

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science
Nigel Forrest

Will defend his thesis

**Discovering Pathways to Sustainability: Small
Communities in Transition**

Abstract

Driven by concern over environmental, economic and social problems, small, place based communities are engaging in processes of transition to become more sustainable. These communities may be viewed as innovative front runners of a transition to a more sustainable society in general, each one, an experiment in social transformation. These experiments present learning opportunities to build robust theories of community transition and to create specific, actionable knowledge to improve, replicate, and accelerate transitions in real communities. Yet to date, there is very little empirical research into the community transition phenomenon. This thesis empirically develops an analytical framework and method for the purpose of researching community transition processes, the ultimate goal of which is to arrive at a practice of evidence based transitions.

A multiple case study approach was used to investigate three community transitions while simultaneously developing the framework and method in an iterative fashion. The case studies selected were Ashton Hayes, a small English village, BedZED, an urban housing complex in London, and Forres, a small Scottish town. Each community was visited and data collected by interview and document analysis. The research design brings together elements of process tracing, transformative planning and governance, sustainability assessment, transition path analysis and transition management within a multiple case study envelope. While some preliminary insights are gained into community transitions based on the three cases the main contribution of this thesis is in the creation of the research framework and method. The general framework and method developed has potential for standardizing and synthesizing research of community transition processes leading to both theoretical and practical knowledge that allows sustainability transition to be approached with confidence and not just hope.

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Faculty, students, and the general public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Arnim Wiek, Co-Chair
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