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# MOBILIZING FOR GREEN TRANSFORMATIONS

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## Introduction

In building green transformations, vital sources of energy, imagination, knowledge, experience and practice lie in citizen action and mobilization. However, such movements take on different forms in different places and at different moments in history. As argued elsewhere in this book, there are clearly multiple green transformations required today, but how can they come about, and what role do collective organization, mobilization and activism play in this process?

Social movement theory identifies the framing of issues, the construction of identities, the mobilization of resources and the galvanization of networks as key features of movements (Leach and Scoones, 2007). Yet the capacity to contribute to green transformations also depends critically on the relationships between movements, networks and their institutionalization, and on the relationships between particularistic, locally grounded practices, and claims and action focused on wider forms of transformation. Green transformations, as argued elsewhere in this book, involve challenges to investment and infrastructure, practices and power relations that involve both private and public sector actors, and extend up to global scales. We argue here that the effectiveness of mobilization in the politics of green transformation hinges on how far vibrant local action and agendas that make space for citizens' own concerns are able to articulate with and mount challenges to global forces.

In this chapter, we explore and evaluate these dimensions in relation to case studies where movements have emerged to urge green transformations of different sorts – in small farm production and markets, in agricultural technology, and in urban design and living. In each of these cases different types of movements have formed and evolved, framing the green transformation challenge in different ways and navigating tensions along the movement institutionalization and particularism







wider transformation, local–global axes in different ways. We also note other contexts where a quieter, more hidden form of transformation occurs through shared practice, linked to particular cultural–political modes of organization. We conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of these differences for alliance building for green transformations and the political challenges this suggests.

## Green movements: a simple typology and a very brief history

Not all movements conform to the banner-waving activist image of the media stereotype. Indeed, there is a wide variety of forms and styles, some more resonant with this image, others much less visible. A movement can be defined broadly as a collective response binding different people in 'practised engagement through emergent solidarities' around a particular issue, or set of issues (Leach and Scoones, 2007, p16, drawing on Ellison, 1997). Green movements have often been theorized as exemplars of new social movements (Della Porta and Diani, 2006), and there is a large literature that explores such dynamics of contentious politics (e.g. Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1998; McAdam *et al.*, 2001, 2003). Today, at least three types of 'green' movement are evident (cf. Szerszynski, 1997; Jamison, 2001).

First, there are those green movements associated with lifestyle change, focusing on shifts in individual behaviour and practice. Such movements are usually rooted in local networks and often part of 'alternative' lifestyles, linked to other movements associated with, for example, food and housing. They may be more broadly linked through wider networking and, while clearly political in the sense of a personal commitment to change, many do not overtly campaign in the public political sphere, arguing that change must be emergent from individual, community-based and local efforts. There has been a long tradition of such lifestyle-centred movements in Europe and North America from the 1960s onwards, while in other parts of the world they have been associated with protecting the political and cultural autonomy of particular groups (e.g. indigenous people's movements, peasant movements) as well as religious organizations (e.g. Buddhist retreats, Ghandian ashrams), often with much longer traditions.

Second, there are activist organizations and networks that form around particular issues. These are more confrontational and aim to tackle wider policy issues through direct action and protest. From the classic Greenpeace whaling protests of the 1970s to the climate justice or anti-GM campaigns of today, such movements have had high visibility, often with visible impacts. In many ways these have symbolized the environmental movement in the global North that came to prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and led to the creation of organizations from Friends of the Earth to Greenpeace to the Sierra Club. Many of these organizations have themselves changed, responding to shifts in the cultural and political landscape, but the radical, activist edge has not been lost. From the late 1990s, certain green movements and campaigns became increasingly allied to anti-

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capitalist movements, including those convened by the World Social Forum from its founding event at Porto Alegre in 2001, and more recently the 'Climate Justice', 'Occupy' and 'Anonymous' movements. Such movements, even if focused on a particular environmental or social issue, have developed a larger critique of the way that contemporary neoliberal capitalism has affected the environment, and social and political life, and has acted to undermine rights, producing inequality and poverty.

Third, some green movements over time, or through splits in original groupings, have become increasingly professionalized, forming more formal organizations, and arguing for a place at formal policy tables and intergovernmental negotiations to put the green case. An important spur to this was the major UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio in 1992. Its predecessor in Stockholm in 1972 had hailed the arrival of the environmental movement on the international stage and was the moment when many organizations formed, led by visionaries such as Barbara Ward, author of *Only One Earth* (Ward and Dubos, 1972) or inspired by the likes of Rachel Carson, author of the classic environmentalist text, *Silent Spring* (Carson, 1962). However, it was in 1992 that environmental issues hit the mainstream, backed by detailed analysis and argument in the World Commission in Environment and Development report, *Our Common Future* (Brundtland, 1987), and then crystallized in the establishment of international conventions and the bottom-up process Agenda 21 (UNEP, 1992). Such institutionalization has, of course, presented strategic and tactical challenges, with co-optation and reformist managerialism being balanced against access and influence. However, since the 1990s and the rise of environmental concerns in national and international policy arenas, such organizations have become increasingly influential, striking up important achievements in a range of areas from biodiversity protection to climate change to sustainable development goals, and even making inroads into business through organizations such as the World Business Council on Sustainable Development.

Whether such groups can be classified as 'movements' is a moot point, however. Some self-define not as such, but as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Many in the more activist groupings will dismiss organizations that engage closely with the mainstream as co-opted 'sell-outs', no longer grounded in real citizens' concerns or challenges to the status quo. However, whatever the classification, the important point is that today there is a huge array of groups, more or less formally organized, committed to green transformations of different sorts. They have different organizational forms, different framings of the problem and different proposed solutions; they have different strategies and tactics in respect of the politics required, and they are networked in different ways, not always working together harmoniously.

Drawing insights from the Honey Bee Network in India, Anil Gupta (Gupta, 2013) usefully argues that movements (grassroots action) must interact with networks (that link different grassroots forms) in order to embed and spread ideas and change, and must be supported by institutions (embracing larger organizations)







if there is any hope of sustaining change within bureaucratic and policy structures. Each cannot achieve a successful and radical transformation alone. There are inevitably tensions, but Gupta argues that these are productive ones, as long as the movements can hold the more formal institutions to account and the network continues to serve the movement participants. The challenge is how to avoid new institutions becoming separated from their network and movement base, and how to keep the networks active so that they are continually generating new ideas and innovations, and avoid getting co-opted by increasingly formalized and powerful institutions in the mainstream. The movements we discuss below have embraced such networking and institutionalization challenges and opportunities to different extents, and in different ways, shaping their abilities to contribute to transformational change.

These case study mobilizations, like many others, are reflective of a particular social–political–cultural process that emerged in Western Europe and North America in the late 1960s, while picking up on other traditions of protest and mobilization, notably Ghandian organization and philosophy in India, and radical social movements protesting against dictatorship in Latin America. Today, such traditions often blend with Western environmentalisms, as new forms emerge through global networking and linkages afforded by international travel, Internet-based communication and global networking, especially among a politically vocal, globalized middle class. Yet in other settings, with a different history, culture and politics, there may be other forms of organization whose 'green' features and commitment to transformation are less recognizable – at least to Western-influenced commentators. We turn to these instances later, asking if there are other forms of less visible but potentially transformative mobilization that are important, and need attention and support if a truly global set of green transformations is to unfold.

## Towards green transformations: three cases

In the following sections, we discuss three different cases of mobilization, exploring how four dimensions of social movements identified in the literature – framing, identity, resource mobilization and networks (Leach and Scoones, 2007) – play out in practice in different cases and settings, in interaction with dynamics along a spectrum from movement to institutionalization, and a focus on particular local issues, to wider global concerns. It is in relation to these interacting dynamics that we address the politics of mobilization in each case, and the contradictions and tensions as well as opportunities and challenges that arise in creating green transformations.

### *La Via Campesina and food sovereignty*

La Via Campesina – the peasants' way – emerged in the late 1990s around a constellation of groups, particularly in Europe and Latin America, wanting to defend

the rights of small farmers in the face of pressures from large-scale corporate agriculture supported by government and international policy (Desmarais, 2007). A vision of small-scale peasant farming rooted in local markets and economies was developed that adopted the term 'food sovereignty' as its rallying cry (Rosset, 2003). A particular strand of this argument, confirmed in a series of statements and declarations, urged the adoption of 'agroecology', which posed a distinctively green agenda. Agroecology emphasizes working with nature not against it, and using low external inputs that are non-polluting, and that do not rely on large-scale corporate input suppliers of seeds, fertilizers, and so on (Altieri, 2009). There are overlaps, of course, with the longer established organic movement and other agri-food movements (Jamison, 2012), but the emphasis here is on the process of farming, its groundedness in local ecologies and its relationships with economic structures, as well as the product itself.

Since its origins the movement has grown, with some suggesting that today it is the largest social movement in the world.[1] This growth has meant the movement has encompassed more and more interests and issues, including linking up with indigenous people's movements, the women's movement, migrants' movements, workers' unions, consumer groups, and more. This 'big tent' approach has enabled articulation with a range of global forces and challenges. However, it has brought with it tensions, and for some a lack of strategic focus, and failure to concentrate on particular political actions. The Nyeleni declaration, produced through an intensive negotiation among movement participants, is the nearest thing that exists to a political manifesto, and it presents a utopian ideal across a huge range of issues.[2]

As an organization, La Via Campesina has evolved from a very loose federation of groups that found common ground in and around the World Social Fora and other events, to a more structured arrangement, with a General Coordinator (currently from Zimbabwe, previously from Indonesia), a central committee, advisory groups, training events, demonstration sites and a regular series of meetings where members from across the movement gather. With its powerful slogan, 'Globalise the struggle, globalise hope', there is an attempt to forge a united alliance across diverse groups around a global issue. Focused campaigns on particular issues, whether around 'land grabbing', 'GMOs', or corporate agriculture more generally, provide moments for mobilization (Borras *et al.*, 2008).

Together with others, there has been considerable energy invested in recent years in two major international policy processes. First was the International Assessment for Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) that culminated in a report in 2009 that, while presented in the language of an international report sponsored by the World Bank, reflected many of the aspirations – and some key language – of the movement. The IAASTD, or at least selected sections of it, has become a focus for mobilization, and a source of authority and legitimacy (Scoones, 2009). Second has been the UN Food and Agricultural Organization's Committee on Food Security (CFS). This is the first UN process where non-governmental representation (not just observer status) is permitted. This has







allowed movement activists to become involved in intergovernmental negotiations – for instance, around the 'Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure' that were passed in 2013, as well as the High Level Panel of Experts' discussions around such issues as 'land grabbing'.

Thus, movement framings centre on the themes of food sovereignty and agroecology, and the associated challenge to corporate control of the agri-food system. It is argued that small-scale, peasant farming can indeed 'feed the world' through agroecological practices, if only the system was more just and less skewed towards incumbent corporate interests. Identities are constructed in relation to a somewhat idealized notion of the 'peasant' or 'small-scale farmer', seen as struggling for self-determination and autonomy in the face of monopoly capitalism and the depredations of neoliberal markets (Guzmán and Martinez-Alier, 2006). The resources mobilized have been significant, less in financial terms although there are important backers, but in terms of the intellectual, organizational and mobilization capacities of movement participants and their allies in other movements, among radical academics, and in some cases within government agencies, in international organizations and among some political leaders.

This building of the movement over 20 years has nevertheless faced challenges, not least in the uncomfortable relationship between local concerns and political action on a global stage. The 'ideal type' peasant deployed in global campaigns very often does not exist. A strategically deployed essentialism in wider movement discourse may sit uneasily with the lived realities of people on the ground. Many people juggle different livelihoods – in town, in the rural areas, across occupations – and rarely follow the autonomous peasant route. Equally, by attempting to encompass consumers, workers and others in the overall frame, the potential class and political differences may disrupt a seeming consensus. Consumers may not be aligned with producers, and workers not with their farmer employers, so the coherence of a struggle against capital may sometimes fray at the edges.

Equally, the edicts about how to farm in an 'agroecological' way are resisted by those keen to use more modern technologies, arguing that these too can create positive environmental and livelihood impacts if used sensitively. A technological fundamentalism sometimes undermines the credibility of the argument in certain contexts, especially when the struggle to provide food and livelihoods is especially pressing. Such ideals, it is argued, may be all well and good in a richer context, where people are prepared to pay for the privilege of 'green' agroecological products, but when poverty and hunger stalks, such rich-world luxuries may not be possible.[3]

That said, La Via Campesina and the food sovereignty movement more broadly, with its building of networks and its increasing institutionalization, is making inroads into mainstream global debates. Once dismissed as the radical fringe, now food sovereignty and smallholder rights are being debated in international fora, with the UN announcing that 2014 is the Year of Family Farming, while on the ground and in the more local struggles, the radical edge and activist momentum is being maintained.

### *Genetically modified (GM) crops*

A similar and overlapping set of mobilizations has occurred especially from the mid-1990s around genetically modified (GM) crops in different parts of the world. These have revolved variously around environmental concerns with crop genetic diversity and 'superweeds', human health issues, as well as a wider debate about corporate control of seeds and farming futures (Schurman, 2004). Alliances have formed between diverse groups, each framing the issue in a different way. A hybrid network of different actors has created something akin to a movement, but with hugely varied characteristics. Contrary to the claims of some that this was all an orchestrated conspiracy by powerful European environmentalists, the evidence shows a variegated response, all rooted in local concerns and contexts. By and large, the lead actors have been relatively rich, educated and middle class, claiming support in different forms from farmers' organizations and movements, including La Via Campesina. However, perhaps in contrast to the bottom-up peasants' movements of food sovereignty, the anti-GM campaigns have been characterized by a set of relatively elite alliances, with transnational characteristics, yet local roots.

Taking what Marc Edelman calls a 'messy, close up view of collective action' (Edelman, 2001, p286) we can get an insight into the texture of such a movement, its tactics and strategies, successes and failures, and draw out some broader lessons for mobilizing for green transformations more generally. In a comparative study of anti-GM activism in Brazil, India and South Africa, Scoones (2008, p339) concludes:

> They galvanize selective and strategic alliances among different and diverse groups around a variety of issues. Some would dismiss these as incoherent and poorly substantiated, but together they often add up to an alternative perspective on agrarian futures to the standard neoliberal line, even if sometimes poorly articulated and partially contradictory. Such positions are the result of complex, hybrid coalitions of interests and ideas, and, as discussed, do not represent a particular, defined set of (class) interests. With their global connections and elite, educated, urban leaderships, they can be seen as often very detached from rural realities and agrarian struggles. But the resonances and connections are definitely there . . . and the strength of their appeal, and the political force that they potentially have, lies in the way such connections – between local, national and global issues; rural and urban; producer and consumer; elite and poor – are constructed and mobilized.

Comparing countries and regions where GM activism has emerged highlights the importance of contrasting political cultures (Jasanoff, 2005). Such cultures suggest different options and open up different spaces for debate. Thus, in some settings close alliances between movements and political parties were possible, allowing for a penetration of political and bureaucratic structures to effect change. In other contexts the legal system created space for protest. The media is also an important







space for raising questions and has been used very effectively by GM movements, even if the storylines are excessively dramatic. Thus, in Europe the spectre of 'Frankenstein foods' or 'Terminator' genes, even if strictly unscientific, allowed an otherwise constrained debate to enter the public sphere. Wider, more direct-action style protests have also characterized anti-GM campaigns, including consumer boycotts and 'trolley dumping', or crop burning and the destruction of field trials. Other campaigners have taken a more positive stance, demonstrating alternatives that are sustainable and based on local seed systems, and open access research and development. Demonstration projects have proliferated, under a variety of banners, showing that 'other worlds' are indeed possible (Levidow and Carr, 2007).

Different campaigns at different moments in different regions have focused on different elements of the debate, whether on consumer health, farmers' rights or environmental impacts. This has resulted in some tensions. As Scoones (2008, p340) notes: 'Holding a broad front often means engineering strategic silences about some tough issues, with contradictions and tensions held in abeyance. But avoiding some of these deeper issues may also mean the unravelling of coalitions and alliances'. Not everyone in the movement has agreed with all these tactics, and intense debates have emerged about the pros and cons of each.

Two decades since the start of the movement, has there been progress towards a greener, more sustainable form of agricultural technology? Success has been patchy. There has been retreat and roll-back over time, not least because controlling the distribution of seeds is nigh on impossible. Thus in India, GM crops were distributed 'by stealth' by entrepreneurs with the quiet acceptance of the property rights holding companies (Herring, 2005) and in Brazil the flood of GM seeds across the border from Argentina was unstoppable. In the context of a rapidly liberalizing agriculture seeking external investment in a neoliberal market economy where government capacity for regulation was weak or non-existent, the opportunities of sustained opposition were, of course, limited. Corporate messaging has also shifted in response. Having dramatically lost the public relations war at the outset, GM is now marketed as an environmentally sound alternative to agrochemicals, and in some quarters as a technological response to climate change. Others argue that GM per se is not the problem but the corporate control of agri-food systems, and that publicly funded and regulated alternatives – from China and beyond – offer sustainable alternatives.

Much as the rearguard responses of the techno-optimists aiming to tackle environmental problems more generally exclude politics, so have these responses from corporate agriculture and their backers. Yet many of the anti-GM campaigns have got trapped in the terms of this discourse, often as regulatory systems and legal cases require it, and have not articulated effectively the larger political critique. The limits to green transformations in this case thus concern less a disarticulation of local and global concerns as networks build and become institutionalized, and more a depoliticization of the debate. Drawing lessons from the case makes clear that fundamental transformations cannot occur through changing a technology, but only the wider sociopolitical system within which it is embedded.

### *Urban sustainability*

A third area where mobilization offers potential to contribute to the processes of green transformation concerns urban sustainability. In both the global North and South, movements have articulated approaches to addressing both specific sustainability challenges associated with urban living and growth, and roles for towns and cities in broader green transformations (Mapes and Wolch, 2011).

For example, the Transition movement aims to mobilize community action and foster public empowerment and engagement around climate change, with the objective of catalyzing a transition to a low-carbon economy (www.transitiontowns.org). The idea originated in 2005 in Northern Ireland when a permaculture teacher, Rob Hopkins, initiated a community-designed 'Energy Descent Action Plan' for the town of Kinsale, with practical steps geared to reducing carbon emissions and preparing for a future post-cheap oil (Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). Described by their founder as 'an emerging and evolving approach to community-level sustainability' (Hopkins, 2008, p134), local Transition initiatives have multiplied and by 2013 there were 1,130 registered in 43 countries – largely in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (www.transitionnetwork.org/initiatives). Some unite towns, while others are constituted in parts of larger cities.

Transition initiatives typically combine a range of practical activities, from local energy generation, food production, farmers' markets, community gardening, composting and seed exchanges, through to local currencies, designing and building eco-housing, recycling and repair schemes, car-sharing, skills-sharing and self-help groups. Each initiative develops its own series of plans and activities through a community-led process. Yet uniting these are a set of common framings. These include the development of alternative lifestyles and systems of provisioning that reject consumerism and enable a low-carbon existence. The aim is to demonstrate practical, positive solutions in the here and now, and so encourage people to shift their consumption patterns towards this 'post-oil' model.

Such initiatives emphasize collective action and capabilities at the community level. Yet there are major contrasts in terms of identity and culture. Far from being a movement of (and advocating inclusion of) the poor, participation in Transition Town initiatives tends to be strongly middle class (Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). Transition Town initiatives largely eschew political engagement. Rather than campaign for political changes that might bring about transformations towards low-carbon futures, challenge dominant regimes or engage in oppositional politics with powerful political or business players, the emphasis remains on positive, community-level demonstration of a 'niche' that can replace dominant patterns when, as is assumed, they wither away. While some see this as a valuable way of doing politics, fostering 'critical emancipation' (Scott-Cato and Hillier, 2010) and penetrating 'under the radar' of existing political conflicts (Hopkins, 2008), others critique it as naive, limited and leaving the movement vulnerable to co-option (Chatterton and Cutler, 2008; Connors and McDonald, 2011).







'Transitioners' share ideas and reproduce their sense of common identity through open-access wiki websites and blogs (Scott-Cato and Hillier, 2010). However, tensions are emerging between such standardization, and the diversity and flexibility needed for local initiatives to flourish in their particular settings. Some local initiatives find the hierarchical relationship with network organizers overly restrictive and controlling. Connors and McDonald (2011) suggest that a 'cultish, top-down culture' may be developing that will restrict the ability to attract new adherents and spread as a democratic, bottom-up movement. While successful in replicating itself, the movement is struggling to increase its impact through building wider alliances (Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). In this respect, it can be argued that the Transition Network might be undermining its own avowed aims to attract as many people as possible to share its vision and values, towards green transformation from below. Again, then, we see potential for green transformations, but emergent tensions between vibrant local agendas and the wider institution-building required to scale up globally.

## Where there is no green movement

The cases we have discussed so far have had their origins in very particular social–political–cultural moments and milieux. Are green transformations generated from below through forms of collective action possible where there are no green movements, modelled in the style familiar in western Europe, North America and parts of Latin America and Asia? In places that do not have these traditions emerging from struggles against colonialism or dictatorship or in democratic societies as responses to an overbearing state or extractive corporate capitalism, what happens? Is it necessary to create new movements that can take up the struggle, or are other forms of quieter, more hidden, less confrontational mobilizations possible, resulting in similar effects?

Here we can turn to eastern Europe and the countries making up the former Soviet Union and China for examples. While hugely different, they all have notable agroecological and sustainable food-growing and provisioning activities ongoing, often on a large scale. Very often not visible as movements, although sometimes supported by projects from NGOs or the state, they may involve the changing practices of millions of people towards more sustainable production and consumption. Smith and Jehlička (2013) term this, in the context of Poland and the Czechia, 'quiet sustainability', which they define as 'widespread practices that result in beneficial environmental or social outcomes and that do not relate directly or indirectly to market transactions, but are not represented by their practitioners as relating directly to environmental or sustainability goals' (2013, p1). This is based on sharing, mutual aid, reciprocity and solidarity within communities, but not necessarily with an explicitly 'green' or 'alternative' framing. It is just what people do, and is valued as such for its intangible, non-market and social benefits. Reflecting on the people involved, they comment:

> Theirs is not a fulfilment of environmental obligations, an attempt to achieve 'resilience', or a response to limits, but the daily practice of a satisfying life. In other words: it is not just that the journey to sustainability is less difficult than is sometimes presented – large sections of humanity may already be on it without feeling the need to proclaim the fact loudly.
>
> (Smith and Jehlička 2013, p34)

In other instances – for example, in China – mobilizations around agroecological farming have emerged in some areas, often supported by environmental NGOs, but all approved and in some cases directly supported by the state. In such a political setting, mobilization separate from the state is not feasible or would be risky, so a strategic alliance is struck with the state, through negotiation with officials, that accommodates, and may even later support, such efforts. As the Chinese state increasingly recognizes the environmental challenges wrought by its rapid economic transition, such small-scale, very localized forms of organization may be seen as a useful route to influence (Geall, 2013).

A similar argument for 'quiet sustainability' could be made for small-scale producers, forest dwellers, informal shack dwellers and many others in the global South who often live outside the reaches of formal institutions and policy. Yet through diverse forms of solidarity – again often not constructed as movements – they carve out livelihoods that very often have positive environmental benefits. Whether this is the management of trees for the harvesting of non-timber forest projects, complex home gardening and multifunctional agricultural practices, the recycling of urban waste and the building of homes, or indeed the numerous daily practices of millions of people worldwide, many might represent a form of 'quiet sustainability'. Hidden from view, not appreciated as part of policy, these are pathways towards sustainability that are less visible and more difficult to institutionalize, yet are nevertheless highly significant. Some might dismiss such activities as simply environmentalism through poverty. But just as the Polish and Czech plot holders should not be seen as 'urban peasants' (Smith and Jehlička, 2013), such everyday environmentally oriented practices, rooted in the cultures of sharing, guardianship, repairing and responsibility, should not be dismissed lightly.

It is this practised behaviour, repeated and institutionalized in particular sociocultural contexts, which may represent the 'quiet' revolution to sustainability. It involves mobilization in that people are enlisted, relations of solidarity and exchange are established and motivations are articulated, but its political implications are different. By not confronting the state or even not engaging with it all, although sometimes strategically allying with it, important strides are made towards green transformations that take a different form, and with a different politics compared to the classic mobilizations and movements described in the cases of La Via Campesina and the anti-GM movement. The urban Transition initiative case perhaps lies somewhere in between; less noisy and confrontational than these others, yet deploying particular, calculated political strategies of negotiation and the demonstration of alternatives.







## Tensions and contradictions

Across these cases, then, green transformations are emerging from diverse spaces, grounded in citizen concerns and mobilization but involving diverse political strategies. In some cases spaces have been opened up by direct protest and lobbying. This has often been complemented by increasingly sophisticated media, and particularly new social media, and activism. Political cycles have an important effect in some places, as green agendas rise and fall with political parties sometimes linking their agenda to green issues, and social movements pushing them to comply. The law and regulatory institutions have been important sites for debate about green transformations in certain places where opportunities for legal activism are present. In other instances changes in behaviours and practices have become embedded in either explicitly 'alternative' activities or through quieter, less explicit but often large-scale shifts in practice. Some such changes may be facilitated and encouraged by sites of experimentation and demonstration organized by movements (perhaps identified as 'niches') explicitly to show and share alternatives, or alternatively as part of local practices that others observe, copy and share in a much more informal way. Whatever combinations of tactics, strategies are used which will depend, as the cases show, on the social, political, cultural and economic context. There is no standard script for green mobilizations and there is enormous diversity, much of it hidden from view, as we have noted.

In effecting often radical change that challenges incumbent institutions and confronts powerful interests, there are no easy or predictable forms of mobilization. Each must be attuned to the circumstance and moment. Inevitably there are often intense debates, within and between movements, about what is the best approach. Multiple tensions and sometimes deep contradictions exist, as hinted at in some of the cases discussed earlier. Debates around framing are often significant: What is green? What is agroecological farming? What is appropriate technology? These are not easy to resolve and, depending on one's position, class, identity, location and aspiration, the answers may be quite different. As discussed earlier, drawing different people from diverse backgrounds into a movement may be challenging. Networks may be quite fragile in some instances, held together by a common opposition to a loosely defined enemy, but with real differences in outlook and perspective among participants. This often becomes especially apparent when identities and identifications clash: between being an environmentalist, a feminist and indigenous person, for example. While multiple subject positions, and associated frames and stances may be able to be held together, this may be more challenging when tensions over strategy and tactics arise.

Within the environment movement more generally, tensions have often arisen when once loose, fragmented activities as part of movements and networks become institutionalized and 'mainstreamed'. Contradictions then often arise between the radical foundations of a movement and reformist green agendas that see success being generated through collaboration with governments, businesses and others, as space is opened up by environmental awareness and activism. New frames are

adopted that are appealing to such allies, such as 'green economy' or 'sustainable intensification', 'ecological modernization' or 'responsible innovation'. Reformists will argue that staying on the sidelines is not an option and that the world has changed over the last 40 years, with new opportunities arising for alliance-building under new configurations.

Others, of course, argue that such moves inevitably result in co-optation, or at the minimum a lowest common denominator debate that rarely confronts power, and indeed too often reinforces interests, allowing a type of 'greenwash' under the guise of corporate or governmental 'responsibility' initiatives. Such 'ecological modernization' may reduce the environmental footprint of industry, but it may not change the power structures that created environmental and social justice problems in the first instance. By not naming and confronting power and entrenched interests, true transformation does not happen, and the green agenda thus gets captured by neoliberal, conservative interests as incumbent forces reconfigure to accommodate and absorb, rather than fundamentally change.

Much of this, of course, comes down to a conflict over the understanding of what is transformation. Is the challenge, for example, simply reducing carbon emissions or is it a more fundamental structural change in ownership, production and consumption that delivers a lower carbon future for the long term, but also meets other objectives of justice, distribution and a wider conception of sustainability? Is transformation simply reducing deforestation, planting more trees or changing the chemical impacts of modern agriculture, or is it again a more fundamental shift in the structure, power relations, ownership patterns and resource access of the global agri-food system?

As neoliberal and ecological modernization agendas, allied to various complexions of corporate social and environmental responsibilities, have gained purchase and have indeed influenced government and business behaviour and practice, they have proved difficult to reconcile with a more radical vision of societal economic and social transformation. As 'green' reformist agendas become more mainstream, with the rhetoric around the 'green economy' increasing in recent years, this has pushed more radical visions of transformation to the fringes. The environmental 'movement' (or more accurately diverse movements) has become increasingly fragmented, making coordinated action more difficult, and the productive relationship between movements, networks and institutions more challenging to uphold.

This has perhaps become especially so as environmental agendas have moved from multiple, local actions around particular issues to a much larger global frame. Tensions have thus intensified between particularism and what it means to effect wider green transformations. Climate change as a global phenomenon has in particular influenced this shift, supported by arguments that humanity is hitting 'green limits' around other 'planetary boundaries' (see Leach, this book). Of course, since the 1970s, as discussed earlier, environmental issues have been framed in global terms – 'spaceship earth', 'only one earth', 'blueprint for a small planet'. However, in recent times, the tensions between local mobilizations and global framings have become more stark. Do the multiple micro-initiatives initiated in







particular places add up to a global transformation affecting planetary processes, or do actions now have to take place at a different scale, removing control and agency from local actors, the lifeblood of any movement? With mechanisms structured at international levels – through various commissions, committees, assessments, protocols or agreements – how do locally rooted but internationally networked movements fit in, and what space do they have to make a difference? Some have argued that the primary role of mobilizations is to protect local perspectives and priorities in the face of proliferating global initiatives and forms of thinking and action. As Esteva and Prakash (1997, p47) put it:

> [T]he solidarity of coalitions and alliances does not call for 'thinking globally'. In fact, what is needed is exactly the opposite: people thinking and acting locally, while forging solidarity with other local forces that share this opposition to the 'global thinking' and 'global forces' threatening local spaces.

In contrast, others suggest that the local and global can – and must – be meshed in powerful ways. Is such translocal networking a key to fostering green transformations that respond both to the particularity of grounded experience and to the needs for wider, global scale change?

## Conclusion

Mobilizations have vital roles to play in the politics of green transformations. These transformations are certainly multiple, as our analysis of framings, identities, resource mobilization and networks across the cases suggests. We see mobilizations linked to a wide range of framings, subjectivities, values and identities. They have engaged with political processes in different ways, across a spectrum from overt contestation of structures of power through more subtle negotiations with the state and international agencies, through to withdrawal from dominant regimes to demonstrate alternative ways of living. These differences depend partly on the issue and place, but political contexts also matter. As we have seen, political histories, cultures and styles of decision-making vary between nations, regions and localities, and around particular 'sectors' – from agriculture to climate change, urban design to forestry – shaping which political strategies and combinations are feasible and desirable. A diversity of strategies and styles, therefore, will almost inevitably be needed, and today these can draw on a wide variety of spaces and practices from face-to-face protest and legal and media action through to more practical, everyday forms of material life and community organizing.

Across these arguments and examples, we see processes of emergent social solidarity – forms of 'green citizenship' – but around diverse, rather than singular, notions of 'green', 'social justice' and 'transformation'. Just as a conceptual framework to understand these needs to draw together diverse strands of social movement theory, so it also requires an integrative perspective on citizenship (Leach

and Scoones, 2005). Mobilizations must galvanize creative, knowledgeable citizens, and must operate in an increasingly interconnected knowledge society where forms of democratic politics are being reconstituted.

Yet how might such multiple, diverse, fragmented mobilizations add up to and contribute to the bigger challenges of green transformation? Scaling up and out through networking and alliance-building can be key but, as we have shown, there are dangers if this comes at the expense of the critical edge and locatedness in context that gave life to mobilization in the first place. Indeed, we have highlighted tensions along an axis from movement through network to institutionalization, interconnected with those from local particularism to wider, including global, concerns. The cases show how these tensions can be navigated in a variety of ways, depending not just on context but on varied analyses of power. Thus a structural political economy analysis, as adopted, for example, by strands of the food sovereignty and anti-GM movements, underlines a logic of alliance-building to confront capitalist corporate and state power. Yet a more 'capillary' notion that locates power in diffuse social relations, informs other efforts to reclaim democracy through micro-social practices and negotiations in multiple spaces. Even mobilizations that appear to withdraw from or ignore the centres of power can be viewed as transformatory in their potential to advance alternatives, and overturn stereotypes and traditions, and reframe ideas and practice into more participatory and negotiable models.

The potential of green movements to contribute to the politics of green transformations, then, lies in their analyses (whether overt or implicit), as well as their action. By embodying particular theories of power and deploying these in diverse political strategies, they contribute to a vital opening up of the politics of sustainability, which must increasingly be concerned not just with the allocation of material resources, ecological space, status and authority, but with who defines the future and what perspectives and experiences matter. This involves cultivating a wider breadth of knowledge and experience to define goals and appropriate ways of reaching them, enabling the diversity that is required to respect diverse ecological and social contexts, and to keep options open in the face of the unexpected. It is by continuously offering alternatives and maintaining a critically-aware position of the inevitable movement-institutionalization and local-global tensions that affect their operation, that green mobilizations offer their greatest potential to inspire the kind of thinking and action that green transformations require.

## Notes

1 Available online at: www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2013/jun/17/la-via-campesina-food-sovereignty. Accessed 20 June 2014.
2 The Nyeleni declaration was produced in 2007 in Nyeleni, a village in Mali. Available online at: www.nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290. Accessed 20 June 2014.
3 Available online at: www.future-agricultures.org/blog/entry/missing-politics-and-food-sovereignty#.U4NI2E1OXIU. Accessed 20 June 2014.