

# Chapter 10

## Practical Recommendations for Policy Makers and Practitioners for the Governance of Urban Sustainability Transitions

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**Abstract** With increasing complexity, societal issues cannot be managed using the classical “rules and regulations” associated with traditional government. Rather, they require more subtle, network-oriented arrangements such as transition management, in which policy makers are not the only partners, and not necessarily the leading partner either. This chapter takes stock of the experiences with five urban sustainability challenges from Japan and Europe to draft recommendations for practitioners to more effectively handle such issues. It also reflects on examples of when and why to use transition management specifically based on these experiences. These examples show the importance and potential of network *hybridisation*, in the broadest sense; network hybridisation has sectoral, administrative, niche/regime, and grass-roots/incumbent dimensions, all of which can provide opportunities for transition. Regarding transition management, we learnt that information provided by scientists can act as a *common starting point* in arenas with diverse participants, who can use it to connect their own context and practice to the arena issue at hand. Furthermore, these cases suggested that striving for *shared actions* and connecting different problem orientations is more fruitful for transitions than striving for *consensus*.

**Keywords** Sustainability transitions • Urban sustainability • Governance recommendations • Transition management • Reflexive governance • Networks • Network hybridisation

### 10.1 Introduction

A growing awareness exists that, with increasing complexity, societal issues cannot be managed using the classical “rules and regulations” approach associated with traditional government. Rather, they require more subtle, network-oriented

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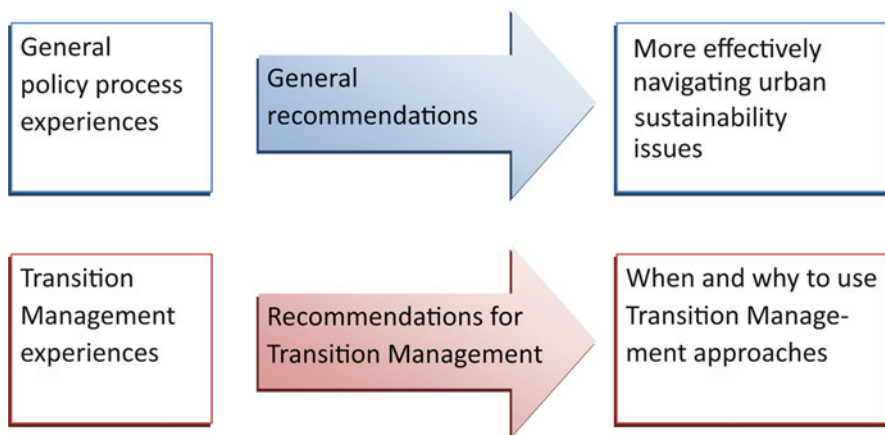
arrangements in which policy makers are not the only partners, and not necessarily the leading partner. Policy makers need to collaborate with businesses, scientists, NGOs, citizens' groups and initiatives, and partners from education to stumble upon possible solutions, as can be learnt from the recent calls for reflexive governance by Voß and Kemp (2006) and Grin (2006).

Approaches for reflexive governance such as transition management (Loorbach and Rotmans 2006) are relatively new and have primarily been implemented and tested in specific and local contexts, despite their importance for the grand challenges of this age. Furthermore, the associated tools and methods are still in development (true to their reflexive nature) and subject to change. Hence, the importance to take stock of recent experiences with transition management and similar examples of policy processes in the context of complex societal challenges, and to derive lessons for practitioners so that they more effectively may work towards societal change, is evident.

The studies collected in this book reflect two types. The European studies of Aberdeen (Frantzeskaki and Tefrati 2016, Chap. 4, this volume), Ghent (Hölscher et al. 2016, Chap. 6, this volume), and Montreuil (Krauz 2016, Chap. 8, this volume) all represent applications of transition management, whereas the studies in Higashiomi (Mizuguchi et al. 2016, Chap. 5, this volume) and Kitakyushu (Shiroyama and Kajiki 2016, Chap. 7, in this volume) from Japan are more free-form examples of governance for complex societal problems, yet they are analysed using a transition management framework. The main difference between the European and Japanese chapters is that the European chapters focus on a transition management intervention, giving a detailed account of a relatively short period, whereas the Japanese chapters report on 'complete,' mostly historical, transitions.

In this chapter, we gather both explicit and entailed governance recommendations based on the empirical chapters and their associated governance challenges. These recommendations are specifically aimed at all professionals who practically contend with urban sustainability issues: these include urban planners and policy makers, who through our recommendations can benefit from lessons learnt elsewhere. For academics, especially action researchers, the recommendations in this chapter can be seen as heuristics to increase the effectiveness of a scientific contribution to processes of social change and as points of concern for gathering research data about urban sustainability issues and the associated governance processes.

We distinguish between two types of recommendations, general governance recommendations and recommendations for transition management approaches (Fig. 10.1). First, the general recommendations for the governance of complex societal problems, gathered from all the empirical chapters, should be of interest to anybody looking for insights about the often messy but also inspiring practice of working towards sustainability. Second, we move to recommendations specific for the use of transition management approaches. These recommendations are not intended as solutions, but rather as guidelines/heuristics that practitioners may use to further transition efforts.



**Fig. 10.1** Two types of recommendations

## 10.2 General Governance Recommendations

The general governance recommendations basically cover two broad types. The first set of recommendations very broadly concern (expectations about) time and action (Sects. 10.2.1 and 10.2.2). In a sense, they reflect the tension in transitions between concrete short-term actions and keeping with long-term visions of sustainability. The temporal aspect of transitions is key here. The second set of recommendations concerns the complexities of local and multilevel networks and context (Sects. 10.2.3 and 10.2.4). Both the multilayered nature of transitions and their geospatial characteristics here indicate the necessity of flexibility in the governance for sustainability, and they underscore that governance recommendations should not be taken to be more than heuristics.

### 10.2.1 *Raise Realistic Expectations About Short-Term Actions*

The one thing clear from all cases in this book is that transitions take time. This observation may come across as a platitude, especially given that definitions of transition often include a time horizon of one or even more generations. And yet, from a practitioner's point of view it is important to have (and raise) realistic expectations for concrete effects of transition efforts and impulses in the short term.

The Japanese cases all show long timelines. For instance, the Higashiomi case arguably has 40-year-old roots in antipollution activism and associated community-based business development using local resources. The novelties that together culminated in the Higashiomi Welfare Mall were 10 years in the making, and the

Welfare Mall itself took 5 years from the first meeting to be established. Similarly, the Kitakyushu case stretches over 30 years. Both cases illustrate that it can take a long time from the first ideas for innovation to the first actions, the first spades in the ground, so to speak. As such, these cases also underscore the importance and duration of the predevelopment phases of transitions (Rotmans and Loorbach 2009), and that transitions come in leaps and bounds once the ground is prepared.

In contrast, the chapters about the European cases span short time periods of only a couple (1.5 to 4) of years. They were explicitly positioned within an historical analysis and thus embedded in a longer timeframe, but within the project scope by definition relatively few actual actions could be accomplished. Here it becomes clear that inherent to proactively addressing transitions is the balancing act between understanding the long-term dynamics while focusing on short-term and relatively small-scale interventions. In Ghent, for instance, one of the few concrete actions was a “carrot mob” that attracted 938 participants and led the targeted supermarket to invest €10.000 in sustainability measures. Such actions may seem modest on the transition scale, but more noteworthy is the long-term potential for change evolving from the processes, such as the opening up within the city administration, two more arena processes, and the further network development. Similar results were achieved in Montreuil, where few actual actions were established during the transition initiative there. However, the transition management approach did yield intangible results such as learning and changes in work routines. New collaborations have been started, such as between the local energy agency and frontrunners and between the council house office and frontrunners, trying to implement transition experiments involving the limiting factor of lack of funding.

It is interesting to also point to the initial skepticism that the transition management approach received in Ghent, from both the city administration and the involved arena participants, because of the tension between their ‘ambitious’ expectations and the long-term character of transitions. Although transition management is aimed at accelerating change, the experiences reflected in the Japanese cases suggest that, even with transition management, we should still be modest about how much action we can expect in a short time, and that efforts towards transitions require long-term commitments that may span several projects and arenas (perhaps temporary transition impulses) over time.

We can draw two immediate governance recommendations:

- Have realistic short-term expectations about transition impulses; be careful with creating expectations of action in the short term, and focus on the less tangible changes in the form of network growth and discourse change.
- Think beyond the project horizon; ‘a few years’ is only a moment on the time scale of a transition. Make a long-term commitment; otherwise, efforts might be wasted.

## ***10.2.2 Work Hard Towards Short-Term Actions***

The previous point underscores the importance of efforts towards actions. The European cases are indicative of the importance of finding resources that create connections to people with time, ideas, knowledge, skills, money, etcetera, to engage in concrete activities. In Ghent, “transition networks mainly involve actors who can link to a professional level and have the capacity of translating new ideas to new practices or ‘selling’ ideas to a broader audience” (Hölscher et al. 2016, Chap. 6, this volume). This point shows the importance of linking transition arena ideas to the professional contexts of transition arena members to result in action.

Similarly, the Montreuil case showed how hard it is to move towards actions, in this case because of limited availability of resources. The predominantly grass-roots-oriented transition arena aimed to include both Higher and Lower Montreuil, two areas with important differences in affluence and culture, but the resulting network consisted mainly of “white males,” not offering the more equal representation that the initiative intended. The case shows that even only participating in an arena still requires time and resources that many people may not have at their disposal.

The examples of Ghent and Montreuil underscore both how difficult it is to come to action in the short term and the importance of finding resources for action. Of course, resources are not the only issue here. In Aberdeen and Montreuil commitment and support from the city administration was shown as equally important. In this regard, also more intangible aspects are relevant (mainly networks and motivation). Still, all examples show how hard it is to move towards action without resources.

In Kitakyushu, subsidies were used as an instrument to accelerate change, as also happened in Higashiomi, where subsidies were applied “flexibly,” in the sense that sometimes the rules and resources for subsidies were changed in accordance with changing situations. This example shows that also the more traditional policy instruments of rules/regulation and financial instruments such as subsidies and fines can be used to create conducive conditions for new markets, which leads us to the following governance recommendation:

- Use policy to create conditions for new markets; create spaces for interests, values, and dreams to meet, and shift resources (time, money, power, . . .) towards the niche.

The issue of how resources are necessary for joint action also points towards the role of increasingly hybrid networks. Transition initiatives need to create links to resources for action, suggesting two additional governance recommendations:

- Be aware of and sensitive to (the necessity of) (network) resources for action, and try to create new network links that can cater for action.
- If possible, create space for the unrepresented by sharing resources; this will benefit the local network of the initiative.

### 10.2.3 *On the Topic of Network Hybridisation*

Across the various cases in this book, the importance of diversity in networks (i.e., network hybridisation) comes to the fore in many different guises: spanning different geospatial levels, different levels of administrative scale, bridging between business, education, science, government, and NGOs, etcetera. We can define network hybridisation as a multidimensional form of diversity in networks, and each of the constituting dimensions (sectoral, administrative, niche/regime, grassroots/incumbents) represents opportunities for using differences for the benefit of transition.

The most typical form of network hybridisation would seem the combination of bottom-up and top-down steering: grassroots meeting government, niche versus regime. However, the cases in fact exhibit network hybridisation on many different dimensions, all seemingly fit to the specific case characteristics. Also, such hybridisation appears to be a more general and nondichotomous structure than the simple niche–regime distinction.

In the cases of Kitakyushu and Higashiomi, hybridisation occurred in terms of business–government collaboration that spanned both local and higher administrative levels. In Higashiomi, hybridisation appeared specific for Higashiomi’s geographic location. Higashiomi is located between Nagoya, which has been an economic–industrial centre since medieval times, and Kyoto, the former (until 1868) capital of Japan and a current-day academic centre with a university that is internationally well regarded. Together, these neighbouring cities act as resources for hybridisation, for example, in terms of in-sourcing knowledge for cross-sectoral collaboration.

In Kitakyushu’s Eco-town Project, close relations between city and national government officials were vital in negotiating for a very beneficial subsidy scheme that enabled local companies to cover both “soft” subsidies for project preparation and “hard” subsidies for infrastructure improvement. In that sense, these cases show that hybridisation is a multidimensional concept that can concern multiple administrative scale levels and also multiple sectors.

The Kitakyushu case is also illustrative for the niche–regime type of hybridisation, especially because it runs counter to the emphasis that has been put on the importance of supporting niche developments through grassroots initiatives. The actors involved in the Eco-town Project, such as high-level government officials and business executives from Nippon Steel and Mitsui & Co, can all be regarded as *incumbents*, powerful actors with important functions in the existing regimes. Although the Eco-town Project can arguably be seen as a niche, it certainly was not initiated by grassroots participants. Rather, it is a case of niche formation by incumbents that clash with the regime. The case shows that transitions can begin in many different places and ways.

In Ghent, we witnessed network hybridisation on a more abstract level, in the guise of a sense of mutual similarity and like-mindedness, regardless of the original motivations and concerns of the actors involved: this increased intrinsic motivation

and a feeling of leverage. Another example from Ghent concerns the shift from collaboration between administrative university staff, students, and professors to a more comprehensive collaboration in transition arenas, that is, the transition UGent process. The same goes for hybridisation within the administration: cross-departmental linkages were created, most evident in the mobility arena. With regard to Montreuil and Aberdeen, the collaboration between the administration and transition arena participants constitutes another example of hybridisation, moving on from the importance of ‘bottom-up’ versus ‘top-down’ to more diverse forms of hybridization.

We can define two general lessons about network hybridisation.

- Try to keep an open eye out for opportunities on *all* dimensions (sectoral, administrative, niche/regime, grassroots/incumbents) instead of searching blindly for a grassroots initiative.
- For policy makers specifically, the cases show the importance of creating links between local and higher administrative levels to create further opportunities for strengthening transitions. If possible, try to establish such links yourself.

#### ***10.2.4 Be Sensitive to Local Conditions***

A final lesson to be drawn from the examples mentioned here and elsewhere in the book is the necessity of being sensitive to local conditions. For instance, in the case of Ghent, there was a high policy focus on sustainability, and policy makers had the ambition to turn Ghent climate neutral. They established a Climate Alliance to involve the actors necessary for achieving this ambition, which offers a very different starting point than the case of Montreuil. There, the grassroots orientation of the arena was in part the result of the legacy of 70 years of municipal communism, involving a strong structuration of civil society in associations and a strong participation of citizens in formal and informal (mainly former communist) networks (despite the election in 2008 of a mayor from a green party).

The Higashiomi Welfare Mall is also an example in case. The specific history and location of Higashiomi may actually have benefited making connections between different frames of reference (Nagoya versus Kyoto) and creating value for multiple perspectives (Regeer et al. 2011; “dosho-imu,” or “connected value development”). Specifically, a local sense of identity as descendants of the ‘Ohmi-Merchant’ may have fostered a sense and skill for connecting different values. The ‘Ohmi-Merchant’ is regarded as a prototype of the modern Japanese merchant, known for their pragmatic philosophy, that business is good when seller, buyer, and society all see it as good, a philosophy that can be understood as a direct plea for connecting different values. Thus, local conditions offer specific barriers and, more importantly, specific opportunities for policy makers to foster and accelerate efforts towards transition.

The above examples about local conditions lead to additional governance recommendations about network hybridisation.

- Do not limit network hybridisation to combining “top-down” with “bottom up” developments.
- Keep an open eye for any possible way of hybridisation that may offer new resources for change.

### **10.3 Recommendations for Transition Management Approaches**

In this section, we gather recommendations, derived from specific aspects of transition management, that may inform future transition management initiatives and which might also be followed in sustainability governance processes in general.

We base ourselves on the empirical examples in this book of how transition management (and/or its associated tools and instruments) influences and accelerates transition efforts. The cases uncovered some considerations for using transition management in specific contexts. In this section, we focus on common starting points for transition efforts and on the role of transition management for the acceptance of diversity.

#### ***10.3.1 Transition Management Can Offer a Common Starting Point***

The transition management processes in all three European cities started with a system analysis. The lessons from the Ghent case suggest that this helped to ensure a level of realism and attainability to the transition arena. In Montreuil, the system analysis was also largely accepted as a good starting point for a discussion. It relied on insights proposed by frontrunners during their interviews, complemented by desk research by the transition team: this ensured its acceptability. The ensuing discussion focussed on the framing of the transition challenges. These result are surprising (and encouraging), especially in light of increased politicisation of policy processes, as well as past criticisms holding that transition management is too directive and top-down to function in the societal complexities of the real world (Shove and Walker 2007).

Specifically, both the system analysis and the future envisioning process helped the participants in all three cities to create shared understandings and to facilitate dialogue and co-creation. In the system analysis, the researchers worked together with Ghent municipal policy makers to assess stocks and interrelations of social, ecological, and economic value (Grosskurth 2008). In the subsequent first arena meeting, the results of the system analysis were used as input for a broader



discussion that helped the arena participants to draw connections between their own perspectives and the topic of climate change.

In general, the information compiled in a system analysis is not just put together from scientific sources and distributed in written form. Rather, it was fed into the process and discussed with the participants in all three cities. The resulting problem orientation was accepted by the participants as theirs. In other words, the arena discusses the information to develop its own (possibly multiple) perspective(s). The information becomes seen as largely neutral through a social process of learning, not because ‘researchers state that this is how things are,’ so to speak.

Furthermore, both the Ghent and Montreuil cases suggest that such information should not be sourced from science alone. Non-scientists’ involvement in drawing up the requirements of the system analysis may have been vital to the approach, as well as not offering it as ‘truth’ but only as inspiration for the envisioning process. Distributing and discussing information from scientists is inherent to a transition management approach, but the experiences gathered here suggest that doing so can also be useful for governance issues in general when participants with multiple perspectives need to collaborate. We can support the following governance recommendations:

- Use knowledge and information from scientists to contribute to a *common starting point* for participants in diverse policy/transition arenas. They can use such information to connect their own context and practice to the arena issue at hand.
- Create space for reframing and reinterpreting knowledge and dominant (policy) frames by engaging with different societal perspectives and types of knowledge.

### ***10.3.2 Transition Management Can Help to Make Diversity More Accepted***

In Aberdeen, transition management provided a different function than the foregoing: it created space for the coexistence of mutual differences in the arena, and as such provided a basis for creating connections between different perspectives (Beers et al. 2010). Specifically, the envisioning process in Aberdeen was of tactical value for uncovering specific current practices that stand in the way of transformative change, which also enabled identifying options for collaborative breakthrough actions. In this capacity, the envisioning process revealed the potential of creating ties with stakeholders that the initial arena participants usually would not consider, in other words, the necessity of gathering unlikely allies, up to and including the oil and gas industries. In Ghent, something similar happened when new actors were invited to join individual climate working groups as a follow up of the climate arena.

Being aware of their mutual differences, the actors in Aberdeen searched for synergies, for instance, change agents sought after possibilities for concerted action

with city projects, despite the hindrances that the current municipal administrative system presented. The envisioning processes helped participants become aware of how they were connected to others, despite having different concerns and aims. This process appears akin to “connected value development” / “dosho-imu,” in the sense that shared concerns are not a necessity for shared actions (of course, they do help). Rather, actions must be able to *connect* different concerns, by having valuable and specific results for each participant. Apparently, the Aberdeen envisioning process, by way of political empowerment, helped search for connections for shared actions amid different perspectives.

It must be noted about the envisioning process in Aberdeen that the stakeholders involved concerned mainly government officials and change agents. These two groups certainly shared (somewhat) opposing views, in the sense that administrative institutions often presented obstacles to the goals of the change agents. However, the actual difference in interests and values might have been bigger still if, for instance, the oil industry had also been part of the envisioning process. In that light, the above result should still be treated as rather context specific, although its indications for the potential of envisioning processes as part of transition management are certainly promising.

Multiple, different perspectives are part and parcel of any sustainability governance processes, and not specific for transition management. The cases discussed here suggest that doing justice to these differences can still serve as a basis for joint action. Rather than striving for consensus, that is, an agreement about problem orientations and future visions, it appears important to search for shared actions that are meaningful and beneficial even from different perspectives. Two governance recommendations are implied:

- Search for shared actions more than for consensus on goals and specific targets.
- Use future envisioning processes to help bridge different perspectives in the search for shared actions.

The above recommendations allude to two more general characteristics of transition management in terms of empowerment (cf. Hölscher et al. 2016, Chap. 6, this volume). First, it can act as a type of *cognitive empowerment* that helps to distinguish (in practice, at least) between what is accepted as “neutral” and what is treated as opinion. Second, it can act as a bridging device that can connect multiple agendas/frames of reference and in so doing support *political empowerment* of the transition arena.

## 10.4 Conclusion

This chapter derived various governance recommendations from the European and Japanese cases of transition and transition management collected in this book. We discussed recommendations based on the tension between short-term and long-term aspects of transitions and others concerned with the multilayered and geospatial

aspects of transitions. With regard to the former, we recommend being careful about which expectations to raise about the impacts of a transition impulse. In the short term, it might be better to focus on the intangible results of network growth and discourse change than on concrete tangible actions. One transition impulse is only a short moment on the time scale of an overall transition. An associated suggestion is to think beyond the time horizons of individual projects and to make a long-term commitment.

Although concrete action (implementation of innovations, etc.) might be difficult to achieve in the short term, actions are also an important aspect of learning towards transitions. Therefore, a second set of recommendations concerns how to accelerate towards local actions on the short term. Networks are key here, as connections of different types of resources (time, money, power, etc.). Policy makers can contribute to action-oriented change by creating space for different actors to meet and shifting resources to niches. Those without resources, who may remain unrepresented in a transition initiative, may require specific attention in this regard.

This point leads us to the multilayered and geospatial specifics of transitions. The cases suggest keeping an eye open for network *hybridisation* opportunities, which should not be limited to combining “top-down” with “bottom-up” developments. Rather, networks have sectoral, administrative, niche/regime, and grassroots/incumbents dimensions, which all can provide opportunities for network hybridisation. Traditionally, transitions have often been thought of as originating from grassroots initiatives, whereas these cases have shown that incumbents may also work towards transition (Geels and Schot 2007). This concept of network hybridisation in fact suggests that initiatives for transition might begin in many different ways, from many different actors. The challenge then is to keep an open eye for any possible way of hybridisation that may offer new resources for change.

For when and why to use transition management, we have learnt that information provided by scientists can act as a *common starting point* in arenas with diverse participants, who can use it to connect their own context and practice to the arena issue at hand. Furthermore, these cases suggested that striving for *shared actions* that connect different problem orientations is more fruitful for transitions than striving for *consensus*.

In closing, perhaps the most notable conclusion is the importance of local context, in terms of obstacles and opportunities for change. This realization underscores the necessity of using transition management as a set of guidelines, not as a ‘cook book.’ The recommendations collected here suggest that transition management can be seen as a balancing act between these points:

- Top-down versus bottom-up
- Incumbents versus grassroots
- Expectations versus actions
- Inclusion of underrepresented perspectives versus inclusion of time, money, and resources for action

In that light, it is very difficult to draw concrete governance recommendations beyond what we presented here. Still, the results from the European transition

management cases indicate the potential of transition management for both cognitive and political empowerment, even in full awareness of the balancing acts entailed by transition management. In that sense, this book in fact suggests that transition management may actually be more complex but also more promising than it seems.

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