

Title: Understanding Climate Change – The Case of the Waitati Transition Town

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Martin is currently doing research towards a Master of Arts degree in Geography at University of Otago. He looks primarily at the Waitati Transition Town and is intrigued by the powerful ideas that the transition concept brings together in an imaginary platform for exploring ways of creating resilient, sustainable and thriving communities.

Abstract:

References to mitigation of and adaptation to climate change are common in scientific, political and public climate change discourse. Within the dominant science-policy alliance that governs the mainstream political understanding of climate change, these terms have become aligned with a techno-scientific and technocratic reading of the issue. This has two major problematic implications. Firstly, this approach has resulted in a culture of administrative rationalism that governs responses to climate change, which is a condition that marginalises alternative readings of the issue and effectively excludes them from the decision making process. Secondly, it fails to capture the intimate connections between climate change and thoughts pertaining to sustainability and other socio-ecological and socio-economic issues such as peak oil, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss. The concept of transition challenges both circumstances through being a bottom-up participatory approach with the emphasis on creating rather than criticising and through seeing climate change as a hybrid issue that not only relates to the universal properties of greenhouse gases. During my research I investigated how the participants of the Waitati Transition town fill the imaginary platform that the transition concept provides with life. In so doing I found that transition can have many faces. In Waitati, the diverse range of community initiatives exemplifies this:

- Waitati Edible Gardens
- Waitati Open Orchards
- Waitati Energy Project (Now the Blueskin Energy Project)
- Waitati Film Society
- Get the Train
- W3 Rideshare

Together, these initiatives provide a social context for creating and maintaining a rich discourse based on the vision of a pleasurable and fulfilling way of life within a resilient and thriving community. The idea that this vision can be achieved through a ‘transition’ that focusses on opportunities rather than problems, unites the various facets of this discourse in subtle, yet powerful ways.



Cartoon found on the Waitati Transition Town Homepage (downloaded on 27/09/2011)