**Republicanism, Climate Adaptation, and the Transition Movement**

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The Transition Towns movement has been cited[[1]](#endnote-1) as embodying elements of a civic republican response to climate change. In this paper, I will discuss some of the main contours of Transition and assess its potential as a green republican response to climate change. I will focus my critique on the following dimensions of the Transition movement: 1) its emphasis on resilience in the face of climate change, 2) its localism, and 3) its apolitical character. I will argue that while the Transition movement is promising as a partial republican response to climate change, these three problematic aspects of Transition suggest that Transition is more appropriately a part of a larger green republican climate politics rather than a sufficient approach on its own.

**Civic Republicanism**

Civic republicanism emphasizes citizens’ active participation in crafting, deliberating on, and pursuing their community’s political ends. Republican liberty, in contrast to liberalism, is not so much about freedom *from* government, but about collective *self-government* and the virtues that enable citizens to be self-governing, to be free from political and economic domination (in other words, structures and relationships that enable on party to exercise arbitrary power over another – on this, see more below), and to deliberate with another to pursue a common life and the common goods that animate it. Republicans extend self-government not only to political institutions, but also to other spheres of life, including the economy, civil society, and even the family. They favor restraints on the market or at least on materialistic values, especially in the interests of limiting inequality and self-interest, both of which can foster domination, and undermine self-government, community, and civic virtue and lead to corruption. They favor the economic independence or self-reliance of individuals or communities, not as an atomistic barrier to the rest of society but as a way of protecting citizens from domination by others and also enabling them to deliberate about the common good free from economic coercion.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Civic republicanism has roots in the political thought of Aristotle and Cicero and in the historical experience of the Greek city-states and the Roman Republic. Civic republican thought flourished in Renaissance Florence and early modern Poland, Holland, and England. Republican themes were also articulated by a number of political philosophers, including Machiavelli, James Harrington, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft, and others. Finally, the American Founders were motivated by a republican perspective, one that remained influential in the United States until at least the early 19th century. Michael Sandel shows civic republican influence carrying over into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example in the Republican Party’s mid-nineteenth century free labor ideology and in the early labor movement. Indeed, Sandel argues that civic republican themes have continued in the rhetoric of some American politicians, both Democratic and Republican, and that republicanism has informed various political movements since the beginning of the twentieth century, including aspects of the Progressive Era, as well as the Civil Rights movement and community organizing movements, and the anti-sprawl and New Urbanist movements.[[3]](#endnote-3) Elsewhere, I argue that the American suburb, perhaps the quintessential embodiment of a consumption-oriented, free-market society, actually has republican roots.[[4]](#endnote-4)

A republican society would emphasize a robustly participatory, engaged, deliberative political culture. It would secure non-dominating relationships in the political sphere, as well as in economics, the workplace, the family, and civil society. It would impose limits on economic inequality. It would ensure that citizens have the social and material basis for independence. It would cultivate relevant civic virtues. It would view society as more a collective enterprise than merely a mutual pact for the protection of individual rights. Moreover, it would have more opportunities for local self-governance, whether through citizens groups, civic associations, town meetings, neighborhood assemblies, and so forth. Where feasible, political institutions would be decentralized down to their lowest level of competent jurisdiction.

A republican society might also be a green one, as republicanism and environmentalism have significant commonalities. As I have argued elsewhere, the environmental movement itself has strong republican overtones, a view I share with other scholars.[[5]](#endnote-5) Though reformist environmentalists might support centralized regulation and top-down ecological management, more radical green activists distrust governmental or corporate bureaucracies and share republicans’ preference for political decentralization and local self-government. Like republicans, many environmentalists see civic participation and local democracy as upholding the common good against special interests.

There are other similarities. Both republicanism and environmentalism harbor suspicion or even hostility toward luxury, consumption, and the market. Like republicans, more radical environmentalists critique capitalism and limitless growth and favor material simplicity over luxury and consumption. As we will see, republicanism often associates capitalism with degenerative corruption, domination by special interests, divisive inequalities, and a breakdown in civic virtue and engagement. Many greens see similar problems: capitalism enables special interests, such as polluters and developers, to profit off environmental abuse; it makes economically dependent workers, such as coal miners, oppose sustainability; it commodifies nature and place; its focus on consumption and growth violates ecological limits, promotes pollution and environmental destruction, fosters materialism and greed, and discourages sacrifice for the ecological good.

Both republicanism and environmentalism are centrally concerned about social and/or ecological vulnerability in the face of corruption or degenerative change. Both views suggest that citizens should have a certain characters or virtues to stave off corruption and protect society and/or the environment. There is thus a focus on long-term stability or sustainability in both republicanism and environmentalism. As John Barry argues, the republic’s determinate existence in space and time, and republicans’ historical concern – often to the point of pessimism – with eventual corruption give republicanism an appreciation of limits, of people’s dependence on and vulnerability to external forces, and even of the republic’s ecological conditions and specificities.[[6]](#endnote-6) Barry thus calls sustainability “a central value for republicans.”[[7]](#endnote-7) Rather than adopting modernity’s conventional narrative of human progress, the republic must maintain itself against degenerative forces. This makes the republican polity an intergenerational compact: one cannot fall back on the prospect of future progress, economic growth, or the invisible hand to give license to either material greed or ecologically profligate practices in the present.[[8]](#endnote-8)

**The Transition Movement**

The Transition movement focuses on three key global challenges: climate change, reliance on fossil fuels (including the controversial issue of Peak Oil, which I will not elaborate on here), and global economic crisis. Transition addresses the problems through local action – the creation of “Transition Towns” or “Transition initiatives” – to build economic, social, and environmental resiliency, reduce energy use, and end fossil fuel dependence. The movement started in 2005-2006 with two groups, in Kinsale, Ireland, and Totnes, UK. By 2013, there were over 1100 initiatives in over 43 countries.[[9]](#endnote-9)

With regard to climate change, Transition efforts can fit into both mitigation and adaptation. In terms of mitigation, Transition groups work to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and thus promote reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, the Transition movement’s effort to build local economic self-determination, especially with regard to food production, would ostensibly make local communities more resilient in the face of disruptive climatic events. However, the movement, with its focus on resilience, tends to lean more toward adaptation.

One must distinguish between individual Transition initiatives, which are generally at the level of a street, neighborhood, small town, or perhaps a municipality, though usually on the scale of communities with no more than 20,000 people, and the larger Transition movement itself. The movement does not present a top-down blueprint for action. Rather, through national, regional, or municipal ‘hubs’ like the UK National Hub, Transition US, or the Mid-Atlantic Transition Hub, it works as a kind of facilitating network that helps nurture more local initiatives. These larger groups pursue a number of tasks. They share information, organize gatherings, make connections with groups in other regions or countries, maintain an online and social media presence for the movement, provide directories of initiatives, facilitate communication among groups, help with fundraising, offer publicity and media resources, provide technical support, publish books, and provide training in group organization and governance, conflict resolution, and sustainable living.[[10]](#endnote-10) Transition US describes itself as “based on a living cell, a biological system, in keeping with the organic emergence of the Transition movement. Various scales of initiative emerge organically … at scales that feel most appropriate to them, guided by the Purpose and Principles of Transition. Regional groups may network together creating ‘hubs’ of Transition Initiatives that work to common purpose.” Transition US “functions like a cell membrane, enshrining the Purpose and Principles common to the wider Transition Movement and acts as a catalyst to keep the circle expanding as the number of initiatives it contains grows.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

For individual Transition efforts, the overall approach seems to be to start with an initiating group that publicizes the movement for about a year through events like film screenings and lectures, and so gets people involved, and eventually receives training from the larger hub. The group then has a Great Unleashing, an organizing event that brings in people from the community and leads to the dissolution of the initiating committee and the creation of an established, active group. As groups mature, they move from smaller-scale projects like community gardens to larger, more holistic efforts that address issues like transportation infrastructure and energy generation.

Specific Transition projects around the world have included community-owned energy cooperatives and renewable energy development; efforts to make local businesses, like dry cleaners, environmentally friendly; permaculture farming, urban gardens, and bee hives; tree-planting; water- and energy-saving projects and building retrofits; rainwater collection; composting, waste recycling, and waste reduction projects; design of pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly streets; street fairs, festivals, and arts and other cultural initiatives; creation of local business and craft enterprises; partnerships with existing local businesses; film series and other informational events; environmental education initiatives; local currencies and barter networks; health fairs; and Energy Descent Action Plans (EDAPs). An EDAP sets out a vision of a powered-down, resilient, relocalized future, and then backcasts, in a series of practical steps, creating a map to get there from here.

A particularly ambitious effort in the U.S., Jamaica Plain New Economy Transition (JPNET), based in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood in Boston, has been intensively active at the neighborhood level. JPNET has organized farmer’s markets, established a local currency, hired a full-time bi-lingual community organizer, created a Community Leaders Fellowship, launched a New Economy Enterprise Hub to create place-based and sustainable jobs and livelihoods and promote racial justice and equity, provided money and assistance with incubating local enterprises, and worked with a local dry cleaner to stop using toxic chemicals. JPNET also organizes annual State of Our Neighborhood Forums and issues annual reports gauging “indicators of community resilience.”[[12]](#endnote-12) These include, among other things, population level and ethnic and socioeconomic diversity, local food production in community gardens, energy use, access to energy off the grid, access to non-automobile transportation, number of neighborhood businesses and jobs, availability of local support networks, individuals’ connectivity to neighbors and the local community, skill level in the local population, and individuals’ physical and financial health.[[13]](#endnote-13)

In the interests of sustainability, local self-reliance, resilience, and community-building, Transition groups also aim at reskilling people and communities to be more self-reliant and less dependent on and vulnerable to global economic networks. They hold workshops aimed at re-skilling in crafts and practices like farming, horticulture, gardening, cooking, baking, canning, weaving, sewing, spinning, brewing, bee-keeping, animal husbandry, herbal medicine, bicycle maintenance, stove construction, plumbing, vermiculture, teaching, emergency preparedness, rainwater harvesting, building and constructing with natural materials, paper-making, aquaculture, hunting, fishing, sailing, furniture-making, welding, water purification, making music, storytelling, crowd-funding, first aid, tanning, woodworking, small engine repair, green home design, and biodiesel manufacture. [[14]](#endnote-14) Philip Barnes of Media, Pennsylvania’s Transition town, says that “reskilling is first and foremost a community-oriented method to master the simple, practical, and useful appropriate technologies that will be prevalent in a localized and carbon-constrained world.”[[15]](#endnote-15)

For larger cities, like Transition Bristol in the UK – Bristol has a population of over 428,000 – Transition can work on two levels.[[16]](#endnote-16) At one level is a set of networked, village-scale initiatives. Transition Bristol holds monthly meetings to bring Transition participants together, maintains a website, and runs a series of events and talks. However, there is a second, more encompassing level, as Transition Bristol has been developing energy, transport, and food strategies for the whole city.[[17]](#endnote-17)

A somewhat different way of pursuing a citywide scale is to start on a neighborhood level and then expand. For example, JPNET has been reaching beyond its own neighborhood and launched the Boston Food Forest Coalition. The Coalition seeks “to establish a public food forest network throughout the City of Boston. This network will consist of publicly accessible edible gardens, orchards, and food forests.”[[18]](#endnote-18)

# The Seven Guiding Principles of Transition

# Barry sees Transition as having key affinities with republicanism. A look at Transition’s core principles illustrates this affinity.

**The Transition US website lists seven guiding principles.**[[19]](#endnote-19) **These are, slightly paraphrased: 1) positive visioning**, 2) **helping people access good information and trusting them to make good decisions; 3) inclusion and openness; 4) sharing and networking; 5) building resilience; 6) inner and outer transition; and 7) subsidiarity, meaning self-organization and decision making at the appropriate level. I will discuss these in a somewhat different order, beginning with one that seems particularly fundamental.**

***Building Resilience***

Hopkins opens *The* *Transition Handbook* with the following: “Central to this book is the concept of resilience.” This has already been made clear to the reader by the subtitle, *From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience*. Hopkins defines *resilience* as “the ability of a system, from individual people to whole economies, to hold together and maintain their ability to function in the face of change and shocks from the outside.”[[20]](#endnote-20)

Hopkins maintains that “cutting emissions without resilience-building is ultimately futile.”[[21]](#endnote-21) Resilience is in many ways about adaptation: adapting to now-inevitable future climate change, adapting to life without fossil fuels, adapting to reduced energy use and material wealth. Hopkins thus ties resilience to living within ecological limits: a resilient society has the “ability to function indefinitely and to live within its limits, and [is] able to thrive for having done so.”[[22]](#endnote-22) The acceptance of limits implies recognition that there are things beyond the control of an individual or society. Barry sees resilience as a realism that enables adaptation: “To be resilient means, at the most basic level, to live, to be able to continue living in the face of often negative changes in circumstances and those *inevitable* and often unpredictable challenges all humans and all societies face.”[[23]](#endnote-23) Resilient actors recognize their limits as well as their vulnerability in the face of future changes.[[24]](#endnote-24) Barry emphasizes, “Resilience … is a way of coping with rather than eliminating vulnerability and contingency.”[[25]](#endnote-25)

Resilience also involves, in Barry’s words, “institutional capacity and cultivating appropriate dispositions, habits, and virtues.”[[26]](#endnote-26) He notes that “resilient individuals or communities are ones that demonstrate certain virtues or characteristics, such as flexibility, adaptability, and adeptness in responding, willingness to change, including especially one’s views or previously held beliefs or values, and foresight to plan ahead for contingencies, envisage different scenarios, and the ability to make informed judgements.”[[27]](#endnote-27) Resilience entails creativity, innovation, and a recognition that conditions are impermanent and in flux.[[28]](#endnote-28) Barry notes, “Resilience can be regarded itself as a virtue, linked to older virtues of fortitude and also expressing elements of courage, foresight, and prudence.”[[29]](#endnote-29) He notes that the classical virtue of courage or fortitude is often exhibited in the face of adversities that one cannot necessarily eliminate but with which one must cope.[[30]](#endnote-30)

The notion of resilience as a virtue recalls republicanism and also fits with republicanism’s recognition of limits and vulnerability to external forces, cited above. Resilience, Barry says, “resonate[s] with some key civic republican themes around contingency, action, uncertainty, *virtù* and *fortuna* as articulated by Machiavelli and others.”[[31]](#endnote-31) Machiavelli likens *fortuna* “to one of those violent rivers which, when they become enraged, flood the plains, ruin the trees and the buildings, lift earth from this part, drop in another … And although they are like this, it is not as if men, when times are quiet, could not provide for them with dikes and dams so that when they rise later, either they go by a canal or their impetus is neither so wanton nor so damaging.”[[32]](#endnote-32) Endowed with *virtù*, one is able to not only take advantage of opportunities provided by *fortuna*, but also plan ahead for when fortune turns and maintain resilience in the face of potential calamity.[[33]](#endnote-33) The wise statesman does not control the river itself and cannot prevent its waters from actually rising, but is able to cope with the water when it rises.

***Positive Visioning***

Though Transition’s emphasis on resilience involves the recognition of limits and the expectation of future challenges, Transition departs from republicanism’s aforementioned pessimism. Rather, Transition and its concept of resilience involve positive visioning. Barry says that a “unique feature of the Transition movement is its upbeat, inclusive, and positive character,”[[34]](#endnote-34) one that welcomes and indeed strives for a future with less energy.[[35]](#endnote-35) Such a future, Barry says, “is not viewed as regressive, negative, or something to be resisted, but rather viewed as an opportunity for the creative exploration of new ways of living that try to achieve high quality of life with less energy and resources.”[[36]](#endnote-36)

This positive visioning acknowledges that the future is constrained but also sees exhilarating and almost infinite possibility within those constraints. Hopkins says that in starting a Transition group, one should not impose a plan or blueprint from the outset, but instead, “Let it go where it wants to go.”[[37]](#endnote-37) Transition, according to Barry, involves “improvisation [and] responsible and informed risk-taking,” in a process that is “spontaneous, creative, messy, and unpredictable,” and involves an effort to reduce unsustainability in a way that is “both disruptive and transgressive.”[[38]](#endnote-38) Yet this improvisation is neither reckless nor marked by modernity’s hubris: Transition emphasizes humility and a “cautious and considered approach to decision-making and action.”[[39]](#endnote-39)

Positive visioning means that Transition offers what Barry calls “concrete utopian” experiments for imagining a different kind of society.[[40]](#endnote-40) In other words, “to live in a less unsustainable society is to live in a *different type of society* not simply the ‘greening’ of the existing one.”[[41]](#endnote-41)

***Inner and Outer Transition***

Inner and outer transition means that Transition requires not just changes in institutions, technologies, economies, culture, and practices, but also changes in perspective and psychology. As Barry points out, this is related to the movement’s interest in reskilling and entails coping, empowerment, and building social connections in the face of daunting challenges like climate change that might otherwise induce helplessness.[[42]](#endnote-42)

In developing the notion of inner transition, Hopkins also draws on the psychology of change and of addiction treatment.[[43]](#endnote-43) A key part of inner transition is shedding our individual and collective addiction to an energy-intensive, high-consumption way of life and cultivating courage and coping with the fear induced by the impending end of that way of life.[[44]](#endnote-44) This of course ties in with positive visioning. It also relates to the idea, discussed above, that Transition involves the cultivation of certain character traits, particularly virtues, suited to a green, post-carbon society.

***Inclusion and Openness;******Sharing and Networking***

For the Transition movement, *inclusion and openness* involves connecting with the local community, from activists to plain citizens to government agencies to businesses. It means recognizing “the principle that there is no room for ‘them and us’ thinking.”[[45]](#endnote-45) Barry says that “at the heart of transition is the re/creating or reviving of community and forms of social solidarity.”[[46]](#endnote-46) Such solidarity, says Barry, involves reversing contemporary atomization and hyper-individualism and pursuing “a shared societal project” to change our way of life.[[47]](#endnote-47)

These values tie in with republicanism’s emphasis on the common good over private interests. Republicanism demands a strong sense of civic identity and sees in a politics a deliberative enterprise to further collective ends. Michael Sandel notes that republican “[s]elf-government ... requires ... citizens who sufficiently identify with their communities to think and act with a view to the common good.”[[48]](#endnote-48) Through self-government, citizens realize a strong sense of community. And the Transition principle of *sharing and networking* suggests building solidaristic bonds beyond one’s own community or Transition initiative: “Transition Initiatives dedicate themselves to sharing their successes, failures, insights and connections at the various scales across the Transition network, so as to more widely build up a collective body of experience.”[[49]](#endnote-49)

***Trusting People to Make Good Decisions***

The Transition movement is fundamentally democratic. It emphasizes the ability of local communities to decide their own economic and political fate and to structure their lives independently of global markets and capitalism and free of centralized state control. Transition emphasizes the notion that “communities of people can shape the conditions (socio-ecological and social) for their own flourishing.”[[50]](#endnote-50)

There is significant commonality with republicanism here. Republicans argue that pursuit of the common good means giving the citizenry – rather than concentrated economic and political special interests – collective governance of society.[[51]](#endnote-51) As mentioned earlier, civic republicans see liberty not so much as freedom *from* government, but as collective *self-government*. Thad Williamson notes, “The most fundamental claim of contemporary civic republican thought is that freedom should be centrally understood as the ability to influence, through participation in collective action, the social forces that shape the life of both individuals and communities: self-governance, in short, is coextensive with freedom.”[[52]](#endnote-52) Iseult Honohan says, “Republican political autonomy means that citizens … follow purposes that they can endorse as theirs, in so far as they have a say in shaping and sustaining them.” Citizens must have “some ability to control the conditions of their collective life.”[[53]](#endnote-53)

Self-government is entailed not only by the ability of the demos to pursue the public good, but also by the republican ideal of non-domination. Domination involves the power to arbitrarily and intentionally interfere with others in their making of choices,[[54]](#endnote-54) whether or not that power is exercised; it also involves “the ability to impose obligations and duties on others arbitrarily.”[[55]](#endnote-55) Authority by established by consent or established out of necessity to secure the good of those – such as children – who are unable to consent is not domination.

Non-domination is not just about whether those in power actually interfere with others but about how power is fundamentally structured. Cécile Laborde and John Maynor say, “For republican thinkers, living in subjection to the will of others *in itself* limits liberty.” They maintain that “domination is a function of the relationship of unequal power between persons, groups of persons, or agencies of the state.” One should not live at the mercy of another.[[56]](#endnote-56)

Non-domination accordingly involves the idea that “agents are free when they are not subject to the possibility of arbitrary interference, or domination.”[[57]](#endnote-57) Non-domination requires that political power be accountable to the public, which in turn means an engaged, vigilant citizenry and self-government. Philip Pettit says, “Democratic participation may be essential to the republic, but that is because it is necessary for promoting the enjoyment of freedom as non-domination.”[[58]](#endnote-58)

Non-domination relates to the classical republican value of *independence*,[[59]](#endnote-59) the idea that a person should stand on their own two feet economically and politically rather than being dependent on someone who controls their fate and dictates their vision of the common good. Historically, republicans celebrated those having an independent economic base and limited material ambitions, such as the small farmer and the self-employed artisan. “‘Independence’ in pursuing one’s economic calling and ‘independence’ as a citizen were entwined.”[[60]](#endnote-60) As Drew McCoy puts it, economic independence “permitted a citizen to participate responsibly in the political process, for it allowed him to pursue spontaneously the common or public good, rather than the narrow interest of the men – or the government – on whom he depended for his support.”[[61]](#endnote-61)

Some republicans, such as Barry,[[62]](#endnote-62) have moved away from the corollary focus on independence toward a focus on mutual vulnerability and interdependence. Here, the citizen is still conceived as independent of political or economic domination. However, one is connected to others by shared vulnerability in the face of threats to the community and the individual and by the mutual interdependencies that arise through collective life. Such mutual vulnerability and reliance, so long as they are reciprocal and egalitarian, are not inconsistent with independence from relationships of domination and subordination.[[63]](#endnote-63) In fact, it is mutual reliance that would enable a local community to escape domination by external political and economic forces.

This brings us back to the democratic aspect of Transition. The movement trusts people to collectively manage their own political and economic lives and thus emphasizes self-government, especially on a local level, as I discuss below. Moreover, Transition pursues non-domination through collective independence from larger political and economic forces and power structures. Barry describes Transition activists as “pioneers” who organize “outposts” in the “empty lands/wilderness” of “the dominant Western consumer and high-energy way of life.”[[64]](#endnote-64) These outposts are a pioneering vanguard for the Transition concept of “a local economy progressively decoupling from the long supply chains of energy, materials, and commodities of the globalized economy.”[[65]](#endnote-65)

***Subsidiarity***

Subsidiarity expresses the idea that challenges like climate change must be addressed at multiple levels rather than through a top-down approach. The Transition US website says that subsidiarity “embodies the idea that the intention of the Transition model is not to centralize or control decision making, but rather to work with everyone so that it is practiced at the most appropriate, practical and empowering level, and in such a way that it models the ability of natural systems to self organize.”[[66]](#endnote-66) Hopkins acknowledges, “Responding to climate change on an adequate scale requires a lot of money and an unprecedented degree of global cooperation.”[[67]](#endnote-67) He says, “Transition Initiatives are not the only response to peak oil and climate change; any coherent national response will also need government and business responses at all levels.” Yet, in keeping with the value of self-government, he emphasizes that absent efforts like Transition and its approach of positive visioning and local action, “any government responses will be doomed to failure, or will need to battle protractedly against the will of the people.”[[68]](#endnote-68) While some policy “needs to be driven at a national governmental level, much of the momentum and pressure, as well as the diversity of projects and initiatives that need sanction or support from government, can come from the local level.”[[69]](#endnote-69) Moreover, “resilience-building is about working on small changes to lots of niches in the place, making lots of small interventions rather than a few large ones.”[[70]](#endnote-70)

Hopkins embraces citywide efforts like Bristol’s but also emphasizes that such efforts involve – as Bristol’s does – neighborhood-level or “village” initiatives and that one must certainly start from a small scale and work upwards rather than proceed from the top down:

I have come to think that the ideal scale for a Transition Initiative is one over which you can feel you can have an influence. A town of 5,000 people, for example, is one that you can relate to; it is one with which you can become familiar.[[71]](#endnote-71)

Such a bottom-up approach also involves local experimentation: “The exact set of solutions that will work in one place will not necessarily work in other places: each community will assemble its own solutions, responses, and tools.”[[72]](#endnote-72) Hopkins maintains that “those at the top lack the knowledge of local conditions and how to respond to them.”[[73]](#endnote-73) For one thing, feedbacks are tighter at a local level. Whereas globalization hides the impacts of one’s actions, “In a more localised system, the results of our actions are more obvious … Tightening feedback loops will have beneficial results, allowing us to bring the consequences of our actions closer to home, rather than their being so far from our awareness that they don’t even register.”[[74]](#endnote-74)

Localism means more modularity: in other words, localities become more self-contained in their economic and other material practices. Hopkins says, “We aren’t looking to create a ‘nothing in, nothing out’ economy, but rather to close economic loops where possible and to produce locally what we can.”[[75]](#endnote-75)

Modularity means less energy use for the transportation of goods in a carbon-constrained world.[[76]](#endnote-76) It also enables localities to insulate themselves from external shocks. Hopkins notes, “The over-networked nature of modern, highly connected systems allow shock to travel rapidly through them, with potentially disastrous results.” He cites the enormous ripple effects when a bank or investment firm fails, or when food products in one factory are contaminated. By contrast, a “more modular structure means that the parts of a system can more effectively self-organise in the event of shock.”[[77]](#endnote-77) Modularity “mean[s] that we engage with the wider world but from an ethic of networking and information sharing rather than of mutual dependence.”[[78]](#endnote-78)

Operating at the local level also entails “build[ing] a bridge to local government,” especially as a Transition initiative evolves to the creation of an Energy Descent Action Plan.[[79]](#endnote-79) However, Transition groups, not local government, should drive the process; local government should play a supportive role, through endorsement, resources, and implementation.[[80]](#endnote-80)

For the Transition movement, subsidiarity is connected to the agricultural practice of permaculture, which focuses on using natural landscape principles and ecosystemic processes rather than external inputs to grow crops. “Permaculture,” says Transition movement founder Rob Hopkins, “mov[es] away from annual cropping and monoculture in agriculture to multi-layered systems making use of productive and useful trees and perennial plants.” The permaculture concept, says Hopkins, goes beyond agriculture, as “sustainability in food cannot happen in isolation from the range of other elements that make up society – economics, building, energy, and so on.” The term “permaculture,” he says, is about “the creation of a culture of permanence.”[[81]](#endnote-81)  
 Barry maintains, “Following this permaculture ethos, Transition initiatives can be seen as grassroots attempts to self-consciously enhance local adaptive capacity. They seek to do this particularly through increasing self-organization and self-management at the local, community level.” Such management involves “flexible and open-ended adaptation rather than the imposition of fixed goals or objectives on … socio-ecological systems” and eschews a single, centralized solution to the problem of climate change.[[82]](#endnote-82)

**Critique of the Transition Concept**

Is the Transition concept viable on its own terms? Or, are Transition initiatives ultimately dependent for their success on a larger political framework? Several problems arise here. The first involves Transition’s focus on resilience and adaptation in the face of climate change.

Barry notes that Transition initiatives are consistent with the concept, put forth by Will Steffen, Johan Rockström and others, of coping with the Anthropocene by working within certain global ecological thresholds, or ‘planetary boundaries,’ to maintain a “safe operating space” for humanity.[[83]](#endnote-83) I would argue that absent an ambitious framework of national and global actions to limit greenhouse gas emissions, the maintenance of such a safe operating space, and the continued viability of Transition initiatives, becomes nearly impossible.

The notion of a safe operating space was initially used by Rockström to describe the Holocene epoch. The global climate has been relatively stable and hospitable during the Holocene Epoch, which began about 11,500 years ago with the end of the last major glaciation. Within the context of relatively stability in sea level, major climatic zones, seasonal cycles, the distribution of vegetation and animal life, the severity range of storms, and ranges of temperature, human civilization spread across the Earth. Certainly in many places – such as the American Southwest, Central America, Greenland, and the Middle East – settlements and whole civilizations came and went under the impact of regional droughts or warming or cooling spells,[[84]](#endnote-84) but the basic contours of the Earth’s geography and climate have not experienced major, abrupt shifts. That stability has enabled human beings to establish enduring agricultural practices, durable shelter and infrastructure, cultural traditions, trade routes, land tenure arrangements, and political boundaries and communities.[[85]](#endnote-85) The global ecological changes ushered in by humanity have prompted Steffen and Rockström, as well as Paul Crutzen and others, to argue that the Holocene has now given way to – or should be replaced by – the Anthropocene, an epoch in which human beings are a major biogeochemical force on the Earth and will leave a major mark on the fossil record.[[86]](#endnote-86)

The loss of Holocene stability certainly calls for the kind of resilient coping and psychological adjustment that Hopkins and Barry describe. We must recognize and accept that the planet has changed and is changing. Consequently, we must create resilient practices and institutions that can not only anticipate environmental changes but also operate within the ecological constraints and limits imposed by our transition away from fossil fuels and by the new environmental conditions we must confront. Barry invokes Rockström’s concept of a safe operating space in the context of discussing how a resilient society would respect limits in order to maximize “head room.” In other words, such a society would ensure that “systems are so designed with sufficient room for manoeuvre so that there is enough space and time for adapting and changing tack as needs be.”[[87]](#endnote-87) Thus, as noted earlier, Transition initiatives, by recognizing ecological limits and working within them, can foster resilience. It is by overreaching, in terms of excessive material ambition the associated demands on the global economy and the natural environment, that community renders itself vulnerable to disaster. To repeat an aforementioned quote by Hopkins, a resilient society has the “ability to function indefinitely and to live within its limits, and [is] able to thrive for having done so.”

Earlier, we spoke of resilience in terms of Machiavelli’s dikes and dams. Yet even the notion of dikes and dams evokes misguided attempts to conquer and control nature. Perhaps a more apt analogy or even illustration would be the idea of setting aside undeveloped parkland or green space to accommodate a riparian floods or rising sea levels.

However, whether we are talking about dikes, dams, or floodplains, the crisis of the Anthropocene calls for more than resilience. Here, we must return to the aforementioned planetary boundaries and safe operating space.

In addressing the challenges of the Anthropocene, Steffen and others argue for a Planetary Boundaries approach. They argue, “The twenty-first century challenge is different from any other that humanity has faced. The planetary nature of the challenge is unique, and demands a global-scale solution that transcends national boundaries and cultural divides.”[[88]](#endnote-88) Their “Planetary Boundaries (PB) approach attempts to define a ‘safe operating space’ for humanity by analyzing the intrinsic dynamics of the Earth System and identifying points or levels relating to critical global-scale processes beyond which humanity should not go. The fundamental principle underlying the PB approach is that a Holocene-like state of the Earth System is the only one that we can be sure provides an accommodating environment for the development of humanity.”[[89]](#endnote-89) The authors identify “[n]ine planetary boundaries … which, if respected, would likely ensure that the Earth System remains in a Holocene-like state.” These are climate change, stratospheric ozone, ocean acidification, the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, biodiversity loss, land-use change, freshwater use, aerosol loading, and chemical pollution.[[90]](#endnote-90) Respecting these boundaries would require “successful and effective global governance and stewardship.”[[91]](#endnote-91) However, the response need not be confined to the global level. Drawing on the work of Elinor Ostrom, they acknowledge that “global governance and planetary stewardship could also be built in a multi-level, cumulative way by identifying where, when and for whom there are – or could be as a result of policy – incentives to act, independently of the international level. The resulting governance system would be ‘polycentric’, also allowing for more experimentation and learning.”[[92]](#endnote-92)

There are several important points to be gleaned here. First of all, resilience, especially for a local community, is only feasible within certain bounds. To take the most obvious example, the only resilience available to a coastal community or a small island nation facing inundation is to move elsewhere. Short of a community’s complete erasure, severe storms or extreme water shortages may make continued existence extremely difficult. Indeed, the kind of local democracy and self-reliance favored by the Transition movement may become very difficult in the event of natural disaster. Disasters disrupt normal social and political life and create states of emergency. Far from being self-governing, citizens can lose their personal possessions, livelihoods, and political voices and become dependent on emergency management and aid agencies. They can find themselves in brutal, inhospitable shelters, as witnessed by the harrowing experience of New Orleans residents who ended up at the Superdome during Hurricane Katrina. Breena Holland says that a person displaced by climate change “is likely to face unknown periods of time” during which they may lose “normal rights of citizenship” such as “being able to participate in political choices that determine one’s life and being able to hold property and seek employment.”[[93]](#endnote-93) Instead, “an experience of dependency on others may ensue, leaving the person unable to even make decisions influencing the various factors that determine her well-being.”[[94]](#endnote-94) People can end up being “cogs in a machine to be shuttled along helplessly in the wake of climate-related disasters.”[[95]](#endnote-95) Rather than being independent, self-governing members of a collective political enterprise, individuals become dependent clients of government agencies, aid organizations, or reluctant host communities.

Moreover, resilience is also relative to local adaptive resources. A relatively affluent community may have the expertise, institutional capacity, infrastructure, and finances to successfully plan for its own resilience, whereas a less privileged community may lack these resources. This disparity is most marked between the global North and South. Peter North thus points out that “[l]ocalisation would … need to address issues of justice associated with processes of uneven and unequal development between spaces with different natural and human resource endowments.”[[96]](#endnote-96) Esther Alloun and Samuel Alexander warn, “The danger is real that the Transition movement may end up as little more than an exclusive middle-class club for nice, comfortable people who already have the resources and options to adapt.”[[97]](#endnote-97) The result could be a “gated community” or “bunker” approach amidst a highly unequal global “geography of resilience.”[[98]](#endnote-98)

In the end, Transition, or any program of resilience or adaptation, ultimately depends on some stability and predictability of ecological background conditions. Even Machiavelli’s dikes and dams assume that the river will rise only so much and not more: dikes, dams, and even floodplains are of little use when submerged. And this stability in turn depends on action to prevent large-scale ecological decline, action – especially setting global targets for emissions reductions and transferring resources for mitigation and adaptation from North to South, rich to poor – that is really beyond the scope of individual local communities.

This brings Transition’s localism into question. The republican tradition does not in fact unequivocally endorse localism. For most republicans, meaningful self-government – beyond the familiar institutions of representative democracy – entails some form of political and economic decentralization. Moreover, a sense of community and common civic purpose may be most easily sustained at a smaller political and geographic scale.[[99]](#endnote-99) Yet republicanism has long involved a debate over whether a sovereign political unit must be small. David Miller notes, “Early republican thought more or less took for granted the city as the place where republican politics might be practiced.”[[100]](#endnote-100) Machiavelli, however, warned of the dangers of small republics being subject to foreign invasion.[[101]](#endnote-101) James Madison, of course, also warned of the dangers of small republics in *Federalist* 10. Here, Madison’s concern was over the power of majority factions and majoritarian tyranny in smaller polities. Madison was justifying the creation of the United States as the first modern republic founded on a continental scale. Madison, as well as Machiavelli and Montesquieu, suggested that the vulnerability of small republics could be addressed via a federation of republics.[[102]](#endnote-102) In fact, Pettit maintains that “republicans have been traditionally partial to federations.”[[103]](#endnote-103)

Miller thus observes that the republican tradition has yielded two overall models: a small, fairly homogeneous political community heavily reliant on civic virtue and based on direct self-government, and a larger political community including multiple jurisdictions and social divisions and reliant on constitutional checks and balances and governed through representative institutions; these models, he notes, are not mutually exclusive.[[104]](#endnote-104) In line with the second model, contemporary republicans have suggested approaches to meaningful republican self-government at a large scale, even a global scale. They often advocate dispersing political participation and authority throughout the state and civil society and beyond national boundaries. Sandel, for example, talks about “dispersing sovereignty” across various levels of governance to create “a multiplicity of communities and political bodies.”[[105]](#endnote-105) This is not unlike the polycentric approach to planetary stewardship mentioned earlier and it suggests that a focus on any one scale of governance may be quite arbitrary. North asks, “If space is constructed relationally, can you cut a bit off? Where does the ‘local’ stop and the ‘global’ begin? If spatial relationships are conceptualised as flowing networks that has temporarily congeal in places, does it make sense to try to capture them at any certain scale?”[[106]](#endnote-106)

Drawing on Machiavelli and his praise for the Roman Republic, Francisco Seijo argues that small republics are non-resilient, because they are vulnerable to external events: “It is difficult to imagine a political entity that is immune from the impacts of distant political or economic upheavals (such as wars, depressions, or trade embargoes placed by or upon other nations) or effectively insulated from environmental disasters (such as earthquakes, hurricanes, plagues, and climate change).”[[107]](#endnote-107) As noted in the foregoing discussion of resilience, a small Transition community may lack the resources or even the sheer territorial scope to deal with a major climate event.

To reiterate, an effective response to climate change entails policymaking, particularly mitigation efforts, at higher levels of governance. British Green Party activist Rupert Read argues, “Transition Towns are a wonderful and inspiring experiment. But, alone, they can function only as *demonstration projects.* They show what is *possible*.” In other words, Transition initiatives alone cannot achieve the very possibilities that the movement reveals. Read maintains that in order to actually reduce the use of fossil fuels, not just in Transition towns, but elsewhere, there must be “[l]egislation that enforces lower *overall* use of fossil fuels, and/or, I suppose, legislation that obliges every town to try to become a transition town.” Transition outposts could not survive without external support: “The admirable local action of Transition Towns is countermanded by economic effects of that action elsewhere in an unreformed more global economy.” Read concludes, “Without policies such as carbon rationing, and, at a global level, ‘Contraction and Convergence’[[108]](#endnote-108) being put into place, *the Transition Towns movement will do virtually nothing to prevent the onset of climate catastrophe though excessive burning of fossil fuels.”*[[109]](#endnote-109)

Small, self-contained communities can also be havens of oppression, and non-domination may necessitate republican institutions beyond the local level. James Bohman argues that impermeably bounded political communities become agents of domination, especially toward those outside their boundaries who are subject to colonialism or who are stateless and denied basic rights associated with membership.[[110]](#endnote-110) North thus pointedly asks of Transition and similar movements, “How would localisation cope with climate change migration?”[[111]](#endnote-111)

To the degree that environmental degradation, including climate change, is itself an act of domination by powerful political and economic actors,[[112]](#endnote-112) republican institutions need to exist at higher levels of governance. Bohman believes that the ideal of non-domination thus necessitates transnational federalism.[[113]](#endnote-113) He suggests “the creation of federations based on interlocking and self-enhancing relationships between various levels of republican institutions, including ones crossing state boundaries.”[[114]](#endnote-114) This would not mean centralized world government, but would involve a dispersal of decision-making “across different institutional levels, deliberative bodies, and various offices”[[115]](#endnote-115) to prevent dangerous concentrations of social and political power.

As noted earlier, Hopkins does concede the need for action at higher levels of government. Interestingly, he even speaks favorably of the British government’s emergency efforts during World War II.[[116]](#endnote-116) These involved food rationing and national efforts to increase home food production. He is open to a national program of carbon rationing in the UK.[[117]](#endnote-117) So clearly, he is reluctant to entirely reject approaches to climate change and energy policy at larger scales of governance. “Transition Initiatives,” he says, “will function best in the context of a combination of top-down and bottom-up responses, none of which can address the challenge in isolation.”[[118]](#endnote-118) In fact, Transition Ireland and Northern Ireland played a key role in getting the Irish government to open up its national energy planning to significant public participation and also helped shape the final report, released in December 2015.[[119]](#endnote-119)

However, Hopkins also maintains that local communities should not wait around for top-down responses, and successful action at the national or global level will be “more likely in an environment where community responses are abundant and vibrant.” Local Transition initiatives would make national efforts like carbon rationing politically palatable to the electorate.[[120]](#endnote-120) Moreover, the initiative for change would still come from the bottom up. To repeat an earlier quote from Hopkins: “much of the momentum and pressure, as well as the diversity of projects and initiatives that need sanction or support from government, can come from the local level.”

But does the focus on local initiative from below amount to an apolitical stance when it comes to challenging the national and international neoliberal policies and power structures behind the very ecological and economic problems that Transition seeks to address? These problems, Paul Chatterton and Alice Cutler point out, “occur through active government policies, which try to maintain the economic and political, ‘business as usual’ scenarios. Unfortunately, left unchallenged they could also wipe out the best efforts at local sustainability, like a tsunami in front of a sand castle.”[[121]](#endnote-121)

Transition’s emphasis on positive visioning involves a rejection of confrontational politics, for fear that this will alienate members of the community. The idea instead is to build an alternative set of institutions that will be the foundation of a new political structure as society transitions out of its current political, economic, and ideological framework. In a blog post, Hopkins argues as follows:

If I decided to run for election as a Transition Town candidate, alongside my great Transition-related policies, I would need to have policies on abortion, healthcare, education, defence, international trade, etc. etc.  Every time I state a policy on one of those issues, I increasingly place myself somewhere on the left/right, pro/anti-growth, pro/anti-capitalism spectrum.  As soon as I do that, I lose all the people who don't also inhabit that place.  What works at the national political level becomes profoundly unskilful at the local level.

Working through a Transition initiative, that lack of an explicit political positioning is one of our key strengths.  It enables you to build the kind of diverse, cross-political groups that building more resilient communities requires.  It enables the creation of projects on a meaningful scale, but unfettered by party politics and wider issues.  It’s the ‘power to convene’ that Transition is so good at, which is virtually impossible to do in a truly inclusive way if you are seen as being politically aligned.

He raises doubts about direct protest over issues like fracking:

But the question then arises as to whether, when the Queen’s Speech gives, among other things, fracking companies the powers to frack under your home without your permission, your best option is to get your neighbours together to reduce your energy use and start a community energy company ..., or to lobby and protest?  And which, ultimately, is more ‘political’?[[122]](#endnote-122)

Yet, this stance, which Hopkins refuses to call apolitical, may amount to, in the words of Esther Alloun and Samuel Alexander, “set[ting] out to ignore capitalism to death by building the new economy within the shell of the old.”[[123]](#endnote-123) Chatterton and Cutler note that the economic and political structures associated with capitalism, including the firms profiting from burning carbon and from other forms of environmental destruction, will not simply fold as Transition efforts proliferate but will fight back to maintain their position: “It seems naïve to assume that companies such as Shell and Stat Oil, BP or Esso will easily give up and go home or fundamentally change what they do while it is still so enormously profitable.”[[124]](#endnote-124) A true transition, they argue, has to operate not only and perhaps not even primarily at a local level, but at the larger systemic level of global carbon emissions and global capitalism:

It is useful here to clarify between two very different types of changes. There are possible environmental improvements in a place (recycling or reducing pollution in a local river for example) and environmental improvements to a system (stabilising carbon in the global atmosphere for example). The crucial point is that no causal relationship can be assumed between the two types of change. For example making environmental improvements in our communities does not necessarily make improvements of the second type, like protecting global ecosystems. For this we need very different kinds of changes such as institutional reorganisation, curbing corporate power and drastically shifting the way the economy and consumer society works. These involve confronting all sorts of vested interests and wealthy elites and it is here that we have to be realistic about what kinds of changes we can achieve without some kind of overarching societal change.[[125]](#endnote-125)

Just as Hopkins argues that national policies cannot succeed without change on the ground, Transition cannot leave the systemic, national- or global-level policies and structures of domination to merely take care of themselves while activists focus on local, in-place policies. In fact, a genuine commitment to subsidiarity, non-domination, and sustainability would more fully require the importance and interdependence of multiple levels of government rather than putting excessive focus on the local.

**Conclusion**

Barry says that he offers “a somewhat uncritical account of Transition” in order to highlight its promising contributions to a green, republican politics. He acknowledges, “I do not think it [i.e. Transition] is a panacea for addressing actually existing unsustainability. However, nor do the main proponents of the Transition movement perspective.”[[126]](#endnote-126) And, for my part, I do not want to dismiss the contributions of the Transition movement (especially as I have been trying to organize a Transition effort in my own city!). Public political discourse about climate change is heavily focused on larger political scales, including global – e.g. the Paris Agreement; supranational – e.g. the European Union’s emissions trading system; national – e.g. U.S. President Barack Obama’s Clean Power Plan; or state – e.g. California’s ambitious carbon emissions policies. Yet an enormous amount can happen at the local level, and not just municipalities, but also neighborhoods and streets. A truly green and truly republican politics needs to simultaneously tackle challenges at all levels. Political action at larger scales needs to: 1) address neoliberal power structures and policies in order to pursue republican non-domination and 2) establish ambitious emissions reduction targets and climate justice policies so that we may secure whatever climate stability – i.e. a ‘safe operating space’ – we still can and enable all communities to adapt to whatever climate change we can no longer prevent. However, the larger, systemic level is appropriate for setting overall targets and political frameworks. To fully secure republican self-government, as well as enhance communitarian values and civic virtue, and also generate grassroots support for policies that will inevitably involve material sacrifice, especially in the developed world, a lot of the formulation, implementation, and ‘ownership’ of specific policy needs to take place at the local or even micro – e.g. street – level. And the right implementation policies will vary from community to community. The concrete, place-specific initiatives, from community gardens to EDAPs, pursued by Transition activists, as well as regional, municipal, and neighborhood policies emerging from complementary movements like Environmental Justice and New Urbanism, offer an essential contribution to the realization of a green, republican politics across a diversity of communities in a carbon-constrained world.

1. See, especially, John Barry, *The* *Politics of Actually Existing Unsustainability: Human Flourishing in a Climate-Changed, Carbon-Constrained World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 78-116. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. On civic republicanism, see, for example, Philip Pettit, [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For historical background on republicanism, see Honohan, *Civic Republicanism*; Garrett Ward Sheldon, *The Political Philosophy of* *Thomas Jefferson* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp.5-7, and Laborde and Maynor, “Republican Contribution, pp. 2-3; J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); J.G.A. Pocock, “Civic Humanism and its Role in Anglo-American Thought” (1968), reprinted in J.G.A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli, eds., *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol. 1: The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). On the republican tradition in the U.S., see Pocock’s aforementioned writings, as well as Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent*; Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Gordon S. Wood, The *Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Enlarged edition) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent*; Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Michael Lienesch, *New Order of the Ages: Time, the Constitution, and the Making of Modern American Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); William E. Forbath, “The Ambiguities of Free Labor: Labor and the Law in the Gilded Age,” *Wisconsin Law Review* (1985), pp.787-791 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Peter F. Cannavò, “Civic Virtue and Sacrifice in a Suburban Nation,” in Michael Maniates and John M. Meyer, eds., *The Environmental Politics of Sacrifice* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010), pp.217-246. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. See the following by Peter F. Cannavò: “Civic Virtue and Sacrifice”; “Environmental Political Theory and Republicanism,” in Teena Gabrielson, Cheryl Hall, John M. Meyer, and David Schlosberg, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.72-88; “Ecological Citizenship, Time, and Corruption: Aldo Leopold’s Green Republicanism,” *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 6 (November 2012), pp.864-881; “The Half-Cultivated Citizen: Thoreau at the Nexus of Republicanism and Environmentalism,” *Environmental Values*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2012), pp.101-124; “To the Thousandth Generation: Timelessness, Jeffersonian Republicanism, and Environmentalism,” *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (May 2010), pp.356-373. Other writings on Other scholarship on the connections between environmentalism and republicanism includes Pettit, *Republicanism*, pp.135-138; Thad Williamson, *Sprawl, Justice, and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Patrick Curry “Redefining Community: Towards an Ecological Republicanism,” *Biodiversity and Conservation*, Vol. 9, No. 8 (2000), pp. 1059-1071; Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*; John Barry, “Towards a Green Republicanism.” *The Good Society* Vol. 17, No. 2 (2008), pp.1-12; John Barry and Kimberly K. Smith, “Civic Republicanism and Green Politics,” in Daniel Leighton and Stuart White, eds., *Building a Citizen Society: The Emerging Politics of Republican Democracy* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, pp.218-219, 222-226. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, pp.227. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, pp.227-230. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. See <https://www.transitionnetwork.org/where> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. See <https://www.transitionnetwork.org/about/strategy>, <http://transitionus.org/>, <https://midatlantictransition.org/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. See <http://transitionus.org/our-story>. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. <http://www.jptransition.org/> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Jamaica Plain New Economy Transition, “Resiliency Measures Project,” February 5, 2012, <http://jptransition.org/2012/02/07/working-group-how-resilient-is-jp/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. <http://transitionus.org/blog/reskilling-mastery-appropriate-technology>. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. <http://transitionus.org/blog/reskilling-mastery-appropriate-technology>. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Rob Hopkins, *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience* (White River Junction: Chelsea Green, 2008), p.208. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. See <http://transitionbristol.net/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. <http://jptransition.org/local-food-web/> [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. <http://transitionus.org/initiatives/7-principles> [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.12. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.12. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.13. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.80; emphasis in original. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, pp.78, 86. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.96. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.97. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.97. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.89. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Barry*, Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.89. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.96. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.81. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter XXV, Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., transl. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p.98. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Here, see also Francisco Seijo, “Niccolò Machiavelli: Rethinking Decentralization’s Role in Green Theory,” in Peter F. Cannavò and Joseph H. Lane, Jr., eds., *Engaging Nature: Environmentalism and the Political Theory Canon* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014), pp.65-81. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.89. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.90. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.101. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.172. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.98. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.114. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.100. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.99. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, pp.87-88. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, pp. 84-93. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, pp.101-104, 106. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. <http://transitionus.org/initiatives/7-principles> [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.112. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.113. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent*, p.274. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. <http://transitionus.org/initiatives/7-principles> [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.115. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, p.56. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Williamson, *Sprawl, Justice, and Citizenship*, pp.188-189. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Honohan, *Civic Republicanism*, p.188. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Pettit, *Republicanism*, p.52. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. James Bohman, “Nondomination and Transnational Democracy,” in Laborde and Maynor, *Republicanism and Political Theory*, pp. 190-216 (198). [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Laborde and Maynor, “Republican Contribution,” pp.4-5; emphasis in original. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Laborde and Maynor, “Republican Contribution,” p.4. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Pettit, *Republicanism*, p.8. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Pettit, *On the People’s Terms*, p.12. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Forbath, “Ambiguities of Free Labor,” p.775. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. McCoy, *Elusive Republic*, p.68. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Pettit, *Republicanism*, pp.265-267. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, pp.105, 107. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.107. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. <http://transitionus.org/initiatives/7-principles> [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.39. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.15. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.43. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.55. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.144. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.55. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.55. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, pp.56-57. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.68. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.70. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.58. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.58. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.170. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, pp.144-145. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, pp.137, 140. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, pp.94-95. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.95. See Will Steffen, et al., “The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship,” *Ambio*, Vol. 40, No. 7 (Nov. 2011), pp. 739–761; Johan Rockström, Will Steffen, Kevin Noone, et al., “Safe Operating Space for Humanity” (2009), in Libby Robin, Sverker Sörlin, and Paul Warde, eds., *Documents of Global Change*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pp.491-501. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. See, for example, Jared Diamond, *Collapse:* *How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Penguin, 2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. See Rockström, et al., “Safe Operating Space for Humanity.” [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. Will Steffen, Paul J. Crutzen and John R. McNeill, “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?”, *Ambio* Vol. 36, No. 8, December 2007, pp.614-621. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.95. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. Steffen, et al., “The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship,” p.749. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. Steffen, et al., “The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship,” p.753. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. Steffen, et al., “The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship,” p.754. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Steffen, et al., “The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship,” p.754. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. Steffen, et al., “The Anthropocene: From Global Change to Planetary Stewardship,” p.755. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. Breena Holland, “Environment as Meta-capability: Why a Dignified Human Life Requires a Stable Climate,” in Thompson and Bendik-Keymer, *Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), pp.145-164 (152). [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. Holland, “Environment as Meta-capability,” p. 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. Holland, “Environment as Meta-capability,” p. 155. [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. See Peter North, “Ecolocalisation as a Progressive Response to Peak Oil and Climate Change – A Sympathetic Critique” (Working Paper), Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 2010, p.14. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. Esther Alloun and Samuel Alexander, “The Transition Movement: Questions of Diversity, Power, and Affluence,” *Simplicity Institute Report* 14g, 2014, p.7. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Alloun and Alexander, “The Transition Movement,” pp.9-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. David Miller, “Republicanism, National Identity, and Europe,” in Laborde and Maynor, *Republicanism and Political Theory*, pp.133-158 (133). [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. Miller, “Republicanism, National Identity, and Europe,” p.133. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
101. See Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, trans. Leslie J. Walker (London: Penguin. 1970); Miller, “Republicanism, National Identity, and Europe,” p.134. [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
102. See James Madison, “Federalist No. 10,” in James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. by Clinton Rossiter (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1961), pp.71-79; Miller, “Republicanism, National Identity, and Europe,” pp.134-136, as well as Francisco Seijo, “Niccolò Machiavelli: Rethinking Decentralization’s Role in Green Theory,” in Peter F. Cannavò and Joseph H. Lane, Jr., eds., *Engaging Nature: Environmentalism and the Political Theory Canon* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014), pp.65-81. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
103. Pettit, *Republicanism*, p.179. [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
104. Miller, “Republicanism, National Identity, and Europe,” p.136. [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
105. Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent*, pp.345, [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
106. North, “Ecolocalisation – A Sympathetic Critique,” p.13. [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
107. Seijo, “Niccolò Machiavelli,” p.74. [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
108. “Contraction and convergence” is a term for a policy of reducing overall global greenhouse gas emissions through significant reductions – ‘contraction’ – on the part of the affluent while poorer nations, communities, or individuals increase their own emissions in order to escape from poverty. [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
109. Rupert Read, “‘Transition Towns’ Are Great – But They Won’t Save Us, Without Help,” *Rupert’s Read* (blog), February 12, 2008, <http://rupertsread.blogspot.com.au/2008/02/transition-towns-are-great-but-they.html?m=1>; emphasis in original. [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
110. Bohman, “Nondomination and Transnational Democracy,” pp.208, 212. [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
111. North, “Ecolocalisation as a Progressive Response,” p.14. [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
112. See Pettit, *Republicanism*, pp.135-138, on this point. [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
113. Bohman, “Nondomination and Transnational Democracy,” p.194. [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
114. Bohman, “Nondomination and Transnational Democracy,” p.194. [↑](#endnote-ref-114)
115. Bohman, “Nondomination and Transnational Democracy,” p.196. [↑](#endnote-ref-115)
116. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, pp.65-67. [↑](#endnote-ref-116)
117. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.76. [↑](#endnote-ref-117)
118. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, pp.75-76. [↑](#endnote-ref-118)
119. <https://www.transitionnetwork.org/blogs/rob-hopkins/2016-03/snapshot-transition-ireland>. [↑](#endnote-ref-119)
120. Hopkins, *Transition Handbook*, p.76. [↑](#endnote-ref-120)
121. Paul Chatterton and Alice Cutler, *The Rocky Road to a Real Transition: The Transition Movement and What it Means for Social Change*, Trapese Collective, 2008, p.7, <trapese.clearerchannel.org/resources/rocky-road-a5-web.pdf>. [↑](#endnote-ref-121)
122. # Rob Hopkins, “Is Transition Political?,” Transition Network.org, June 7, 2014, <https://www.transitionnetwork.org/blogs/rob-hopkins/2014-06/transition-political>.

     [↑](#endnote-ref-122)
123. Alloun and Alexander, “The Transition Movement,” p.13. [↑](#endnote-ref-123)
124. Chatterton and Cutler, *Rocky Road to a Real Transition*, p.6. [↑](#endnote-ref-124)
125. Chatterton and Cutler, *Rocky Road to a Real Transition*, p.33. [↑](#endnote-ref-125)
126. Barry, *Actually Existing Unsustainability*, p.79. [↑](#endnote-ref-126)