

TRANSITION TOWNS CONFERENCE 2009 Report by Helen Royall



There were about 350 people from all over the world who gathered together for the 2009 Transition Conference at the Battersea Arts Centre in London.

The weekend was hot and sunny and the organisation was tight as well as fluid and flexible. The organisers had learned from last year and had made many improvements. One (and my favourite) was that people had been asked to bring homemade cakes and nibbles for tea breaks. Excellent. The first session on Friday was in local groups talking about the things that were happening. I had prepared a chart of the things going on in Transition Stroud but was glad that Jade from the Food Group was there to add several things I had forgotten.



On Saturday morning, Rob presented, with Mike Grenville, Charlene Collison and Jacqi



Hodgson, a workshop about EDAPs, presenting the current state of play with the concept, from Forest Row and Totnes. The workshop was introduced by Rob saying there is no right way to do this and the end product is likely to tell a story that guides but you don't necessarily have to stick to it. The speakers also said that having a dead line was very helpful!

A more detailed report of this workshop can be found [here](#).

This was followed by the first open space session. Many of the participants had come with expertise, experience or interest and had offered to lead a session accordingly. I attended a group talking about creative recycling and remembered my experience of a recycled band that had created a most unusual set of instruments including a supermarket trolley as percussion.

After lunch we had the premiere of 'In Transition'. Emma Goude, Peter Lipman and Rob Hopkins introduced the film which then ran to the packed hall. At the end, it received a standing ovation, a very enthusiastic response. One of the names I rather liked was, instead of NIMBY's (Not In My Back Yard) they suggested OOOBYs (Out Of Our Own Back Yard). Also in Lewes, when the Lewes pound was launched the pounds sold out very quickly with one Lewes pound selling for £30 at one point. Let's go Stroud Pound.



In the feedback and questions session afterwards, the main question that emerged was the fact that the film presents a very white and middle class image of Transition. As the film is made up of various footage sent in from groups all over the world it is a reflection of the membership of Transition groups everywhere and something that needs to be addressed in each locality.

After a second open session where I was in a group talking about working with young



people we took some time off to play football, dance or just relax. Then it was time for the evening event, 'Transition Everywhere'. The first speaker was David Strahan who gave an update on peak oil and why it still matters. He argued that the current low prices are actually more harmful than the high prices we saw last summer, and that all the indications are that peak oil is still near at hand, and that the fact that the run up to the price spike last year wasn't accompanied by

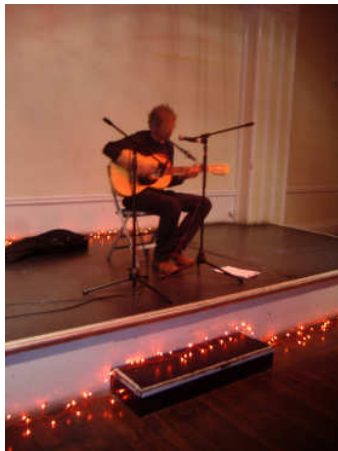
increased production, is one indicator that OPEC countries are unable to increase production – already increasing as much as they can.

The next speaker was Stephan Harding of Schumacher College who presented a wonderful, hilarious and moving crash course in Gaian science, in spite of a PowerPoint presentation that ground to a halt. He talked about the genesis of the Gaia concept, and about how the mechanistic, dualistic view that saw nature as being like a lifeless machine, and humanity as being separate from it, is at the heart of our current ecological crisis. He held the audience beautifully, weaving a compelling narrative around examples of how nature regulates itself.

Wonderful. Then eco-psychologist Mary-Jayne Rust talked about the Resilience of the Heart, and on the subject of ensuring inner resilience. This moved into territory that is not so often explored, and Mary-Jayne set out a number of pointers that people who are active in Transition might build into their work in order to ensure that they avoid burnout and exhaustion.

Rob followed with an update on Transition, where it has got to and where it might go next. The very final turn of the evening was a special surprise guest, the Reverend Billy of the Church of Life After Shopping.

The evening finished with an open mic session where I took the opportunity of singing a song or two.



Sunday started with various workshops. I chose one about putting together a web group for each area. Unfortunately I didn't understand much of it as it was led by computer literate men who obviously knew what they were talking about. Ah well. I get the idea and maybe it's time for our IT group to get going and link up with our own region.

We then went into our final Open Space and I happened to end up in the Garden Share group. This was a wonderfully inspired group with some experienced members and other keen ones. There were many ideas for how to get started, how to run it and how to fund it including a paid co-ordinator and a 'Green Thumb Gang' who could help people if they needed it.

We ended with all members coming together for a wrapping up session. The chairs were re-arranged into a big circle and people were invited in pairs to reflect on what they had particularly enjoyed about the conference, what they would do differently next time, and finally, what were the seeds they were taking away with them, and what might they grow into? I very foolishly offered to organise a children and young people's section of the conference next year. The session closed with a group singing of a Transition-themed version of Janis Joplin's 'Oh Lord Won't You Buy Me a Mercedes Benz' song, with new words about a composting loo. I think I prefer a Mercedes

It was an amazing 3 days in an amazing venue. The depth and breadth of the workshops and the quality of the discussion in the Open Space sessions was excellent. Well done to the hard working organisers.

Oh and next year's may well be a residential, camping, more outdoors and more hands-on type affair. Ah well, never mind.



Recommendations

1. Compared to many other places Stroud has a huge amount of Transition type activities, many already in place before the Transition development.
2. Several other places have made progress with EDAP's – we should continue the work we have recently started.
3. Funding sources can be found by asking other TT areas e.g.
 - Esmée Fairbairn Foundation <http://www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk/>
 - Community Award Scheme
 - Artists Project Earth <http://apeuk.org/>
4. There are web based / e mail processes that are more flexible than Google Groups and may help us eg Ning
5. It is well worth going to, so look out for it next year. Hopefully all ages will be invited.

Helen Royall 28 May 2009