

## **The Lot In Transition : Parks and People**

### ***Transition in Local Government***

The Parks and People project was the brainchild of the Regional Nature Park of Monteveglio, which was also the first municipality in continental Europe to become a Transition Town. The form and content of the project is in harmony with the aims of Transition to create and enhance links between people and communities, and as such is a particularly enriching experience for all participants. In Monteveglio, part of the Transition movement successfully stood in local elections thereby becoming a motor for change in local policies, implementing transition ideas at the core of all municipal planning decisions. This implication in the political decision making process is inherent in the transition ideal – bottom up democracy in motion, and what an amazing source of richness and inspiration it is proving to be !

### ***A common European culture ?***

The Parks and People project evolved from the realisation that despite the diversity of geography, languages, customs and traditions there is common European culture on a local level. Throughout Europe, citizens are inventing and nurturing initiatives aimed at reinforcing sustainable development and protecting biodiversity. Through action at local level, citizens are also rebuilding those all-essential relationships that allow their communities to thrive, and to become resilient against the shocks of peak oil, climate change and economic contraction.

### ***Europe in our Regional Nature Park.***

Between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> October, the European partners of the Parks and People project (nature parks and municipalities from Italy, Spain, Slovenia, Czech Republic Hungary Sweden and France) visited several of the Lot's flagship projects, many of which are transition initiatives in all but name. The partners swapped ideas and experiences in villages and tourist sites throughout the Lot, an exciting and interesting cultural exchange. From a transition perspective, there was a little too much concentration on facilitating contact and exchanges with elected representatives of the region to the detriment of a full participation by 'ordinary' people – the musical evening at La Granja in Soulomes being the only real occasion open to the public.

### ***Transition in Escamps .....***

The transition workshop at Escamps involved a video-conference presentation from Christiano Bottone, president of Transition Italia, giving participants a general overview of the transition movement. Kim Goddard of Sénaillac en Transition, then described what a transition initiative looks like on the ground – the formation of the pilot group ; the showing of the film 'In Transition 1.0' with workshops on the themes of food, transport, energy and education ; the bimonthly 'Transition Open Space' days in the village hall, the skill-sharing workshops, the 'History of our Elders ' project etc....

This was followed by a 'web of resilience' exercise in the sunshine – illustrating in a concrete hands-on fashion the primordial importance of the links and relationships between elements in an ecosystem (be it a woodland, a farm or a village) in creating and preserving resilience in that ecosystem.

Participants returned indoors to hear Claudio Meli, Parpe partner from Monteveglio describe some of the



transition led projects that have been implemented by the local council – including a school

constructed on sustainable development principles, an energy descent plan involving photovoltaic installation etc ...

**..... and Escamps in Transition !**

A notable ‘Eureka’ moment was when the mayor (deputy,) exclaimed « but we’re doing that ! » in opening of a communal grocery shop, delightedly recognising her village as being a perfect illustration of a local initiative at the cutting edge of the European move towards resilience. Well done Escamps and welcome to transition !

***Thegra – re-inventing a resilient community.***

The PNR introduced the visiting European partners to their innovative ‘landscape trestles’ tool – a participatory approach which allows people to reflect together on the nature of their landscape and their urban and agricultural environments in order to become conscious and active stakeholders with a part to play in envisioning and implementing future urban planning. It could, and should, be a powerful tool enabling citizens to plan the necessary changes in housing, energy use, transport, food production. These changes are in the way we live are inevitable given peak oil, climate change and economic contraction – how much more sensible to embrace the change and plan our future rather than shut our eyes and pretend it’s not happening or that we can do nothing about it.



The people of Thegra, with the full support of their council, have built their own village hall. They have developed a mixed housing hamlet including a communal room, adjoining gardens to allow easy interaction between people in the hamlet, a common heating system, a newly constructed path to allow children to walk to school in all security and inter-generational accomodation facilitating the interconnectedness of young and old. They have restored part of an old hamlet outside of the village, including a traditional breadoven, which provides an inviting focal point for outdoor meetings and activities. All of these projects give invaluable cause for hope for fledging projects elsewhere in the Lot, where the it sometimes seems that the fear of change is causing paralysis rather than positive action on the political level.

***The exceptional and the ordinary treasures on our doorstep.***

The Lot is fortunate in having any number of sites of exceptional beauty and value within it’s boundaries – the European partners were suitably impressed by the traditional tourist attractions of Figeac, St Cirq Lapopie and Rocamadour. The WOW factor !

The bi-lingual shared workshop with school children at “Le Marais de Bonnefont” was a



practical exercise in education for sustainable development and biodiversity for both young and old, as was the session of outdoor activities at Les Amis du Cele with students from the European class at the Lycee Clement Marot. The educational approach implicit in transition was beautifully portrayed, learning through doing (in this case learning English by undertaking concrete actions towards sustainable development...or learning about sustainable development by practicing English !)

The visit to the Phosphatier at Bach was fascinating for all who have never been there before – and its exploitation as a tourist site and as a centre of huge scientific interest is yet another example of people working together in non-profit making organisations to protect and preserve of our incredibly rich natural and cultural heritage.

The proliferation of exceptional natural and architectural sites in this area can blind us to the extraordinary importance of the biodiversity of the common or ordinary, and it's in this sphere that the work of the technicians of the park is perhaps least visible but most important. The presentation of the landscape at the top of the hill in Cuzals showed the progress that can be made in working with local farmers to reclaim and manage scrubland, pushing back the encroaching woodland which creates a very real fire risk. In the past multi-functional farming practices allowed this area to support a population nearly three times as large as now, but it has suffered from neglect due to a more intensive agricultural exploitation and ensuing depopulation. Local farmers, with the support of the PNR, are regrouping in Pastoral Land Associations to address this problem. The conflicting demands of the environment, tourism, agriculture, commerce and the population are not easily resolved. The strength of the PNR lies in its voluntary nature – all change and project development work depends on awareness raising, negotiation and creating real working relationships with the local population, be they farmers, elected representatives, consumers, schools etc ... Having no legal muscle may be seen as a weakness, but it is also the transition way of creating change and ultimately will prove far more powerful and durable than legal constraints.



### ***Working together : the Park and Transition.***

The transition movement will prove to be a crucial actor in finding solutions to seemingly contradictory demands on our ordinary and everyday environment, as it is intrinsically people based and environmentally friendly – its about creating and maintaining sustainable relationships between people, their environment, their consumption, their energy, their work, their play.

The exigencies of peak oil, climate change and economic contraction leave us no choice but to find solutions, to act now and to act together.

Individual responses are essential, but may be too little given the enormity of the the task.

A response at government level is also essential, but may well take too long.

The transition response at community level may just be enough, fast enough.

In providing support, in liasing between community initiatives and in representing communities on a regional scale, the PNR is one element in the ecosystem aiming for resilience and as such a valued partner of the transition movement in the Lot.