

Low Carbon Transitions: Relevant Lessons from the 1970s Crisis?

SURF/SPRU Workshop in the ESRC Sustainability Transitions Seminar Series

<http://sustainabilitytransitions.info/>

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Introduction

Everyone, it seems, is interested in low carbon transitions. But haven't we been here before? The 1970s was a period of economic, ecological and state crisis that spawned conflict, contestation and debate about the future direction of society, of which alternative technologies and re-directed strategies were a critical part. Yet such solutions remained largely at the demonstration or experimental stage and were seen as exemplars of new technologies, lifestyles and diverse forms of social control over what might have been an alternative socio-technical transition in housing, infrastructure, design and cities. By the 1980s it was clear that this space of experimentation was closed down and the emerging logic was the dominance of neo-liberalism. In 2011 we are once again in a period of significant structural change. But what are the similarities and differences between these periods when thinking about low carbon transition? How might similarities suggest deeper, fundamental mobilisations in transitions; and how can differences make us more sensitive to the context specificities of transitions? This workshop's purpose is to create a context for thinking reflexively and constructively about the wider lessons and insights of the crises in the 1970s for the challenge of creating a low carbon transition today. The workshop is aimed at practitioners and researchers working on contemporary transitions, with a view to making productive use of some historical perspective.

Structure of Workshop

The workshop aims to create a structured dialogue to critically compare the socio-technical responses in the 1970s and contemporary responses. A variety of municipalities, civic associations, grassroots groups, and workers movements responded to crises in the 1970s with visions, strategies and initiatives for realising alternative urban spaces and practices. Examples include the Alternative Economic Strategy of the Greater London Council, and the Urban Centre for Alternative Technology in Bristol. Both spawned a diversity of experimentation with more socially inclusive and ecologically sound urban development. Attracting greater state and corporate interest today, initiatives like the Green Deal, Transition Town network, community energy and food co-operatives, propose similarly diverse solutions to our contemporary crises. With initiatives then and now in view, the workshop will explore responses to crisis through three steps:

1. The organisers prepare a short position paper expanding upon the rationale and themes for the workshop and what is required from participants. An introductory session at the workshop will set out key questions and the broader political, economic and ecological crises in the 1970s and now.
2. Speakers are asked to write a short paper with their reflections of the lessons and relevance of the 1970s for today's debate. At the workshop we will have a series of structured conversations between a pair of researcher/activists active in the 1970s and 2010s based on the following themes:
 - a. The politics of crisis in the 1970s and 2000s
 - b. Economic development strategies - Socially useful production and green growth
 - c. Urbanism and planning - Autonomous cities and low carbon cities
 - d. Housing and architecture - Eco housing and low carbon housing

- e. Energy technologies and infrastructure – city-scale renewable energy, low energy urban development – hard and soft energy paths and low carbon energy infrastructures

In each session the broader questions framing the discussion are: What are these experiments seeking to do – re-enforce, adapt or transform economic activity and relationship to ecology? How do these experimental projects link to pre-existing regimes? What are the resonances and the dissonances between the 1970s and the contemporary low carbon transition?

3. The proceedings will be recorded, transcribed and with the papers then produce as an edited book looking at the contextual and transferable lessons of the 1970s for the current low carbon transition. We will also produce a short briefing note on historical lessons for contemporary proposals on the basis of the workshop, for distribution to practitioners, policy-makers, and corporate representatives interested in low carbon transitions.

About the organisers

Mike Hodson is Research Fellow at SURF, University of Salford. His research interests focus on urban, regional and community transitions to low-carbon economies, the ways in which this may or may not happen and understandings of the lessons to be learned from such processes. Mike has developed projects funded by the European Commission, UK research councils, sub-national government and through private consultancy. Most recently Mike has written *World Cities and Climate Change* (with Simon Marvin) and has edited an international collection on *Cities and Low Carbon Transitions* (with Harriet Bulkeley, Vanesa Castan Broto and Simon Marvin). Currently, with colleagues he is examining transitions to low carbon urban futures and the ways in which forms of knowledge are mobilised, negotiated and organised to inform low carbon action and issues involved in retrofitting the city.

Simon Marvin is Professor and Co-Director of SURF. His research addresses the changing relations between neighbourhoods, cities, regions and infrastructure networks in a period of resource constraint, institutional restructuring and climate change. Simon's research has been funded by the ESRC, EPSRC, international research foundations, the European Commission, commercial funders, and many public agencies. His recent research has examined comparative urban responses to economic and ecological pressures in particular in London, New York and San Francisco and the critical issues involved in retrofitting cities' infrastructure in response to climate change and resource constraint. Simon is a co-author of six internationally leading books on cities and infrastructure.

Adrian Smith is a Senior Fellow at SPRU (Science & Technology Policy Research) and member of the STEPS Centre (Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability) at the University of Sussex. His research draws upon insights from innovation studies, political science and science and technology studies, in order to critically analyse the politics and governance of transitions to sustainability in both developed and developing countries. In recent years this has included research into grassroots innovations in settings as diverse as energy, food and housing in the UK, the social technologies movement in Brazil and Argentina, as well as the history of the alternative and appropriate technology movements.

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE – DRAFT - SPEAKERS TO BE CONFIRMED

Session	Key Issues	Supplementaries	1970s	2010s
9.30am-9.45am	1. Introduction What are the similarities and differences between the form and scale of the crises of the 1970s and 2010s and the state responses?	1. What are the similarities between the crises we are facing now and those we faced in the 1970s? Are these really times of policy, economic, ecological, infrastructural experimentation? In what ways? 2. What is the relationship between different projects and systemic responses? Did/do they seek to re-enforce or transform the relationship between economic activity ecology? How did/do experimental projects link to pre-existing regimes?	Organisers	
9.45am-11am	2. Economic Development in the 1970s and now The AES, workers plan, socially useful production, Green New Deal, low carbon economy, low carbon industrial strategy etc	Alternative economic strategies – in time of crises – then and now. What’s changed?	Hillary Wainwright, Red Pepper	Tim Jenkins, NEF
11am - 11.30am	COFFEE			
11.30am - 12.45pm	3. Planning and Urbansim Energy cities, autonomous cities, renewable cities, low carbon cities, etc	How do the debate about urbanism and planning of the 1970s differ from those envisaged for low carbon cities?	Pasty Healey University of Newcastle	Aidan While University of Sheffield
12.45pm - 1.30pm	LUNCH			
1.30pm - 2.45pm	4. Architecture and Housing Passive houses, solar houses, low energy houses green houses, eco houses, low and zero carbon houses	Eco-housing – have we been here before?	Pat Borer, CAT.	Jenny Pickerill, University of Leicester
2.45pm - 3pm	COFFEE			
3pm - 4.15pm	5. Energy Technologies and Infrastructure Low energy urban development – hard and soft energy paths and low carbon energy infrastructures	AT activism – what did it achieve and what can it achieve?	Dave Elliott, Open University	Joanne Wade?
4.15pm - 4.30pm	6 Close and Next Steps	Comparative themes and issues – implications for low carbon transition.	Organisers	

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