Assessing diversity and inclusivity within the Transition movement: an urban case study

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Abstract

The Transition movement has experienced remarkable growth in its first decade, yet there remains considerable doubt about its ability to appeal to a diverse audience. To date, there have been few studies that have explicitly examined diversity of participation in the movement. Addressing this gap in the literature, a case study is presented of Transition Town Tooting (TTT) that employed a mixed methods approach comprising semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and a quantitative survey. The results indicate that the demographic profiles of TTT participants do not represent the diversity of the Tooting population, which is exacerbated by TTT's 'passive' approach to inclusivity within the core group. Reflecting upon the implications for Transition's goal of local resilience, it is suggested that, particularly within dense urban communities, initiatives may have more potential for engaging diverse voices through a local 'brokering' role between various sub-communities.

Keywords: Transition movement; diversity; inclusivity; participation; urban sustainability; community.

Introduction

> Successful Transition initiatives will need an unprecedented coming together of society. They dedicate themselves to openness and inclusion… in the challenge of energy descent, there is no room for "them and us" thinking (Hopkins, 2011, p.78).

In the decade since its inception in Rob Hopkins's permaculture classroom in 2005, the Transition movement has undergone rapid and widespread development to become a global brand (Seyfang 2009; Taylor Aiken 2014). Founded on an assumption that low carbon living is both essential and inevitable, Transition seeks a radical re-localisation of society with the aim of making communities more resilient to

the 'social, economic, and ecological implications of peak oil, climate change, and a dysfunctional global economy' (Barnes 2015, p.313; Hopkins 2008; Bailey et al. 2010). At a recent count, the Transition Network (TN) had 1,130 registered initiatives across 44 different countries (Transition Network, 2014). These initiatives each seek to bring together the members of their local, place-based communities to collaboratively envision – and start to build – a positive, post-oil future (Haxeltine and Seyfang 2009).

Diversity and inclusivity is fundamental to Transition philosophy. The movement is committed to the involvement of multiple perspectives (Scott-Cato and Hillier, 2010) and encourages participation and collaboration across economic, political, social and cultural divides (Connors and McDonald 2011). In contrast to most other social and environmental movements, Transition adopts an overtly apolitical stance and avoids directly confronting interests of power (Aiken 2012; Connors and McDonald 2011; Bailey et al. 2010). Mason and Whitehead (2012) suggest that this 'inclusive localism' has facilitated 'great diversity in its political activities and the potential to foster an ethic of respect for difference and alternative perspectives' (p.511). Yet, commentators both internal and external to the movement have voiced concerns that, despite its extraordinary success in initiating a surge of grassroots activity, it may be failing to achieve the diversity of membership it espouses. Transition initiatives have been observed to be comprised predominantly of individuals who are highly educated, middle class, and white (Aiken 2012; Felicetti 2013; Stevenson 2012; Merritt and Stubbs 2012; Smith 2011b). Despite this growing body of literature, in most cases, lack of diversity has been an incidental observation of the authors' personal involvement in Transition initiatives, or of research focused on different principal questions. There are very few studies that have explicitly set out to empirically investigate the question of diversity within Transition, with a particular lack of research exploring the potential causes and consequences of a lack of diversity at the community scale.

Here, we seek to address this gap in the literature by examining diversity within Transition Town Tooting (TTT), a Transition initiative in a demographically diverse area of south London. Employing a mixed methods approach, we find that TTT participants are disproportionately likely to be highly educated, white, and not aligned with a particular religion. Through an analysis of TTT's ways of working, we observe a link between this lack of diversity within the group and what we describe as the 'passively

inclusive' approach the group takes to core group recruitment. We find that TTT demonstrates greater potential for diversity through its collaborative partnerships with a wide variety of 'external' local actors in Tooting. In this role, TTT can help to strengthen connections between diverse 'elements' and 'functions' within the community, which has been identified as a key component of the local resilience sought after by the movement. We therefore propose that, as Transition moves into its second decade, developing and emphasizing this role as local 'broker' presents an opportunity for influence within urban locations.

The role of diversity and inclusivity in Transition philosophy and politics

The prominence of diversity and inclusivity within Transition philosophy reflects the principles of the permaculture course from which the idea for the movement first emerged (Hopkins 2008; Aiken 2012; Graugaard 2012). 'Permaculture' was first coined to refer to 'the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive ecosystems which have the diversity, stability, and resilience of natural ecosystems' (Mollison 1988, p.ix). Transition emerged from 'an attempt to see what would happen if permaculture principles were applied to seeking responses to peak oil' (Hopkins 2011, p.77). Among the 12 fundamental principles of permaculture are the maxims 'Use and value diversity' and 'Integrate rather than segregate' (Holmgren 2002). These are echoed within Transition's official 'Ingredients for success', which state: 'Inclusion and diversity need to be embedded at the centre of Transition as a defining feature' (Hopkins 2011, p.94). In both permaculture and Transition, the desire for diversity can be linked to the shared pursuit of 'resilience'. Adapted from ecology, where it refers to the ability of an ecosystem to absorb, and adapt to, change and disturbance (Graugaard 2012), resilience is applied within the context of communities to describe 'an active, community-based, internally-driven and holistic approach that should, in theory, provide greater protection against external shocks' (Barr and Devine-Wright 2012, p.526).

The Transition model is designed to increase local resilience to global-scale threats, in particular, 'peak oil, climate change and the precarious economic situation' (Hopkins 2011, p.45). Within Transition, a community's resilience 'refers to their ability to not collapse at first sight of oil or food shortages, and to

their ability to respond with adaptability to disturbance' (Hopkins, 2008, p.62), and 'diversity' is explicitly identified as a key feature of that resilience. It is posited that having access to, and being able to utilise, a diverse pool of local resources and capacities places communities in a much stronger position to respond to external shocks and engender positive change: 'When community resources are engaged towards a shared community objective, the community's capacity to reach that objective can increase' (Magis 2010, p.411). Magis suggests that collective community action is most effective when diverse groups of people are engaged in accomplishing these objectives. In addition to the diversity of elements – and functions of those elements – *within* a system (or community), resilience theory, and Transition philosophy, also stresses the importance of the strength of connections *between* these elements, and between different systems (Cabel and Oelofse 2012; Smith 2011a). Transition's basis in resilience theory therefore guides its bottom-up, community-led approach, which encourages the formation of lots of small-scale initiatives ('systems'), each tailored to the particular local context (Hopkins 2008), but connected to each other through the TN.

Transition adopts an approach to localisation in which, 'the values of openness, inclusiveness, and consensus building ascend in importance' (Barnes 2015, p.319). Transition groups are encouraged to apply diversity 'in its widest sense, including ethnicity, disability, age, class, gender and sexual and religious orientation… all national origins… identities… as well as professional and non-professional status' (Hopkins 2011, p.96). This desire to include a diversity of voices within groups also reflects the influence that the psychological 'Stages of Change' model has had in guiding Transition's approach to the treatment of oil 'addiction' (Hopkins, 2008). A core component of this approach is to create 'listening spaces' where members of the community can discuss the various personal and collective motivators and hurdles to realising change, 'to cultivate positive visions and find ways of dealing with inner 'dreamblockers'' (Hopkins, 2008, p.102). It follows, therefore, that by encouraging and facilitating participation from a diversity of community members, Transition groups will be better equipped to help local people overcome their own blocks to change, and overcome the community's 'addiction to oil'.

Diversity and inclusivity in practice

Despite the seemingly fundamental role that diversity and inclusivity play in Transition philosophy, there has long been awareness, both within the movement and amongst external commentators, of the challenge that has been faced in achieving this in practice. Transition has been regularly identified as attracting predominantly middle-class, well-educated and reasonably affluent individuals (Aiken 2012; Merritt and Stubbs 2012; Stevenson 2012).

Measuring diversity

Reflecting their own perception of a lack of diversity within the movement, in 2009, the TN secured funding for a 'Diversity Project', completed in 2010 and 2011. The project was focused on broadening participation in Transition 'by working with low-income, faith and black minority ethnic groups' (Smith 2011b, p.102). As part of this work, the TN carried out an online survey of its members to measure the diversity of the movement. To our knowledge, the full results of this survey are not published, but Smith (2011b) reported that preliminary findings suggested that '95% of the respondents described themselves as white European, and 86% were educated to post-graduate degree level' (p.102).

The majority of the published academic commentary on diversity within the Transition movement does not provide an explicit measure of diversity. We have identified only two published studies which attempt to quantify the degree of diversity within Transition initiatives: Seyfang (2009) and Feola and Nunes (2014). In her analysis of the demographic profiles of members of Transition Norwich, Seyfang (2009) found that membership was not representative of the wider population of Norwich: a disproportionately high number of members were female, between 45 and 65 years of age, part-time or self-employed professionals, with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Despite having high levels of education, many members had comparatively low incomes, a characteristic which she interpreted as being suggestive of their post-materialist values. Seyfang's study did not enquire into ethnic and religious diversity.

In contrast to Seyfang's single case study, Feola and Nunes (2014) adopted a comparative, global perspective. Their study, based on responses to an online survey from 276 initiatives spanning 23 countries, was primarily focused on assessing definitions of, and conditions for, success within the Transition movement by comparing attributes of active and non-active groups. Three of the attributes measured were of particular relevance for understanding diversity: age, level of education, and (ethnic) diversity. In line with Seyfang (2009), Feola and Nunes found that participants were predominantly middle aged (between 30 and 49 years old). Results for the level of education of steering group members were somewhat inconclusive, as the vast majority (91%) of the total survey sample either did not respond to this question or selected 'Do not know'. For 'diversity' (which is never explicitly defined in the paper), over half of the respondents (51.2%) stated that the group's representation of the diversity of their community was 'Not very good', and a further 4.7% that it was 'Not good at all'.

Factors influencing diversity

The Transition movement (originally the 'Transition *Town*' movement) has historically appeared more relevant to small rural towns (Kenis and Mathijs 2014). Feola and Nunes (2014) found that less successful, or 'non-active', Transition initiatives are most commonly located in urban areas, suggesting that 'local attachments among urban transition initiatives are weak and not compensated by global attachments to the wider Transition Network' (p.248). These observations connect with the substantial, historic body of sociological literature, from Tönnies (1887) onward, which has examined and debated the apparent dissolution of place-based community in urban contexts. Drawing this literature together with his own ethnographic observations, Taylor Aiken has interrogated the role that community plays within Transition philosophy and rhetoric (Aiken 2012; Taylor Aiken 2014; Taylor Aiken 2015; Taylor Aiken 2016). He argues that, having had its first few incarnations in small rural towns and propagated rapidly to large cities, the TN is 'still wrestling with working out how the "community" it talks about is manifest and realised in such [urban] contexts' (Aiken, 2012, p.94). Neal (2013) observes that, in order to find expression in large cities, Transition has had to 'rescale [urban] places into a more rurally recognisable spatial and demographic

size' (p.63). In doing so, urban initiatives are encouraged to assume 'rural-like' relations and values with regard to nature, the environment, locality and community. Bailey *et al* (2010) have noted that the first Transition Towns were similar not only in their size and rurality, but also in their tendency to have a shared local culture, making them 'more receptive to its [Transition's] environmental and community messages by virtue of their economic mix and political leanings' (p.599). North and Longhurst (2013) challenge the assumption that Transition is necessarily more suited to a rural context. They propose that initiatives based in urban areas might provide 'more fertile ground for a deeper transition involving systemic change', due to a greater opportunity to leverage 'a diversity of actors able to do the work of transition' (p.1435). The high demographic diversity within urban populations implies that the diversity of participants in urban Transition initiatives is of particular significance if they are to be representative of the communities in which they operate. Indeed, Feola and Nunes (2014) found that, whilst 'diversity' relative to the wider population was found to be lowest among urban Transition initiatives, 'diversity correlates significantly with success for city/urban transition initiatives but not for other [rural] types of transition initiatives' (p.242).

Despite the movement's ostensible ambition to encourage diversity, several authors have identified certain elements of the TN's approach that may be limiting the ability of the movement to attract a diversity of participants. Connors and McDonald (2011) have suggested that the potential of Transition to attract a wider audience has been curtailed by 'a quite rigid, top-down and it must be said, an inherently undemocratic management structure (as a movement with an anointed 'founder' and arguably a prescriptive manifesto)' (p.567). Similarly, Scott-Cato and Hillier (2010) have observed the emergence of 'some arborescent, hierarchical tendencies' (p.876) within the TN, which they link to a desire to protect the Transition brand. Kenis (2016) also made similar observations of the 'visioning exercises' conducted by the Transition initiative she studied in Flanders. She notes that, although these exercises are intended to encourage participants to think creatively about the future of their community, 'they are at the same time explicitly encouraged to come up with future alternatives that… constitute key elements of what Transition Towns conceives as the good life' (Kenis 2016, p.15).

It has also been suggested that the Transition structure is such that the characteristics of the group are usually highly reflective of the individuals who set it up: those who, not only have the impetus to act, but also have the resources and capacity to do so, namely, well-off, well-educated, and with time on their hands (Merritt and Stubbs, 2012; Aiken, 2012). Merritt and Stubbs found engaging marginalised members of society to be a particular challenge for the Transition groups they studied, with evidence to suggest that some initiatives consciously discount certain members of the community: 'Some TT members even went so far as to suggest that "poor people cannot be expected to understand and be involved in climate change"' (2012, p.100).

Linked to these more structural issues, a common criticism of Transition has been its assumption that adopting – or attempting to convey – an 'apolitical' position will facilitate diverse participation (Chatterton and Cutler 2008; Connors and McDonald 2011; Stevenson 2012; Smith 2011b; Merritt and Stubbs 2012; Kenis and Mathijs 2014). It has been argued that this approach overlooks the fact that 'differences of opinion or power inequalities do not disappear just by ignoring them' (Kenis and Mathijs 2014, p.180). Chatterton and Cutler (2008) and Connors and McDonald (2011) have been particularly critical of Transition in this regard, suggesting that, by avoiding issues of power, the movement will be rendered irrelevant. Whilst they acknowledge the importance of wide participation, they argue that the fundamental ideology of the Transition movement will not appeal to everybody, and attempting to do so will inevitably lead to the dilution of the movement's principles, and lessen its efficacy. This issue was also encountered by Staggenborg and Ogrodnik (2015) in their study of Transition Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. They found that the initiative's commitment to an open and inclusive approach meant that its leaders 'never developed a strategy for going beyond "fun" events to address issues such as resource depletion and climate change in a meaningful way' (Staggenborg and Ogrodnik 2015, p.773). Stevenson (2012) therefore suggests that, unless the movement adopts a more critical stance with regard to class dynamics and social inequality, it risks being 'reduced to a form of middle-class lifestyle politics, unable to cross borders and engage with other experiences and class histories' (p.77). In what follows, we explore these issues in practice through a case study of TTT.

Case study: Transition Town Tooting

Tooting is an area of London well known for its cultural and socio-economic diversity. In 2012, the then UK Labour leader, Ed Miliband, chose Tooting as the place to launch the party's 'One Nation' vision for cultural diversity in Britain:

> [Tooting] is somewhere where people of all different backgrounds, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Christians and those of no faith, live and work together. A place where people don't just tolerate each other, but build friendships, families and businesses across communities. That's the kind of country we want to build. And that's why I have come to Tooting today (Miliband 2012, para.4).

Since it was founded in 2008, TTT has been highlighted for its efforts with regard to diversity. For example, in a 2010 blog post, Transition movement founder and figurehead, Rob Hopkins, stated: '[TTT] have, since the group's inception, seen diversity as "a way of operating" rather than an optional add-on. Tooting is one of the most diverse areas of London, and the group has striven to reflect that' (Hopkins 2010, para.9). The group's approach to diversity was also publically celebrated in the Transition Companion (Hopkins, 2011, pp.94-95). TTT, therefore, presents a particularly interesting case for exploring diversity within the Transition movement, and investigating the activities that particular initiatives might undertake to encourage and expand diversity.

Methodology

Defining diversity

There is no single, agreed definition of diversity. It is a word that encompasses and triggers a range of conceptions, perceptions, and normative beliefs about the composition of society (Bell et al. 2007). At its

broadest and simplest, diversity can refer to any state of heterogeneity, dissimilarity, or variation. Here, we assess the degree of difference between TTT participants and the wider Tooting population according to five key sociodemographic characteristics: education, income, occupation, ethnicity, and religion.[1]

Data collection

We adopted a mixed methods approach to data collection, combining qualitative interviews, participant observation, and a quantitative online survey, conducted in May and June 2015. Qualitative data was collected through 19 semi-structured interviews with residents of Tooting, 10 of whom were TTT participants and nine were non-participants. Potential interviewees were identified and recruited through a 'snowballing' technique which began with Harry, a TTT group member who acted as the primary gatekeeper for the research. Harry identified a number of individuals – both TTT participants and non-participant partners or collaborators – who he thought would have relevant knowledge of the group's functioning, and contacted them personally on our behalf to request an interview. Concurrently, Harry sent a generic email to the entire TTT mailing list to identify anyone within the wider TTT network who would be willing to share their experiences on the topic of diversity. During interviews, interviewees connected us with further individuals to interview, which helped to lessen gatekeeper bias (Sixsmith et al. 2003). Details of the interviews conducted are provided in Table 1 (all names used are pseudonyms).

[1] Although we also collected quantitative data on the gender and age of TTT participants through the online survey, the qualitative data collection was guided by the issues that were raised during interviews and, here, there was very little discussion of age or gender. Therefore, whilst we recognise that gender roles and relations are relevant to inclusivity and diversity within the Transition movement – and are in need of research – we have chosen to focus on the five listed aspects, as these were the factors that our interviewees perceived as most relevant to the issue of diversity within TTT and that we were able to explore to a sufficient level of detail.

<TABLE 1 about here>

The interviews were supplemented by six episodes of participant observation. The lead author was an active participant in each of the following TTT events: two gardening sessions; two monthly public meetings (one general group meeting and one community garden meeting); one 'Neighbourhood Planning' meeting; and one meeting of the co-chairs and treasurer.

Finally, a quantitative online survey was designed to gather demographic data on the characteristics of diversity defined above. The purpose of this survey was to collect data from a larger cohort of TTT members than we had the resources to interview and, thus, provide some further verification of our qualitative findings. The survey was sent by email to TTT's 942-strong mailing list, and 70 completed questionnaires were returned during the three-week window that the survey was open. The sample is self-selected and not statistically representative of all members of TTT. As such, the quantitative results should not be considered generalizable, but, presented alongside the data from interviews and observation, provide a means of methodological triangulation.

Like the majority of Transition initiatives (Feola and Nunes, 2014), TTT has no formal membership arrangements and anyone interested in the group is encouraged to join the mailing list. As a result, the 942 entries on the mailing list include individuals with hugely varying levels of commitment to, and participation in, the group's activities. One interviewee suggested that it is possible to distinguish between three broad 'rings of involvement' within TTT: the 'core group', responsible for the overall management of TTT; the project-based volunteers, who help to deliver particular TTT projects; and the supporters, who are interested in TTT's activities and may attend events. At the time of the research, the 'core group' was an identifiable group of 32 specific individuals, however, the level of participation of the 910 others on the mailing list is uncertain and diverse. The survey did not ask respondents to detail the nature of their involvement in the group, and, therefore, the 70 respondents may fall anywhere on this spectrum, from the outer edges through to the inner core of TTT.

Our results and analysis are presented in two sections below. The first section provides an overview of the diversity of participants in TTT compared to the population of Tooting. In the second section, we explore the influence that TTT's ways of working has on diversity within the group.

How diverse is TTT?

Almost all interviewees agreed that TTT participants – especially the most active members of the core group – tend to be from a relatively homogeneous subset of the community: Liza referred to the group as a *'bastion of white, middle class, educated people'*, and Emma described the core group as *'predominantly young, bright, urban, white, professionals who are quite middle class in background and orientation'*. The interviewees' observations were also reflected in the survey results. 86% of survey respondents stated that they have completed an undergraduate degree or equivalent (the majority of which have also completed a postgraduate degree), which is in stark contrast to the wider Tooting population, 42.5% of which have gained a degree or higher (Office for National Statistics 2013b). Despite this high level of education, a broad range of incomes was reported amongst survey respondents. The apparent disparity between the level of education and income was explained to a certain extent by the observation that several TTT participants were consciously deciding *'to opt out of the system'* (Liza), foregoing lucrative careers in order to concentrate on non-materialistic aspects of their lives. Several interviewees also indicated that having flexible working hours, and working part-time, are common characteristics of the most active TTT participants.

During the interviews, the lack of ethnic diversity was repeatedly mentioned and - when compared to the 2011 census data (Office for National Statistics 2013a) - the survey respondents were unrepresentative of the ethnically diverse population of Tooting; 70% of the respondents described themselves as British or Irish, compared to only 35% of the wider Tooting population. Potential reasons for the lack of ethnic diversity in TTT were explored during the interviews. One factor identified by a majority of the interviewees

was that, despite a high level of intercultural tolerance, there tends to be limited social mixing between the multiple ethnic communities in Tooting on a day-to-day basis:

> People are in separate, kind of, "mutually friendly" groups, but that perhaps don't necessarily cross. There are quite a lot of different groups who meet – there's a big Somali community that's very supportive and there's a big Tamil community – but I'm not sure there are places where everybody mingles (Lynn).

Almost half of the survey respondents described themselves as not identifying with any religion, compared to 22.1% in the wider Tooting population (Office for National Statistics 2013c). The lack of participation from certain faith groups may also be connected to the limited social mixing within Tooting and TTT's perceived identity as white and middle class. Nina, for example, described being unable to persuade individuals from her Muslim Asian community to join a TTT gardening session or meeting, despite a number of them having expressed an interest, as they do not identify with the group and *'feel they don't fit'* (Nina). In addition, Megan identified belonging to a faith group as a potential barrier to participation in TTT due to limits on people's time:

> If people are spending a lot of time on their faith, on their religion, they're not necessarily going to have enough time to think about climate change and get involved in that kind of group, because they're involved in a faith group (Megan).

Alex suggested that TTT may, in fact, provide a nucleus around which non-religious white British individuals can form a collective identity and community that they cannot find elsewhere:

> I think that community is an important thing for human beings and, actually, if you're white British and not religious, there isn't actually much of a – you have to create community around something, some common cause… if you're a bit like, 'I'm spiritual but it doesn't feel

> appropriate for me to be in a church'… if you are looking for that sense of community, which is definitely something I realised is important, [TTT] is where you end up (Alex).

As discussed earlier, a number of previous authors have suggested that certain aspects of the way in which Transition initiatives operate may be exacerbating the lack of diversity of participants within the groups. Therefore, in the following section we present our observations regarding the impact TTT's ways of working appear to have on diversity.

The influence of TTT's ways of working on diversity

Activities and community engagement

TTT intends all activities and events to be inclusive and accessible to everyone in Tooting. The group offers a large number and wide range of activities, all free of charge. TTT consciously plans activities, which require varying levels of involvement; for example, some are one-off events whilst others are projects extending over periods of several weeks, months, or years. They host activities in different locations around Tooting in order to connect with people in spaces where they feel comfortable, recognising that *'everyone has issues with space and who's in it'* (Jane).

One significant variation between TTT's different activities is the degree to which they are overtly and explicitly about climate change. Some activities, such as the 'Carbon Conversations', have an explicit environmental or climate change focus – in this case, reducing one's carbon footprint – whilst others are subtler in approach, and only implicitly allude to climate change and sustainability issues. This is a conscious tactic, in recognition of the varying levels of environmental interest and awareness in the Tooting population and the varying levels of appeal of overtly environmental activities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most popular and diverse events – the 2010 'Trashcatchers Carnival', which included a procession made

almost entirely out of scrap materials, and the trademark annual TTT food festival, 'Foodival' – do not highlight the link to climate change or peak oil in an explicit way.

The decision to run events and activities that do not directly link to the environmental objectives of Transition can be a source of controversy within TTT. Some interviewees, such as Jane, described how the fact that some of the activities are not overtly environmental enables TTT to appeal to a broader base of the Tooting population and, therefore, increase the diversity of its participation:

> …some of the things we do might seem a bit peripheral and so we've often talked about the Foodival and asked ourselves whether it is really overtly about climate change and if it was, would 600 people come to it? Probably not, you know, if it was, "this is the climate change and food day" (Jane).

A number of other interviewees expressed some concerns about the tension within the group between the desire to make progress towards the environmental aims of Transition and the desire to appeal to everyone in Tooting:

> (S)ometimes we go, "oh God we haven't set up a community energy project" ... sometimes Transition comes up with these really concrete things, alternative currencies, and sometimes we think, "oh God are we failing at Transition", but I think the one thing we're not failing at is story, what is the story of Tooting, and that's about the spirit of Tooting, that's about the people of Tooting and that's about, you know, different stories and cultures and faiths and, you know… (Hannah).

Craig, a participant in another local low carbon group, explained that his reason for not participating in TTT is that he wants to take more direct action on climate change and energy: '*gardening isn't going to save the planet*'. Similarly, Joe, a former TTT core group member, stated that he left the group as he did not think TTT was generating enough change:

> I thought Transition's not for me because I can't have the conversations I want to have, you know? [The] local food festival, which is great, but what's it going to change? It's not going to change anything at all, it's just going to be a bit of fun (Joe).

Despite some TTT events achieving broad local appeal, all the interviewees agreed that the diversity of participants is not high across all activities. Harry identified that the 'authorship' of the activities – that the ideas are always coming from the same small group of people – may have substantial influence on the breadth of the activity's appeal:

> I think some of the authorship of project ideas is perversely a barrier in itself, because, if you don't think about that in terms of reaching different groups that you're not reaching, then the danger is that you will attract the same people over and over again. And perhaps that's what we do and that's why we get this very incremental growth over the eight years TTT has been around (Harry).

Liza echoed Harry's concerns, suggesting that a lack of diversity of the people in the core group influences the types of activities that TTT organises, which, in turn, impacts the diversity of attendance. She believes that people's backgrounds are able to influence the activities because of the way in which TTT events and projects emerge, which relies heavily on the energy and motivation of the core group individual leading the activity:

> We run events that we like to run, because that's one of the motivating factors of TTT, is that you do it because you have the energy for it. So, therefore, you are going to do something that responds to one's own culture and if one's own culture is predominantly white British then you're going to do white British things. And to develop something, which is not white British, I mean this is so kind of generic, it might be seen as kind of not real, if it wasn't involved with somebody from the community (Liza).

Harry and Liza's comments suggest that TTT's difficulty in engaging a more diverse audience for events and activities can be traced back to a lack of diversity within the core group.

Core group composition

We describe the approach to recruiting core group members that we observed in TTT as a 'passive inclusivity': rather than actively seeking to recruit new group participants, TTT focuses on adopting an 'open door' policy. A reason given by several TTT participants for this passive approach is that any attempts to target certain parts of the Tooting population could be construed as conflicting with the Transition movement's apolitical, inclusive ethos. Specifically, there were concerns that, by focusing on attracting certain members of the community, TTT may risk excluding other members. For these participants, the most important thing is for the group to remain equally open and welcoming to everyone.

There was also evidence of more pragmatic reasons for maintaining a more informal, fluid approach to core group membership:

> [The core group] sort of comes and goes as people learn what they can give, what they can take… everyone's fitting this in on top of their, you know, whatever life they have, earning money, whatever commitments they have to their family, their households, their parents, their baby (Hannah).

Hannah's comments suggest that, rather than having a flexible and fluid way of working, it is TTT's core group composition that is flexible and fluid. That is, the organisational structure and the way the group operates remains relatively static, and the contribution of different people will ebb and flow with their ability to fit with this structure. Limitations of this approach were highlighted by Tom, a core group member, who voiced concerns that the availability of a person to attend a meeting is a critical factor in the degree of influence that person is able to have in the group:

> TTT operates under the pretence of being a democracy. We have our votes, but, the thing is, we have to go to meetings, we have to go to AGMs [Annual General Meetings], we have to be there to say our bit. But those who have kids, or really weird jobs, like me, where we have to work evenings, we can't do that … [those people] inherently have less influence, whether their ideas are good or not (Tom).

These comments were developed further by James, who identified that participating in the TTT core group is unlikely to be attractive to those who are struggling financially, and that TTT activities are not well-orientated to those members of the community:

> I don't think our planning meetings to be fascinating if someone is really prioritized on having enough food that week or paying the bills that week. The entry point for them would be things that are addressing that; so there might be things about childcare, or growing food on a state allotment, or something like that. But at the moment I don't think we're really opening that up (James).

A number of interviewees vented frustration at the passive approach to inclusivity, and suggested that TTT needs to adopt a more overt approach to recruitment, with the development of a clearer engagement process. The issue is currently being addressed, to some extent, with the development of 'TTT Open Days'. These new events are designed to 'demystify' TTT to the wider community and showcase the group's activities, as well as provide a concrete entry point into the group. However, others in the group stated that they believed that more radical changes are needed if TTT is to attract the diversity of participants required.

One of the ways in which TTT actively works to counteract the lack of diversity within the core group is through networking and collaboration with a broad range of social actors in Tooting.

Collaborative working

Collaboration currently forms a significant part of TTT's strategy for engaging with a diversity of local

actors, including other voluntary groups, businesses, and public institutions. This collaboration takes various different forms, with TTT adapting its role and position within a partnership to fit the particular context. TTT sees one of its core collaborative roles as a convener in participatory and non-hierarchical deliberation, with the purpose of exchanging ideas about what Transition could and should look like in Tooting. One example of this approach was the recent 'Looking out for Tooting' (LofT) event, which aimed to bring together local community groups to discuss Tooting, its future, and the opportunities for working together in order to achieve positive change. Whilst talking about LofT, Hannah described how TTT's hosting reflected the underlying ethos of the group:

> …the thing about the role of hosting and gathering, is that it acknowledges the diversity, it acknowledges all the different tracks, skills, perspectives, viewpoints, capabilities and it says we're all stronger if we do this together. So I think in that regard it reflects a lot in what we do and that constant look out, look in, look out, look in, rather than to come up with a fixed plan how things could be done (Hannah).

This was supported by many interviewees, both inside and outside of TTT, who spoke favourably of the group's ability to work with other groups in a non-hierarchical way. Despite not being members of TTT, Alex and Craig, for example, regard the group as a *'broker'* and *'glue'* within the community, and Nina talked of relationships that would not have been created had it not been for the group's efforts to connect with the wider community. Similarly, Lynn, who works at a local refugee support organisation, described TTT's inclusive working methods in the context of a project on which they had collaborated to build a garden for refugees:

> [TTT are] really good at drawing out different people's ideas and being fully participatory…I don't know whether there's a word for this model of working…where you just do things side by side, you know? Nobody is instructing particularly, nobody is teaching, you're just working collaboratively. And they're really good at that. And I think there's huge value in that in this

kind of setting, where perhaps people are nervous of their language abilities or don't quite feel they fit (Lynn).

Due to resource constraints, however, there are limits to the extent to which TTT is able to connect with different parts of the community. Nina identified that, although TTT has connected with many local actors from the Muslim Asian community, including shops, restaurants, schools and community groups, *'they've yet to reach the core community'*. She suggested that, in order to connect more with individuals of this community, *'we [members of the Muslim Asian community] also need to help them [TTT] for it to happen'*.

Discussion

The Transition movement is simultaneously global and local. Whilst Transition philosophy provides a generic set of 'principles, ingredients and tools' (Hopkins, 2011, p.13) to help guide communities towards increased local resilience, it also emphasises that the transition process must ultimately be led by the local community: 'the journey itself and where you end up – that's up to you' (p.14). The global concept of 'Transition' is therefore translated and enacted differently by different communities, in alignment with particular local contexts. To achieve this, the TN recommends the formation of a local steering group to take responsibility for designing and running activities that will help embed Transition principles within the daily life of the community (Brown et al. 2012). In Tooting, this process of local translation is being led by the core group; as the principal decision-making organ, the core group determines the types of activities, projects and events that are run in the name of Transition, and sets the strategic direction for TTT. A consequence of this, interviewees recognised, is that the majority of the activities that TTT pursues reflect the personal interests of the core group members. In line with the growing commentary on a lack of diversity within the movement (Aiken 2012; Felicetti 2013; Stevenson 2012; Merritt and Stubbs 2012; Smith 2011b), we found that only a particular – well-educated, middle-class, white – subset of the community participates in TTT's core group. Consequently, interviewees reported that Transition has

gained a white, middle class identity in Tooting, which can lead those who do not align themselves with this particular identity to feel that they do not belong. This supports previous observations made by Merritt and Stubbs (2012) that the character of Transition initiatives tends to depend heavily on the individuals who set them up.

The relative homogeneity of the core group is at odds with core Transition philosophy, which identifies diversity as key to local resilience (Smith 2011a). It suggests that TTT's vision for a low carbon Tooting is unlikely to reflect the diversity of worldviews held within the community which, according to Transition's 'Psychology of Change' model, will make it less effective for addressing the range of internal and external barriers to overcoming society's 'addiction to oil' (Hopkins 2008). For this reason, Hopkins (2011) advises that the steering group make an effort to remain welcoming to new people: 'A group usually works best with a core of people who steer it and who meet regularly, but who are open to whoever else wants to come. Each group should continually ask itself '"Who isn't here who should be here?", looking for new people with relevant skills' (p.128). However, we found that TTT struggled to achieve the balance between actively seeking people with the 'relevant skills' to help to construct a 'vision' of Transition whilst remaining politically neutral and attractive to all members of the community. TTT currently takes a passive approach to inclusivity, operating under the assumption that, by adopting an 'open door' policy, participation in TTT's core group is accessible to all community members. Several interviewees highlighted, however, that this is insufficient for achieving diversity as it ignores some of the structural barriers to participation for certain community members.

Previous authors have argued that the ambition for everyone in a community to be involved in a Transition initiative may not only be unrealistic, but may also be counter-productive, as it risks the group becoming 'subsumed within a bland local consensus of inaction' (Mason and Whitehead, 2012, p.511; Connor and McDonald, 2010; Chatterton and Cutler, 2008; Staggenborg and Ogrodnik, 2015). Our data have revealed this to be a significant concern amongst some TTT participants and former participants, with a perception that the desire for universal appeal and participation inevitably demands the dilution of the principles and impacts of the movement. These issues are arguably particularly salient within highly diverse

geographical communities like Tooting, where local groups must translate Transition's traditional, place-based concept of community, within a highly heterogeneous urban context (Aiken 2012; Neal 2013). As a densely populated area of Greater London with a history of migration and multiculturalism, Tooting arguably represents the antithesis of the traditional, rural 'Transition Town'. The diversity of worldviews coexisting in Tooting is so high that the expectation for a single voluntary group to represent the full spectrum of local perspectives is virtually unattainable. Whilst some of TTT's events, such as the 'Trashcatchers Carnival' and 'Foodival', have been successful in bringing a diverse group of community members together, these types of events have not actively engaged participants in shaping the process of transition. Consequently, despite being lauded for diverse participation, only a small, relatively homogenous portion of Tooting is actively engaged in the key objective of Transition: to develop a vision and action plan for a more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable society. Kenis (2016) has highlighted this as an inconsistency within Transition's approach: 'On one hand…the common good is presented as something one has to arrive at together through dialogue. On the other hand, the basic tenets of this common good are predefined' (p. 16). As a result, Kenis argues, Transition inevitably closes down the opportunity to leverage the pluralism of local communities, and excludes those who do not agree with this prescribed notion the communitarian ideal.

There is a very large body of literature critical of the interpretation of community as a homogeneous, spatially-defined unit, and there is considerable evidence of clear social and spatial divisions within communities that are externally defined as single entities (Halseth 1993): 'The reality is that communities, more often than not, are made up of an agglomeration of factions and interest groups' (Stone and Nyaupane, 2014, p.4). This is certainly the case in Tooting, which is comprised of a large number and wide variety of active social groups and organisations, each representing different, overlapping sub-sections of the community, including religions, ethnicities, ideologies, and interests. We have observed that, rather than achieving a diversity of individuals within its core group, TTT has been more effective in connecting a diversity of voices through its role as a local 'broker' between these existing Tooting sub-communities. Considered within the frame of 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital (Putnam, 2000; Magis, 2010), our

findings suggest that Tooting already possesses a large stock of *bonding* social capital, to which TTT, as another local interest group, provides an additional contribution. There is, perhaps, greater need within Tooting, for actions to increase local *bridging* social capital. Following Feola and Nunes's (2014) observation that cooperation with other local actors is essential to the success of Transition initiatives, we suggest that it is in its 'bridging' role that TTT serves as an example of how local Transition initiatives, particularly in urban locations, may have a particularly productive part to play in building local resilience. In a diverse, highly segmented urban population, Transition initiatives may have most agency in helping to provide the space and atmosphere for dialogue that helps to foster trusting relationships between the pre-existing, highly diverse patchwork of sub-communities that make up 'the community'. Through these activities, TTT is constructing and cementing relationships between different sections of the community, and, as such, can be seen to be contributing to local resilience by strengthening connections between the 'elements' of the 'system'. By enhancing links between the multiple 'elements' (sub-communities) within the 'system' (Tooting) and recognising and capitalising on the diversity of 'functions' of those elements (the different contributions of various local actors), TTT is working in a way which should help to enhance the resilience of the community (Hopkins 2008).

Conclusion

Diversity and inclusivity are key 'ingredients' of Transition's approach to achieving resilient communities (Hopkins, 2008). In this case, TTT, despite striving to be a diverse and inclusive group, has been unable to avoid gaining a white, middle class identity, which is unrepresentative of the wider Tooting community. Through closely examining and analysing the ways in which TTT operates, we have observed the challenges faced in achieving internal diversity within local Transition steering groups. Specifically, we have argued that the 'passively inclusive' approach to steering group recruitment is insufficient for delivering internal group diversity. We have seen that TTT achieves much greater success in terms of diversity in its collaborations with other local groups. We suggest that this is a reflection of the nature of large (urban) communities, which are likely to be a dynamic patchwork of diverse sub-communities, rather than a single

unit. Consequently, urban Transition initiatives may have more potential for influencing local resilience by concentrating on this local brokerage role: building and strengthening bridging connections between pockets of high social capital.

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Tables

Table 1: Pseudonyms and affiliations of interview participants

Interviewee pseudonym	Interviewee affiliation
TTT participants	
Jane	TTT core group
Liza	TTT core group
William	TTT core group
Tom	TTT core group
James	TTT core group
Hannah	TTT core group
Daniel	TTT core group
Harry	TTT core group
Megan	TTT core group
Vivian	TTT mailing list and participant at one event
Non-participants	

Mark	Local business network
Nina	Local community care service provider
Emma	Local community association
Craig	Local low carbon initiative
Alex	Local low carbon initiative
Lynn	Local refugee support organization
Amy	Local library
Steven	Local councilor
Joe	Former core group participant

*Interview conducted by telephone or video call.