together in projects, first it's putting projects together that can lay the foundations for a local economy. A local economy is more resilient and is more appropriate.”\(^{112}\)

Being local and local economy as some of the main principles of TM take central role together with the attempts to change culture:

“(…) We need a new cultural renaissance, which is more about local economy and more fitting to Dunbar's number\(^{113}\), we just have to accept that we

\(^{108}\) Maria 
\(^{109}\) Maria 
\(^{110}\) Markus 
\(^{111}\) Ibid. 
\(^{112}\) Markus 
\(^{113}\) Paper written by anthropologist Robin Dunbar “Co-Evolution Of Neocortex Size, Group Size And Language In Humans” (Behavioral and Brain Sciences 16, no. 4 (1993): 681–694.) states that (…) there is a cognitive
are human beings and that we are local and we can't, we get stressed about all this number of people around us.”

Maria’s attempts to change culture into a more local one through the TM even make part of her identity:

“(…) Another part of my identity is the world we create more locally (or rather gloclally) – an international intentional community, Suderbyn Permaculture Ecovillage, which is an extremely dynamic living and learning residence, but also a playground for experiments, both social and technical, a space of re-learning, questioning and experimenting to find more optimal and resilient ways of living, producing and developing as a community.”

To conclude, the local level is extremely important to all of the interviewed TM participants but what is even more important is the interdependence of the local and global. Local actions in form of creating a local economy, food security, eco-villages etc. play a central role in caring for the global world.

**Ecovillages**

The term ecovillage popped up many times during the interviews. It seems to be one of the central solutions for the TM strategy. Some interviewees started their own ecovillages while others have been living and working in one for several years. For Markus, the ecovillage was one of the active starting points in the Transition life. Before starting his own ecovillage, he was participating in many discussions and debates about oil dependence until he decided to do practical things and simultaneously become a media person for the TM in Sweden:

“That we suddenly decided, that we should do something useful, so we all went off and started to do practical stuff. I, I would say everyone, there are couple who still discuss oil actually, quite entertainingly. Anyway, we ah, I started the ecovillage Änggården which is an ecovillage just outside Flen, between here and Gothenburg. And then I started working with the Transition Movement. I ran the social media side, [VC3] I set up gigantic social web place and I'll have

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*limit to the number of individuals with whom any one person can maintain stable relationships, that this limit is a direct function of relative neocortex size, and that this in turn limits group size ... the limit imposed by neocortical processing capacity is simply on the number of individuals with whom a stable inter-personal relationship can be maintained.*

114 Markus
115 Maria
a look back - that's me, I am still working with Transition, and still the Ecovillage.”\textsuperscript{116}

Local ecovillages are considered to be one of the grass-root initiatives which transition movement is employing in Sweden and in other countries. They are also called “intentional communities” according to Maria. Maria who has herself been living in an ecovillage on Gotland for the past several years, sees it as one of the most crucial solutions for change and transformations in the society:

“It's like different projects take different way and different themes and focuses but I would say that it's always about grass-root initiatives and also attempt of people to change, transform the society or to accelerate the transition forces which are going there. It's also very often, we work very closely to a lot of this, local ecovillage network.”\textsuperscript{117}

Despite the eco-village project having its own movement, according to one of the respondents – the World Eco-village movement – from analysing the interviews it is concluded that eco-village can certainly be considered as one of the transition movement strategies.

The alternative economic system: the commons and the collaborative economy

The interviewees expressed a way to change the unfair economic system and hence the culture through an economic system called \textit{commoning}, which the transition movement in Sweden is working on but also through “shared economy”. Markus describes what \textit{commoning} is about and compares it to capitalism:

“(…) we have been working on something that is called commoning which is an economic theory as much as anything, and it was put forward by Elinore Ostrom, the Nobel Prize Winner. The Commons are actually very effective and efficient ways to organise looking after property. Capitalism talks about individual ownership. I don't understand capitalism actually, to tell you the truth. When I turned 60 I thought I need a hobby, I don't I'll study capitalism and I am still doing it and I still don't understand it. I really don't, it seems to me a mind... it's a mistake, it's like an illusion, it's like what... this is a badly thought through way of thinking sort of stuff. I hope one day, you know, in the future people say "yeah you know, everyone believed in capitalism but no one knew what it was. It's one of humanities most unclear times, it was one of

\textsuperscript{116} Markus
\textsuperscript{117} Maria
humanities times when they were rather unclear, confused, capitalism was actually a confusion rather than a useful tool.”

Similarly, “collaborative economy”, also called “sharing economy” was discussed by Lucas in relation to the local movements such as TM and compared to the “growth economy” which defines the capitalist model:

“If the local movements grow as we want them to do people will change. I don’t want to say, "people change" but yeah people would vote differently also, is what I think. It's a win-win in that way too, and also it will show, I think even from as economic perspective, we see that is collaborative economy is really growing already and the local movement, basically it can be very good for economy as well. I don't think that we should have an economy that is based on growth but even today in economy with growth it can be good for economy.”

**Policy change and decentralisation**

The political relationship between the movement and the EU is unarguably expressed in the movement’s challenge to impact policies. Jessica believes that it is possible to change the EU policy but she claims that unfortunately the movement does not prioritise employing such strategy:

“I believe it is possible to influence EU policy with a systematic approach. We did so on the waste directives and were able to affect the ROHS directive, the packaging directives and the WEEE directive in the face of large economic players. Sadly, the movement does not prioritise this way of working as it seems to believe it is out of reach.”

However, the interviewed transitioners argue that decentralisation plays a significant role in facilitating the movement to make a significant change. Decentralisation gives people at the local level louder voice and more possibility to influence policy-making in their local communities so it is not surprising that the movement seeks to have more decentralisation. Lucas expresses his hopeful understanding about the link between decentralisation and upscaling of the movement to the EU level:

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118 Markus  
119 Lucas  
120 Ann
“I think if it's going to be scaled in the way that we want, that Transition way of doing things want, we need to maintain a big level of decentralized policy-making and decentralized decision-making in general, that people should have quite a lot of say, actually, about how they and the people locally live. So, it's going to be hard to merge these all the way, up-scaling from city to county to country and then to the EU and then to the world. But I think it can be done, it's not organizationally impossible like if you would just start from scratch and map it out how it should be organized, I think it can be done, so you have a good mix of national rules, laws and stuff like that, EU laws. I don't think it's impossible but it's going to be very hard.”

Markus explains that centralisation is not very good for transition because it may hinder people from being interested in doing transition on a local level:

“(…) Honestly, when you talk to politicians locally and we've done this around eco-village, I mean most, regardless of whether they are conservative or socialist or whatever, most people are more loyal to their local community and their local situation than they are to their party. But most of them would say though, we are actually steered too much by our party politics, centralised. So, from that point of view the steering of party, the centralisation of politics is probably not very good for transition because it stops people who otherwise would want to be inspired by transition in actually doing stuff on a local level.”

However, Markus also looks at the other side of the coin by acknowledging that centralisation can also be advantageable for local parties:

“On the other hand, it opens up, again the problem is the solution, on the other hand it opens up for a lot of local parties, yeah cause I mean when you going to vote, you know, one guy says “I'm Miljöpartiet” and then the other guy says "I am the local party" and heh, you know we want the buses to run on time and we want the rubbish collection to work and you think, well yeah "let's get the basics done first". Yeah, and we let the big parties battle out this, the large issues.”

According to another respondent, finding the balance between centralisation and decentralisation makes a lot of sense. Maria explains why this balance is so important:

“So, from one side we need more decentralization and more resilient local economies, more resilient local societies and communities, from another side we do live in a globalized world and we do need to solve the problems all together. If we are in the same boat and on one side people try to get the water out of the boat and on another side people are just sitting there and laughing at the first side, this is just ridiculous, we are all here having the same planetary

121 Lucas
122 Markus
123 Miljöpartiet in Swedish is Green party
124 Markus
boundaries, having the same problems with climate change. I mean but in the future, for most of the regions but still we have the same challenges coming to us and also migration showed that, I mean the last wave of the migration showed that we do have similar challenges which we need to tackle together not closing the borders but trying to address the problems in another part of the world, because otherwise it's impossible to avoid the echo coming to our homes.”

To conclude the sub-chapter, despite of the strong wish to alter the cultural, economic and political systems, the interviewed transitioners agree that the change should happen within the “existing system” instead of working outside of the system:

“(…) In order to get anywhere we need to use existing systems. To actively aim for a total political collapse is not the way forward. I believe such a path will end in too much human suffering.”

In the scope of this study, “using the existing systems” could be interpreted as being politically engaged in the current political order. The following chapter will, thus, explore to what extent the movement and its participants politically engage and collaborate with the EU.

6.6 Political Engagement of the Movement

The findings regarding political relationship of the movement show that all respondents were in agreement that political involvement and engagement of the movement was very desirable and potentially very effective. Some participants discussed the political involvement at the local level but some also included the national and the EU levels. At the EU level the process of political engagement is very slow due to bureaucratic structure of the EU.

Lucas means that this engagement can be very effective especially at the local level where it all starts and if it covers a popular issue it will eventually impact the wider politics at the national or the EU level:

“[political engagement can be] potentially very effective, and in municipalities and in cities is the thing I think the most, so and that's politics. (…) Because it starts from the bottom and gets a while till it gets to national or EU level, I

125 Jessica
guess, but maybe it goes fast if it becomes quite important in municipalities or
cities, maybe the transition to up-scaling can go very fast. I imagine, but I think
it can be very effective, absolutely, because, there is so many lines that hard to
draw also, because transition can be, I mean cykelkök\textsuperscript{126}, like bike-repair, I
think that can be a Transition initiative and stuff like that, and city-farming,
and local currency, if that can become a thing, more in many cities then I really
think that the impact can be very big on other politics as well because they
need to handle it, they need to adjust to what is happening on the local
level”\textsuperscript{127}.

Although at this point it is not something for him, Lucas thinks that it’s a good idea and
import for participants of the TM to engage more politically and he gives some successful
examples of such engagement by a TM initiative in Western Sweden:

“I think it's a good idea, yes, I think they should but we all have a different part
to play because now I feel like that maybe it is not my thing but I really like
when people do that. I have friends here in Malmö that engage, like go to, write
to politicians and, no I really think it's a good thing. For example, transition in
Helsingborg, they are a little group, just a little group of people who started
there a transition initiative and they engaged in a question about... the city
wanted, maybe wanted to take away Koloniträgårdsområden, so they engaged
in a question like that. They are very small but they made an opinion, and yeah,
you got together a lot of people in that subject and stuff like that is great, of
course. So, in sakfrågor [specific matters] that concern Transition-related
things which is everything, of course I would like to see more of that,
absolutely, it's important.”\textsuperscript{128}

Similarly, Jessica thinks that political engagement for the TM can be “very effective”\textsuperscript{129}. When asked, for example, about a potential political engagement of the movement with
Green political parties at the EU level, Jessica said that “it should be possible and yes, it is
desirable”\textsuperscript{130}.

Markus on the other hand, knows transitioners in Sweden who are local politicians and
discusses the importance of the interdependent relationship between the local politics and the
movement:

\textsuperscript{126} Translation from Swedish: bicycle kitchen. It is one of the TM initiatives based on volunteering in order to promote bicycle-friendly cities. People gather to help each other reparer their bycicles or donate their old ones which could also be repaired and taken by anyone for free.

\textsuperscript{127} Lucas

\textsuperscript{128} Lucas

\textsuperscript{129} Jessica

\textsuperscript{130} Jessica
“Well, you know we've done a few things, um, in local politics. We've had in Sweden a few Transitioners who are local politicians. (...) And TM in various countries have had some sort of political involvement, sometimes it's local level, sometimes it's national level. I mean, but yeah here in Sweden it's a really low level. Now at local level in Sweden is mixed, I mean I know a lot of local politicians. I wouldn't say a lot, I know a few, who are very positive to TM and, if you like, localization generally and want to work with them locally. Sometimes, in different places, there is a very strong TM but quite often there is not a strong awareness of transition in the municipality, in the municipal offices or in political side and sometimes it's the other way around. Sometimes you've got like municipal politicians who are very well aware of transition but there is no local group. Transition will take off when these two meet each other and that could happen any time because the TM is growing and when is this transition is growing to. And it's popping up like in different places in the world, different things are popping up, which a, like solving problems.”

Finally, Erik is convinced that by not being political the transition movement like any other movement will fail and that politics should be at the heart of TM’s agenda:

“It will fail! Because any movement that tries to be non-political will fail. Yeah! Sorry about that world, (laughs)! Politics is at the heart, like that is what it is, you know, the human relations of how we organise ourselves and how we relate to the world around us and there is, the resources. How can it not be political? That is the definition of politics, as far as I am concerned. If there are worries within the TM, that if they are too political then they will not be appreciated by some perhaps regressive conservative forces then it's just the risk that needs to be taken. The whole point is that you know the Transition creates a different kind of world and if you have people who want to maintain the world as it is, well that's just incompatible. There has to be an honest political message at the core of the TM activities. Otherwise it's not a TM. (...) well I mean if it doesn't have an agenda, if it doesn't say we are trying to create a different world or a different society or a different community, then it's, then it is by definition just trying to maintain what already exists and so there is no... it's simply impossible to say that there is no politics in transition. Even if it were just, even if Transition were limited to say what was happening in Totnes. Well, that's still political, there is still a sense of ah creating opportunities for people who are currently economically disenfranchised, well that's political, you know even if it happened nowhere else, that would be a political movement within Totnes.”

To concluded, most of the interviewees regarded political engagement as potentially very effective; for some this effectiveness would manifest at the local level and for others at all levels, including the EU.

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131 Markus
6.7 The European Union, Free Trade and the Movement

Free trade and the EU

All the interviewed participants uniformly agreed that free trade is unbeneﬁcial to human development, favours big corporations and disfavours small local companies. Moreover, the link between free trade and the system is seen in their responses. They state that by promoting free trade the EU contributes to maintaining the system as it is. Erik demonstrates how free trade and trade agreements are tools for maintaining the power in the hands of a very few people to an extent where imagining a different way of trading becomes impossible:

“(…) I think really, they are [free trade and TTIP/CETA] about the rights of investors and the maintenance of power, but the great deal of economic power is in the hands of a very few people. I think the EU is, has become kind of increasingly obsessed with market, market interactions to the point where now it can't, we can't really conceive of a different narrative than what it calls free trade.”\textsuperscript{132}

Markus exempliﬁes the impact of free trade on small organisations:

“Here I follow, there is a Swedish woman called Helena Nordberg Hotch and she has an organisation called Local Futures and she makes it very clear, she says look: the problem with these trade agreements is that they really favor large organisations and at the same time as they favor large organisations they disfavor the small ones.”\textsuperscript{133}

Jessica also criticizes the impact of free trade:

“I don’t think that any decent human being who actually understands the impact of these trade agreements are in favour of them.”\textsuperscript{134}

Respondents also discuss a link between free trade and sovereignty. Markus is concerned with the fact that the idea of free trade nowadays is portrayed to be the best way of trading between countries instead of the earlier concept of trading between sovereign countries when there is a surplus pf production:

\textsuperscript{132} Erik
\textsuperscript{133} Markus
\textsuperscript{134} Jessica
“Oh, don't get me getting on free trade, I mean Christ! You know, this came up at the time of Adam Smith, it was an economist called Ricardo. And they were saying like, yeah, you know nations should do what nations do best, and you should trade with each other. This was not an idea that people didn't like really and it didn't really take off until maybe the 50's and there were a lot of people talking about trade in this way, the you know like, one country should concentrate on a specialization and then they would be able to trade with another and this is one of this things that read economic theories but they actually have no empirical evidence that say that this is the way it should be. In fact, it never, if you take back, say back in the 50's when I've heard people say "we went to management school" right, so you have a country and the country looks after itself, like car manufacture, has you sell this and sell that and it's like, if it has a surplus then it will straight that surplus with another country for what the other country doesn't have enough of. That was the idea, that's sovereignty, that's the idea of being a sovereign nation and you have your own country again, sorry you have your own currency, that's what sovereignty is all about. And that's the idea of it, that's the idea of trade and suddenly it gets, it gets taken over by these organisations that talk about free trade, but really what's happening.”¹³⁵

In the same way Erik links, free trade to sovereignty in context of local resources but also relates it to modern colonialism:

“(…) But also, I mean, the concept of free trade is so tenuous, and I mean there is such a lack of empowerment for most of humanity. It can't be something that is actually has a direct beneficial link to humanity. I think any real benefit to human development is a secondary, secondary by-product of this kind of system. Um, and it's very often is used as an excuse to destroy local resource sovereignty to actually continue the march of colonialism.”¹³⁶

6.8 Collaboration with the EU or at the EU Level

Hope for collaboration

The EU is getting there but it’s taking them a lot of time and the financial side is the most important for the EU, seems to be the unitary belief of all interviewed participants. Lucas expresses this idea by exemplifying Denmark and some importing issues it had with free trade in the EU:

¹³⁵ Markus
¹³⁶ Erik
“(…) Money goes first and that's where the balance is basically the most important is financial side. I may be cynical but I know a lot of examples, especially like chemicals and stuff. I know Denmark tried to ban, and they did that and they said that "we don't want to import this thing" I don't know what was, can't remember, so they did that and the EU sued them or punished Denmark in some way because "you cannot do that", it's part of the free trade, even if it's bad stuff, things need to go smooth across all borders, "except people, they shouldn't go smooth across borders"."137

Other participants believe in the changing awareness of the people who work at the EU but are critical towards the EU’s bureaucratical structure and agenda that takes long time to change things. Ana, for example thinks that people who work in the EU are trying to bring change but it is the focus of the institution that hinders this change:

“I do think that there are people working in the EU who are trying to bring change using the means available, but it is a challenge as the EU focus is on economic interests before all else.”138

Markus, also has hope that people who work at the EU institutions in Brussels are getting on the same level of understanding as the participants of TM:

But from my own experience from working with people in Brussels, I say that they are kind of, they are getting pretty conscious.139

He concludes that, “the EU is kind of getting there in understanding this sort of thing but it's taking a lot of time for them”.140 To demonstrate why it takes such a long time he gives his personal example of legislation issues in the EU when it comes to labelling ecological products:

“The rules are so, so, so, so insidious, I just can't, I'll give an example. I don't have this product here, but I had a product right, which I happened to import to Sweden, so you have to give it a bar code, and the bar code is your company and then the product registered, and has a bar code for the product and that's free actually in the EU, that's very nice. It's not an EU thing though, it's… I think it maybe is, the European product. It's kind of stuff, unless you work with business, you never hear about it, you know like European Product identification system. Anyway, and then you have to go in and then you have to give your product a category, so when it's coming to country, the customs know what it is; there is no ecological category! There is not organic category, you know, you think that we have milk and organic milk and you think that

137 Lucas
138 Jessica
139 Markus
140 Markus
organic milk would have its own category so then you could raise the, you know raise the tax or lower the tax on that. There isn’t, why? What's going on?? When you say you want to have a country that is environmentally friendly why can't you label, why are environmentally friendly products aren't given the codes?”

Maria is convinced that actions and even discussions at the EU level on making sustainable change are far more behind those that happen at the local level:

“I mean I do believe that transformation can come only if we combine bottom-up and top-down approaches, but so far, it's rather as sweet words, so far, I would say that processes and actions which take place on local levels and in local communities are way ahead of what big organisations, big institutions are talking about. It's about 10 to 15 years behind. Like I mean the actions which local communities do, there are so many intentional communities which already have totally, not totally but at least partly renewable energy, grow their own food in a sustainable organic way, relate to each other in cooperative way instead of competition, grow a healthy generation, do education in a more holistic integral way instead of separation to subjects. I mean all these things they just start slowly, slowly come to, I mean people did get an understanding that this is the way forward but it takes so much time for the institutions to change the legislation, it takes so much time to convince all the lobbied parties that the institutions are way behind than the grass-root initiatives.”

Like Markus she explains that this change happens so slowly at the EU level because it is hindered by legislation:

“And this is really sad because very often we come to the cross when basically the local initiatives already know what to do and already have solutions but they are completely stuck and hindered by the legislation or they are completely stuck by corporative structures and in this case, I mean why the change doesn't happen even though we do have all solutions we need. But still are so much hindered by the structures which are much slower. Like I mean, when you come for example to our place, like I am looking now in a window I see in front of me, only bio-gas cars, like car-pool of bio-gas cars, I see bicycles, I see a part of a garden, a part of a naturally-built house. Nobody can say that this is something bad and this is not the way forwards, it's not an extreme, it's changing Diesel to bio-gases, changing basically materials with high-impact to less. It's changing from industrially-produced GMO food to organically grown. People do understand that this is something good but why don't we do it on a bigger scale, it's not about productivity, it's about being hindered from the, either from the institutions which do need to change

141 Markus
142 Maria
legislation or from corporate organisations which are too much interested in keeping the old order because this is where basically power stays.”

However, she stays hopeful about cooperation of the TM with all political levels including the EU:

“I mean definitely, definitely there should be a political cooperation, this is what I said in the beginning of the previous part that basically the real transition can happen only with support of the political structures both nationally, even locally and nationally and regionally and on the European level. I mean I am not talking about global government but all possible levels and it is possible only when we cooperate. (…)" 

The EU is a “good thing”

Despite the negative aspects that the interviewees mentioned about the EU’s economical focus and the free trade, almost all of them seem to appreciate the idea of EU and identify themselves as part of the EU. The interpretation of the idea slightly differs from one another. Lucas for instance expresses his appreciation in a form of support and unity that the EU gives to people:

“I like the idea of EU and I am ashamed to say that, and of course I feel part of the EU, like if I see EU flag at international context, I think like, yeah, we are part of the EU, that's what we are. The idea that a lot of groups of countries come together and find out how they can support each other, there is still a lot of supporting that is good, that's not bad. And, so yeah how to say, I feel that I am part of the EU.”

The explanation of why Lucas feels “ashamed to say that” he likes the idea of EU can be found in his other quote. Lucas seems to differentiate the EU as the idea, the EU as the economical institution and the EU as people. And he appears to support it as the idea of unity and the people it is “made up of” but he does not appreciate the economic agenda of the EU:

“It's made up of all nice people and I'm sure of it, people who want good things but it's struggling, it's stuck between, I mean I am anti-capitalistic and I blame the EU is bad because it's capitalistic. I don't know what to do more about that. But the people, I don't feel angry about the EU, never felt like that. Maybe

143 Maria
144 Maria
145 Lucas
sometimes, especially when they trade like this CETA and TTIP that I can be a bit angry but I guess it's just business as usual for them.”

In a similar way Erik has a very strong appreciation for the idea of EU as unity, i.e. the cultural and political unity of the EU. He seems to relate to EU’s motto “unity in diversity” but he believes that the reality should get closer to the actual idea:

“I do, yeah, I like the idea! Yeah, that's the word idea is very important! I love the idea of the EU. I, being you know, the diversity of cultures that exist within the EU, that for centuries were just kicking the shit out of each other, and now there is this wonderful sense of aah, I'm in Berlin, I am in Prague, oh, shall we go down to Spain for a couple of weeks and like, it's just like, it's such a good idea! Anything that joins human beings together essentially is a part of the common humanity, only can be a good thing and I think, yeah, the idea is still there and it's just has to evolve, the reality has to evolve towards the idea.”

Belonging to the EU is also very important for Erik. When explaining which geo-political level is more important for him, Erik says that being a European is way more important than being a British person:

“I still, I definitely feel like a EU citizen, I feel like a human being first, then a European second and then, well actually no, I feel like a human being first, a member of my community locally second, and then the European third and then definitely a British person after that. That's much less important.”

For Jessica, the idea of the EU means peace, she likes it and she is concerned if the EU ceases to exist:

“I like the idea of the EU because prior to it we were at war for 1000 years and we will be again when it goes.”

Even the TM participant in Sweden who does not hold citizenship of an EU country highly values the idea of the EU as unity in diversity. Interestingly, she connects this idea with the movement and how the problems related to localisation should be taken up at the EU level as well:

“I would say yes, especially as I am coming outside of the EU and I can see many benefits from this, not only that they don't need a visa traveling the European countries but also on a level of EU programs. Our organisation, our NGO works with this European funding also quite a lot and it's a great thing.

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Footnotes:
146 Lucas
147 Erik
148 Erik
149 Jessica
when you have a capacity to move people around the countries to exchange, to basically solve similar problems with different approaches and see what works better (…) What is important and what does not function always is to remember about the difference in a context, difference in a cultural context which exists even in the EU, so it is not about the attempt to create one cohesive sort of gray culture but it is about diversity and recognizing this diversity and applying different approaches in different regions and different countries because we are very different still. So, in this way, many points at which it can be critical. But to, how do you say, this is about a simultaneous movement inwards and outwards. So, from one side we need more decentralization and more resilient local economies, more resilient local societies and communities, from another side we do live in a globalized world and we do need to solve the problems all together. If we are in the same boat and on one side people try to get the water out of the boat and on another side people are just sitting there and laughing at the first side, this is just ridiculous, we are all here having the same planetary boundaries, having the same problems with climate change. I mean but in the future, for most of the regions but still we have the same challenges coming to us, and also, migration showed that, I mean the last wave of the migration showed that we do have similar challenges which we need to tackle together not closing the borders but trying to address the problems in another part of the world, because otherwise it’s impossible to avoid the echo coming to our homes.”

The last quote from Maria summarises the importance for the TM participants to engage with their projects and initiatives at the EU level and this will be discussed in the following subtheme of this chapter.

**EU projects**

In addition to recognising the importance of trying to solve the movement’s key issues at the regional, i.e. EU level, the participants recognise the support they get from the EU, in a form of EU projects or EU funding. In the case study, the most mentioned projects appeared to be the LEADER programme and the ECOLISE platform which are funded by the EU.

The interviews showed that supporting local farming and developing country side are some of the key goals of the Transition Movement in Sweden. LEADER which in French stands for *Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale* is a twenty years old

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150 Maria
151 Translation from French: “Links between the rural economy and development actions”
programme initiated by EU to support local rural development projects. Since 2014 it was extended to a broader term Community-Led Local Development, which in addition to supporting local community projects in rural areas started funding projects in urban and coastal areas as well. The use of the programme by TM participants is supported by their answers, such as when Lucas talks about using LEADER to fund TM projects:

“LEADER project and this other, this Landsbygdsutveckling, to keep country side economy good, development. It's a lot of projects that I funded by that actually. Transition projects as well.”

Markus also identifies LEADER as one of the cooperation links between the movement and the EU:

“(…) Yes, we've had something which was called the LEADER program. The LEADER program has, in a way, it's something at least which has helped local sustainable economy, and the LEADER program has been useful for Transition Movement. In many ways we have had, we've been able to do various projects thanks to LEADER funding.”

The other link of cooperation between the movement and the EU that was uncovered by the interviews is the ECOLISE network. ECOLISE is a European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability which supports a community-led transition to a resilient Europe. The transition movement in Europe actively uses this network which is funded by the EU and according to Markus it has been a good cooperation:

“It's called ECOLISE. So, the ECOLISE work has been funded by the EU and that's been very good as a cooperation. And there is also, the EU also is very interested in social economy and they put quite a bit of money into that. And they also put money into REALS, which is an eco-village project. So around ECOLISE there is like Transition and there is like the World Eco-village movement, these of all have been supported by EU.”

From Markus’s quote, it is visible that eco-village project supported by the EU programme called REALS is another point of cooperation between the TM and the EU. Markus gives
further recognition and appreciation to the EU’s work for the movement and especially the aspect of eco-villages:

“I mean the EU they've put a lot of money into social economy and they've supported ECOLISE. And I know the EU sees, I mean in terms of environmental programs, they see small local communities as being an answer to pollution problems, especially eco-villages. Eco-villages are really, really very clever solutions to a lot of the problems facing EU.”157

ECOLISE works as a platform which speeds up the process of idea and practice exchange between the grassroot initiatives and the policy-makers. In Maria’s response, it is once again visible that participants consider the EU’s structure being slow at making a practical change but the ECOLISE network helps to mainstream these practical solutions at the EU level:

“The problem is that for big bureaucratic structures it's not like they don't understand or they don't have an intention, it's just really a slow process. But definitely and this is what ECOLISE works towards, to have this more participatory approach to have the capacity to basically develop those solutions which are already there, not to develop but to mainstream them. (…)”158

The results of this chapter demonstrated that despite not appreciating the free trade policy of the EU, the participants are in favour of the idea of EU as a multicultural entity. The results also demonstrated the relatively solid collaborating relationship with the EU. The points of collaboration are expressed in EU projects, programs and funds that transitioners regularly apply for in order to implement their initiatives. Moreover, there is a Transition Movement network at the European level (ECOLISE) which is also funded by EU.

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157 Markus
158 Maria
Chapter 7. Conclusion

This case study demonstrated the nature of Transition Movement in Sweden and its relationship with the EU using multi-institutional politics approach. The findings expressed this relationship through TM participants’ perception, attitude, sense of belonging to the EU, and their political engagement. Doing so, it attempted to answer the research question: “what is Transition Network in Sweden; how political is it and what is its relationship (interaction) with the EU?”.

Transition Movement in Sweden

The Transition Movement in Sweden appears to have a fluid structure and the participants’ demographic characteristics vary greatly as they come from different countries and are of wide range of age. The results showed that even the structure of the movement influences its relationship with the EU. There is a believe among some of the interviewees that the movement would benefit from having a more organised structure which could be considered more effective in order to reach out to regional political entities: the EU institutions.

The interviewed transitioners showed to be motivated to be part of the movement because it gives them a better life style but also because they feel like they make a difference in the world.

Targeting the culture

Despite of the interviewees being politically engaged at the EU level (EU parliamentary voting, former experience with the EU institutions, policy-making) their focus lies on altering the culture, which they almost equate to the capitalist economic system. Because they see the culture and the economic system as consumption and profit oriented, they regard it as highly destructive both for Earth and all organic life on it. This way they are even critical towards Sweden as being one of the most modernised post-industrial states in the world.
According to them, Sweden’s strategy towards sustainability is not enough; the “oppressive” culture of consumption has to be altered.

The Transition Movement in Sweden is taking up a strategy of a different environmental activism in comparison to the traditional contentious one (demonstrating, lobbying etc.): it attempts to foster a social and cultural change by creating inspiring initiatives. Five strategies used by TM Sweden to alter the culture were identified:

1. Inner transition: Personal life style, consumption
2. Resilient local economies: being a glocal
3. Initiatives: ecovillages
4. Alternative economic system (e.g. the commons)
5. Policy change and decentralisation

**Political relationship with the EU**

From the findings it became evident that the movement clearly focuses on changing the culture but what is its political relationship with the regional (European) level then? Does the movement target political institutions at all and how? Upon my initial encounter with various people from the movement before conducting this thesis, it could seem that most of the movement’s participants were apolitical, i.e. did not have any political agenda and were not interested in participating in political activities. From the interviews, however, the picture turned out to look different. By attempting to change the society through culture, the movement stays political.

This is demonstrated by different findings from the analysis, such as participants’ argument that it is important to work within the existing system and their already existing political/economic cooperation. They all regarded political engagement in form of cooperation as being something very crucial for the movement even if they did not practice it themselves.

Most of the interviewees claimed that political cooperation with the EU is highly desirable and can be very effective. They believe that down-up approach is the way forward because grass-roots initiatives have more practical and efficient solutions than the higher political
institutions, such as the EU. Unfortunately, the participants themselves do not attempt to excessively engage with the EU institutions as they seem to be too slow due to its bureaucratic structure. However, the interviewees gladly use the European network of transition initiatives (ECOLISE) which is supported by EU.

ECOLISE was not the only EU cooperation uncovered through the interview analysis. Various projects, such as the EU rural development policy, the LEADER project and REALS all support the Transition Movement initiatives in Sweden.

Overall, the case study attempting to show the relationship between the movement and the EU, uncovered some unexpected results. The analysis of the interviews showed that the movement targets culture more than changes in policies at the EU level. Nevertheless, the interviewed participants have a strong personal relationship with the EU and they use the regional level as a platform for improving their grass-root activities (e.g. ECOLISE network). Although targeting political institutions, such as EU would be considered desirable, attempting to change the culture the way the movement does should be considered very effective and legitimate from the perspective of multi-institutional politics approach.

**Outlook**

Discussing the relationship between the researched movement and the EU, would make it more reasonable and fair to look at the perspective of both sides and explore to what extent they impact each other’s existence and activities. The recommendation for further research would be, thus, to look at how the EU reacts to the rise of Transition Movement in the European states; and whether, there is a potential of EU recognition and support/assistance to such grassroots movements. Conducting interviews with EU representatives working in the area of social movements and environment would bring more insight into this relationship, as well as looking into existing policies in these areas. Such research would not only contribute to social and political science but also to implementing existing solutions and tackling the climate change and peak oil issues.
Bibliography


Appendix. Interview Schedule

1. Information about the interviewee

Sociodemographic characteristics (age, origins (big city, country side?), education, political and other affiliations, current and past involvement in other movements, labor unions etc.)

Social aspects
- How would you describe your life style? And your personal way of consumption?
- What is your opinion on the relation between the Global North and the Global South? Is the relation fair in your opinion? How do you think the European/Western lifestyle affects poorer countries with regard to environment?

2. Transition Movement

This theme will attempt to cover the concept of motivation

Participation in the Transition Movement
- When did you join the movement? Why and how?
- Are you worried about the future of the planet and of the place of human societies on Earth?
- What are your main activities and aspirations in the movement?

Role in the TM and role in the world
- Do you feel like you are making a difference?
- Do you think that the difference that you make can change anything on a bigger scale, for instance at the EU level?
- What sociopolitical environment is more important for you local (your community), national, regional (the EU, Scandinavia) or global?
- Do you consider that a local action towards transition is the best way to achieve the goal of helping our societies to survive their current dangers?
- Can the local approach be helped by a more globally-structured activism?

3. The TM participant and the EU

Perception and attitude towards the EU in areas of economical, environmental, social aspects and policies
- Is our current global economic model satisfying for you?
- Do you observe any cooperation or contribution to the movement from the EU’s side?
- What is your opinion on free trade and consumption promoted by the EU (e.g. CETA/TTIP)?
- What is your general opinion about the EU and its attitude? Do you have any concerns or hopes?
- Do you think a (potential) alliance with the environmental political movement at the EU level, such as the European Green Party would be possible? Would it be desirable?
- What do you think about how the EU’ balances policies of economic prosperity and the environmental protection? And the emerging necessity of a global environmental awareness?

**Representation**

- How do you feel represented by the EU institutions? Do you feel like you have a voice in the EU politics?
- Do you vote on national or/and the EU level?
- In your opinion, how effective can the political engagement be for the Transition movement?

**Belonging**

- Do you identify yourself as part of the EU or exclusively as part of your own community in which you do the transition work, or both?
- Do you like the idea of the EU?
- How much do you engage in the EU politics?
- Do you think the EU policies play a big role in your everyday life and how?

**4. Free time**

Open subject (something that the interviewee would like to add)

- Do you have anything you would like to add, something that we haven’t mentioned?