Leadership in Self-Organized Movements

A Case Study about the Transition Movement in Sweden and Denmark

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Main Field of Study – Leadership and Organisation
Degree of Master of Arts (60 credits) with a Major in Leadership and Organisation
Master Thesis with a focus on Leadership and Organisation for Sustainability (OL646E), 15 credits
Spring 2018
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Acknowledgements

The authors, Lena Mehl and Viktoria van Stegen would like to express their gratitude and appreciation to the Transition movement in Sweden and Denmark and especially to our dearest Interview partners. Thank you for openly sharing your insights and for the valuable meetings and conversations. We would further like to thank our supervisor Sandra Jönsson for the support during the preparation and writing process. To Fredrik Björk, our teacher, thank you for providing us the initial contacts to the Transition movement. A very special and warm Thank you also goes to the people at STPLN, for moral, emotional and nutritional support. We really enjoyed working at your facilities and becoming part of the STPLN community. To our fellow companions Sarah and Theresa, thank you for sharing this experience of writing a Master Thesis with us, for lunch breaks in the sun, co-working and still being our friends after the work day ends. We further want to express our gratitude to our proofreaders for your helpful and highly appreciated input and to our friends and families for the emotional support and encouragement.
Abstract

Climate change is one of the most important challenges of today’s societies and poses serious global threats on the world’s environment and societal structures (UN, n.a.b). Providing a novel and adaptive approach to lead and organize for sustainability are self-organized movements (Atkinson et al., 2018). One of those is the Transition movement, which tries to counter the twin threats of climate change and peak oil with local, community-led, bottom-up action. This research aims to explore leadership in self-organized movements at the example of the Transition movement by collecting and analyzing leader’s perceptions about leadership, its relevance but also challenges within the Danish and Swedish Transition region. Hence, a qualitative approach is used. Even though leadership plays a subordinate role in the minds of the leaders, who see it as informal and relate it to tasks of coordination and empowerment, it is evident and present in all of the movements actions. Leadership can thus be considered as relevant and of importance for the movements development and for self-organized movements in general with a community-centered approach. It is also shown that the intangible leadership perception in the Transition movement can pose challenges in relation to systemic boundaries, engaging people and acquiring funds which can collide with the core values of the movement. Nevertheless, self-organization in connection with leadership findings of this study present a way to lead and organize for sustainability.

Keywords: leadership, complexity theory, shared leadership, self-organization, sustainability, Transition movement
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1. Introduction

Climate change is an identified and pressing issue of our time posing challenges on many layers, threatening life as we know it and societal structures as they are (United Nations, n.a.b). It is a problem novel to society and unknown in how to approach it. Thus, it calls for new ways to lead and organize for sustainability. One way to counter these acute issues are self-organized grassroots movements, as a collective approach for mitigation and adaptation (Atkinson et al., 2018; Fischer et al., 2017; Seyfang & Smith, 2007). They offer a bottom-up move towards innovatively tackling the problems at hand, thus providing “[...] new ways of ‘governing from below’ that reflects local contexts and understandings of problems” (Atkinson et al., 2018 p.171). Involved are people as a whole rather than one designated individual leader for collective action. Thus, leadership in its traditional form does not apply. As this topic is rather untouched in current research this thesis wants to explore leadership perceptions, workings and challenges within self-organized movements. As an example of such a novel approach the Transition movement is used.

1.1. Background

The following chapter will provide background about the Transition movement in general, its model as well as its structure to lay the contextual foundation for the research conducted.

1.1.1. The Transition Movement

The Transition movement is a social movement, which wants to provide a solution for the current environmental developments led by a grassroots, community approach. Rob Hopkins, the founder of the movement describes it as “a positive, solutions-focused way of gathering those around you together to start exploring community-scale responses to peak oil and climate change” (Hopkins, 2008 p. 133). The first and best-known town to implement the movements principles is the Transition Town Totnes. Situated in the UK, it is the place where Hopkins moved to after he had been inspired to create the movement during his permaculture work in Kinsale (Hopkins, 2008). Transition Town Totnes is now still the center of Transition activities around the world.

The movements actions center around the changing climate, which can extremely affect all aspects necessary for our societies to continue existing in a healthy way, like food systems, energy and freshwater supply (United Nations, n.a.a). Official governmental leaders, economic organizations as well as society as a whole struggles with these issues, which call for innovative and different kinds of leadership. The United Nations explain the seriousness of these problems in their Agenda 2030:

“Global health threats, more frequent and intense natural disasters, spiralling conflict, violent extremism, terrorism and related humanitarian crises and forced displacement of people threaten to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades. Natural resource depletion and adverse impacts of environmental degradation, including desertification, drought, land degradation, freshwater scarcity and loss of biodiversity, add to and exacerbate the list of challenges which humanity faces. Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development. [...] The survival of many societies, and of the biological support systems of the planet, is at risk” (United Nations, 2015)

Until now, no working solution has been found to effectively cope with these developments. For this reason, the Transition movement has been created.

The movement itself defines the word transition as the “passage from one form, state, style or place to another” (Transition Network, 2016). This indicates, that the society we are living in needs to pass through from wasting resources and fossil-fuel dependency to a more sustainable society. The Transition initiatives who act out this change are local and therefore mostly small projects, initiated by the community (Mälgand et al., 2014). These local Transitions then merge into bigger ones all over the Network, as a worldwide response to climate change led by the commons, making global change possible by small-scale, local and community-led activity (Mälgand et al., 2014).
Thereby, the movement can be differentiated from others, as it is a “bottom-up community response”, not following one leader’s vision (Felcetti, 2013 p.563). The aim of a transition to sustainability is reached through social and collective action more than through technological methods (Nicolosi & Feola, 2016). The aspect of leadership in this context is of relevance because there are no assigned leadership roles or one designated person directing Transition, yet the movement has spread internationally and can display a new way to organize and lead for sustainability. People who take initiative and develop the movement exist, however not in a formally or assigned role. Furthermore, no research has been found about leadership in such a self-organized movement when reviewing existing literature. This is why this thesis is exploring this topic. To understand leadership in the specific case of the Transition movement, organizational aspects of it need to be laid out first, as it differentiates itself from traditional organizations.

1.1.2. The Transition Movement as a Self-Organized Movement
As defined by Boonstra and Boelens, self-organized networks can be seen as “autonomous community-based networks of citizens, outside government control” (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011 p. 100). The Transition Network is one of them and wants to “inspire, encourage, connect, support and train communities world-wide as they self-organize around the Transition model” (Transition Network, 2016). The autonomy from the government was thereby found to be important to such self-organized groups, as they often perceive the existing policies on sustainability ineffective (Atkinson et al., 2018).

Lichtenstein (2000) identified three qualities of self-organization, which can contribute to success. These qualities are self-referencing, increased capacity and interdependent organizing. The more of these three exist in an organization, the more self-organized the system will be (Lichtenstein, 2000). All of these qualities can as well be found in the Transition movement. High self-referencing, focusing on their own activities, is well implemented into the movements culture. The participants do not want to protest against anything, but want to achieve their own positive outcomes. Increased capacity means to find innovative ways to make use of resources that already exist. By having a worldwide network, the individual initiatives can benefit from learning how to best use resources from other initiatives. Added to this, interdependent organizing can be achieved in the Network as well. By allowing enough space for innovation while still providing boundaries, the Network’s system can work well while being kept from being overwhelmed by too many directions to develop (Lichtenstein, 2000).

1.1.3. The Transition Model
One of the main goals of the movement is to build resilience against the current and future changes in climate. Resilience in general is the ability of a system to withstand shock and to keep functioning despite of this shock (Hopkins, 2008). The Transition movement, however, does not only see resilience as a reaction to a threat, but also as an opportunity to positively and creatively interact with these developments (Hopkins in Allen, 2017). This opens space for being optimistic about the future instead of fearing what might come. Thus, the Network motivates the society to join the movement not by providing a fear of a dark future, but by motivating with the idea that positive change can happen (Connors & McDonald, 2011). This is part of why this movement does not intend to be a protest, a political movement or a dictate (Bay, 2013).

The Transition movement is structured and organized by the Transition Network Ltd. This organization exists to develop the overarching idea of the movement as well as the guidelines behind Transition, without making these too tight for creative innovation (Feola & Nunes, 2014). Nevertheless, every national organization wanting to engage in Transition has to establish a contract with Transition Ltd. It is furthermore responsible for facilitating better connection between the initiatives, as well as training and advisory activity (Feola & Nunes, 2014). With the Transition Town Totnes at the center, the Network is then structured into national and regional hubs in the participating countries (Feola & Nunes, 2014). These hubs support the local initiatives. Figure 1 shows the idea...
behind the structure of the Network. However, it can vary between different countries and individual Transition groups, as the structure is free to choose and just an optional support.

Additionally, the Network provides criteria the initiatives have to fulfill in order to become acknowledged initiatives (Brangwyn & Hopkins, 2008). These criteria cover points from the minimum size of an initiative to training and engagement in interconnecting with other groups (Brangwyn & Hopkins, 2008). To help Transition groups get coordinated and start working, the movement around Rob Hopkins also published various books and a Transition Primer (Brangwyn & Hopkins, 2008; Hopkins, 2008; Hopkins, 2013a; Hopkins, 2013b). These provide background as well as practical information on how to successfully do Transition. In general, it is based on four assumptions (Hopkins, 2008):

1. In the future, people will have to live with a lower energy consumption and should prepare for this (Peak Oil)
2. Communities nowadays are not resilient enough to withstand energy shocks resulting from Peak Oil
3. Collective action for resilience is necessary as soon as possible
4. By working together with people in the community, life will be improved

These four assumptions are the basis for the work done in Transition. They guide the intentions and actions behind the individual initiatives. Additionally, there are twelve steps, which are supposed to help initiators, who mostly have no experience in leading groups of people, cope with the building up of activities. These are the steps most initiatives will likely go through in the initiating phase:

“1. Set up a steering group and design its demise from the outside
2. Raise awareness
3. Lay the foundations
4. Organise a Great Unleashing
5. Form groups
6. Use Open Space
7. Develop visible practical manifestations of the project
8. Facilitate the Great Reskilling
9. Build a bridge to local government
10. Honour the elders
11. Let it go where it wants to go
As according to the self-organization of the movement, these steps are not supposed to be meticulously followed, but rather used as guiding steps towards establishing a Transition initiative (Hopkins, 2008). Through this, every initiative is able to implement their own kind of leadership. Flexibility is part of why the movement was able to inspire successful Transition groups all over the world. The individual initiatives can put emphasis on topics relevant to their region, focus on elements which work and exclude those that do not in a self-organized way (Nicolosi & Feola, 2016).

Within initiatives, many different systems are addressed: environmental, economic, personal and social systems (Seyfang & Haxeltine, 2012). Thus, the range of issues addressed by the movement is broader than the range of many other environmental movements (Mälgand et al., 2014). Furthermore, the movement is not government funded and thus is independent in systemic thinking, which is not necessarily corresponding to status quo societal, organizational and leadership structures (Hopkins, 2008).

1.1.4. The Transition Movement as a New Way to Organize for Sustainability

The last paragraphs showed the intention, the model and the structure behind the Transition movement. This kind of self-organized movement could be considered to be a new way to organize and lead for a more sustainable future. As climate change has various impacts on different parts of the world, individual action and leadership to regional problems becomes necessary. The Transition movement can provide this by having initiatives which address local problems while still being interconnected through the global network. This bottom-up structure makes it possible to have a worldwide answer to climate change by working ‘glocally’ (Hopkins, 2008).

The local initiatives work as a catalyst, so that every community can in the end have their own useful approach to a problem instead of working with one single predefined concept (Hopkins, 2008). In this structure, the Transition Network Ltd. functions as a supportive organization and not as a leader to push through their own vision of Transition. They “exist to inspire and motivate the initiation of projects, and then to network and nurture them once they start” (Hopkins, 2008 p. 143). This makes it possible to have change coming from within the Network, initiatives and participating communities rather than from specialists, external to the societies and local problems (Hopkins, 2008). Additionally, this way of organizing the movement not only makes local and focused sustainable change possible, but also makes the single initiatives better in responding to changes (Hopkins, 2008).

These organizational aspects show that the Transition movement can lead to positive action countering climate change. As the self-organizing structure shows, the individual initiatives can organize rather freely. This leads to the question of how leadership is perceived in such a kind of organization, where leadership roles are not visible from the outside. This is why this research wants to explore the leadership perception within the movement, as a representative of self-organized social movements.

1.2. Problem Formulation

The Transition movement as such is not a regulatory organization, but a self-organized network as described in section 1.1.2. Therefore, it does not have a set organizational structure with defined leadership roles. This makes it possible for everyone involved to start their own local Transition and take on ownership as well as leadership. The system has been successful in its expansion and is now represented in over 1200 communities in 48 countries (Transition Network, 2017). However, not much research about leadership in self-organization has been conducted. Therefore, it presents a research gap, which this study explores.

On the basis of the organizational structure, or non-structure of self-organized movements it comes into question how leadership is perceived in an organization where bottom-up approaches are prioritized and assigned or official roles for positions are avoided. Furthermore, how this movement actually works within its micro cosmos and which role but also which relevance leadership plays is thought-provoking. Another point of question is which challenges this perception and exhibition of leadership and the respective processes can pose for the movement now and in the future and also for
self-organized movements in general. This is particularly interesting as it is a novel approach to look at a self-organized structure where leadership seems to be of secondary importance, yet is present. We have not found research about leadership in the Transition movement or leadership in self-organized movements in general and thus this topic is relevant to explore, as self-organized movements present a new way to lead and organize for sustainability.

As there are no direct leadership positions, this research is focused on founding members as well as members of the national boards. Thus, the definition of a ‘leader’, in the context of this thesis, does not refer to direct and appointed leadership positions, but rather to more informal and naturally emerged leading positions within the movement.

1.3. Purpose
This thesis aims to explore which role leadership has in a self-organized movement operating across national borders and how the leadership perception influences working processes. Furthermore, challenges of leadership in a self-organized movement are aimed to be illuminated. As an example of a self-organized movement, the Transition movement was chosen.

1.4. Research Questions
The following research question will be addressed:

1. How is leadership perceived by leaders of the Swedish and Danish Transition movement?
2. In what way is the discussion about leadership and the challenges it brings about relevant for the future of the Transition movement?
2. Theoretical Pre-Understandings

The following chapter introduces the theoretical framework. In this part, relevant leadership theories are presented. The leadership theories used are complexity leadership and shared leadership. These theories were chosen, as no direct leadership exists, which makes post-heroic theories the most applicable in the context of a self-organized movement. Post-heroic leadership theories do not see one designated person as a leader but emphasize the emergence and distribution of responsibility (Cohen in Dutton, 1996). The theories were chosen after the collection of the empirical material due to the inductive approach of the study.

2.1. Complexity Leadership Theory

Complexity leadership is a theory, which aims to respond to the rapid changes in an interconnected world and market, where adaptive challenges frequently occur. It derives from complexity theory and assumes the existence of complex adaptive systems (CAS) (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007). The following paragraphs will explain the single concepts of complexity theory, complex adaptive systems and complexity leadership in more detail.

2.1.1. Complexity Theory

Moving from the industrial era to the knowledge era has increased the complexity in our systems tremendously. Characteristics of the knowledge era are globalization, democratization, deregulation and technology. These are new developments existing systems have to handle (Halal & Taylor, 1999 in Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Looking at complexity from a macro perspective shows, that our systems are “a collection of dynamic networks of interactions”, each network consists of a collection of various agents that act in parallel and create rich interconnectivity (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017 p.11). Finding one solution through traditional control approaches can appear to be impossible. Everything is somehow connected and affected by the changes happening within the system. Thus, the context is in constant flux, which in turn creates unpredictability (Snowden & Boone, 2007). Everything is a result of interactions among people and the environment, thus objectivity in its original sense does not exist. Nothing is independent or isolated and relationships and interconnections govern the development of complex systems (Keene, 2000). There is consensus among researchers that the essence of complexity is rich interconnectivity (Keene, 2000; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The interactions of things change their consequences unpredictably because the interconnectivity is so rich and therefore control becomes impossible. The changes are irreversible and the systems are required to adapt to the new reality such as in the financial crisis in 2008 (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).

From a traditional, newtonian approach, change is responded to with order and control. However, according to complexity theory “it takes complexity to beat complexity” (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017 p.10). Disorder is a key player for creating forms of order that are novel and higher than the ones we are used to. “The space of complexity is that state which the system occupies and which lies between order and chaos.” (Keene, 2000 p.2). Eventually, complexity results out of simplicity, a paradox in the complexity paradigm. Complex systems adhere to few rules, but they include the vision, values and beliefs of the system, which can be applied to the organizational context (Keene, 2000). Complexity is the realm of “unknown unknowns” (Snowden & Boone, 2007), which require adaptability for resilience and development. Because of the ongoing, self-organizing interactions of agents within the system, future desired states cannot be known but emerge (Plowman et al., 2007).

Leadership needs to acknowledge these dynamic systems and interconnectivities around them which broadens the management requirements for leadership (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Networks and emergence need to be engaged to capitalize on collective intelligence (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Eventually, humans, thus also leaders, are part of the creation of the environment.

2.1.2. Complex Adaptive Systems

“The world of the complex adaptive system is one of becoming” (Keene, 2000 p.2). Systems are dynamic and non-linear, following a continuous flow of creativity, change and becoming. The critical
parameter of CAS are the connections of the elements and their diversity (Keene, 2000). No centralized control and no fixed order regulates CAS but self-organization, continual adaptation and change in relation to environmental conditions rule the emergence of the system (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The goal of management is to increase the learning and self-organization of the agents within the system (Lichtenstein, 2000).

Essential characteristics of CAS are (1) the unpredictable interactions and actions of agents, (2) sensitivity to change of initial conditions – the incremental fluctuation of one part of the system may lead to changes not expected in another part, (3) unpredictable behavior adjustment to environmental conditions – changes occur in unexpected places and non-linear ways (4) constant flux between stability and instability and (5) emergence of actions if there is danger of disequilibrium (Plowman et al., 2007). This rapid adaptability and creativity towards environmental changes makes CAS unique and resilient as opposed to resistant, static systems (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

In organizations CAS are defined by the organization’s underlying order and principles. This determines the organizing structures such as design, strategy, leadership, control and culture (Lichtenstein, 2000). However, emergent self-organization requires the interaction of multiple local agents. Their interactions create unintended outcomes which are not intervened by any kind of central control (Chiles in Plowman, 2007). Organizations have two sides, an entrepreneurial and an organizational. Initially all organizations start out with a higher focus on the entrepreneurial side seeking innovation and taking their opportunities to create value often in an approach, disruptive to conventional ones. Nevertheless, as organizations grow and mature, innovation needs to be converted into repeatable results and thus the organizational part enforcing bureaucracy and central control is taking over. A CAS aligns these both sides by establishing rules and procedures that fulfill the desire for innovation but also meet the need for repeatable results (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).

2.1.3. Complexity Leadership

Leadership in CAS differs from traditional leadership approaches. Leaders in this form are facilitators that create the environment in a system for interaction to be possible and create a new form of reality guided by the overarching vision and rules of the system. Leadership is not considered to be exclusively carried out by one specific person or top management team. Complexity leadership theory focuses on “creating organizational conditions that enable effective, but largely unspecified, future adaptive states” (Mendes et al., 2016).

Three forms of leadership are visible in CAS, that contribute to leading for adaptability:
Operational Leadership – This kind of leadership is necessary to embrace the power of the operational system for efficiency. However, in CAS operational leaders recognize and engage the formal functions differently. The work is directed to protect interactions and innovation against the destructive pull to order, traditional leadership approaches inherit. Operational decision making is thus to be benefiting the entrepreneurial thinking and not happening at the expense of entrepreneurial ideas and innovation. However, the operational pressures and constraints generate innovation because entrepreneurial leaders need to consider feasibility as well. Thus, implementable innovation is generated in the tension between entrepreneurial ideas and operational pressures. Basically, operational leadership converts emergent ideas into organizational systems and offers structure for innovation and efficiency (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).

Entrepreneurial Leadership – In the knowledge era rapid adaptation and innovation is key. Entrepreneurial leaders create and develop novel solutions that help the organization adapt to those pressures. Entrepreneurial leaders operate in local contexts and use the importance of timing, as a great idea may not be right at the time but in the future (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).

Enabling Leadership – The interface between the operational and the entrepreneurial system is the area of enabling leadership. Enabling leaders initiate and amplify support for novelty by engaging the principles and practices of the CAS to leverage network structures and complexity dynamics. Thus, the collective intelligence of the CAS is unleashed and interaction is enabled. This adaptive space feeds the emergence of adaptive responses a key component of the rich interconnectivity of CAS. Enabling adaptive space is done through information flows and pressures that loosen up the system for change to be let in. Current patterns get disrupted when a system gets loosened up and through the enabling leader’s brokerage and group cohesion the complexity dynamics can emerge, conflict and link up. Windows of opportunities can present themselves and novelty can emerge (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).

2.2. Shared Leadership

Shared Leadership, as well as complexity leadership, is a leadership theory which was developed as an opposition to heroic leadership theories having one leader in charge, who has the power to lead the way alone (Pearce et al., 2009). Instead, the theory proposes to share the power depending on who has the most knowledge about the topic at hand (Pearce et al., 2009). Therefore, it refers to the characteristics of distributing leadership among the team members and not having one designated leader (Carson et al., 2007). Leadership is not regarded as the outcome of the knowledge and skill of an appointed formal leader, but the interactions that happen between the involved people and the apparent situation (Spillane, 2005). In consequence, a collective structure emerges, which can be called a leadership network. Team, as well as individual activities and outcomes are shaped by this leadership network (Carson et al., 2007). Thus, in shared leadership, team functions are performed by all team members. Pearson et al. provide a suitable definition by stating that “shared leadership is a dynamic, unfolding, interactive influence process among individuals, where the objective is to lead one another toward the achievement of collective goals” (Pearson et al. 2009, p. 234). When a situation calls for leadership, a team member provides the necessary response but steps back afterwards to leave the space open for the other team members to express their leadership. This type of leadership is not only advantageous because it gives individuals more opportunity to take the lead in certain situations, but also because it benefits the caring amongst group members. In a study conducted by Houghton et al. (2015), the authors argue that shared leadership can positively affect group solidarity as well as caring between the members of a team. Furthermore, they argue that this effect can even be increased, if there are cultural values and social support structures existent (Houghton et al., 2015). This aspect can be particularly interesting for this research, as this study focuses on a social movement which is formed around a feeling of community with strong core values.
3. Methodology
This chapter explains the researcher’s general approach towards theory and the research design used. It gives insights into how the overall research process is structured.

3.1. Role of Theory
This research uses a qualitative and inductive approach to answer the research questions stated in section 1.4. To explore a relationship, in this case the relationship between leadership and the Transition movement, qualitative research is the most suitable (Berkwits & Inui, 1998). Perceptions are captured individually and thus the exploration gains more validity. Therefore, this research begins with the question of how leadership is perceived by leaders of the movement and seeks to explore several possibilities without having a set outcome as a goal (6 & Bellamy, 2012). After categorizing the raw interview data into keywords and categories, it is then possible to infer from the interviews on leadership theory. In line with the inductive approach of the research, not only one leadership theory is applied to the empirical data, but several different theories are considered. The leadership theories are chosen based on the answers the interviewees give and which theories seem to be related the most to the specific case situation.

3.2. Research Design
The aim of this research is to explore the leadership perceived in a self-organized movement at the example of the Transition movement. The qualitative approach is chosen because the study aims to explore a complex and novel field. Studies about networks and self-organization tend to use a quantitative approach. However, for this study there are no evident variables to conduct a quantitative study. Hence, first qualitative research is necessary to illuminate this complex field and make sense of it through the lens of the presented research questions.

As explained in 1.1.2., the Transition movement is a self-organized movement, spatially dispersed and without designated leadership roles. Therefore, it is useful to focus on a smaller region and examine it in detail, in order to get a deeper insight into the workings of leadership and the perception of leaders on the topic of leadership. This research focuses on the Danish and Swedish Transition movement, as the research is carried out at Malmö University and thus these regions hold the opportunity to meet directly with some of the participants. The country as such is not of relevance for this research and is simply an example of the Transition movement. They were chosen for their geographical proximity between researchers and interviewees, in line with convenience sampling (Tracy, 2013). Two countries were chosen because looking at one region in depth could be too narrow and specific to later project the perceptions about leadership onto the whole movement and eventually on self-organized movements in general. By interviewing members from two areas, the data can be benchmarked for a broader picture of leadership in self organized movements.

Focusing on a narrow region refers to conducting a case study. The case study in this context focuses on answering empirical and inductive questions (6 & Bellamy, 2012). By conducting a case study, connections and relationships between the Transition actions and the transitioners are observed (6 & Bellamy, 2012), to find out how exactly leadership is represented and perceived within the complex system of the Transition Network. For this, in-depth interviews within the frame of the case study are conducted. In line with the method of using a case study, this research looks at perceived leadership in the movement through different leadership theories. The theoretical pre-understandings in chapter 2 provides the lens through which the empirical data is analyzed (6 & Bellamy, 2012). Case studies normally use a variety of methods in order to study a phenomenon (6 & Bellamy, 2012), whereas this research only focuses on in-depth interviews due to time restrictions.
4. Methods
This chapter gives insight into the methods used to collect and analyze the empirical data. First, an overview over the case study will be given. Following this, the interview process and the sampling of interviewees as well as the coding and analysis of the interview data is described.

4.1. Case Description
For the research, a focus on two individual countries and their respective Transition movements was chosen. These are the Danish (Omstilling Danmark) and Swedish (Omställning Sverige) Transition hub. These countries serve as samples of the movement and by studying two countries results can be benchmarked and projected onto the whole movement. As mentioned in 1.1.3., every national Transition Organization needs to have a contract with Transition Ltd. The following paragraphs therefore explain the official country specifics for Denmark and Sweden.

The Swedish Transition movement has been founded by the governmental organization *Hela Sverige Ska Leva*, which was named Transition Sverige and had the official contract with the English Transition Ltd. Once the Network grew strong enough, it felt like it should have its own NGO without employed people working on Transition as project managers. Thus, a second Transition organization was founded and named Transition Network Sverige. Due to the existence of two different Transition organizations, a coordinating group was then later brought into existence, in order to mediate between the individual actors. Today, this coordination group has the official contract with Transition Ltd, which means it is officially the representative of Transition Sweden. Both initial organizations are now co-hosts of the official Transition hub Sweden.

In Denmark, the Transition hub was formed around the same time as in Sweden. An official NGO was formed, due to having the need of a bank account and being registered as an association under Danish law and a contract was signed with the Transition Ltd. Other than that, the organization of the Danish hub is rather loose, with a Transition board as the only annually officially elected actors.

4.2. Collection of Data
This research uses generated, qualitative data, as this makes it possible for the participants to directly talk about the leadership context and how they relate to it (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Additionally, websites and scholarly articles concerning leadership, the Transition movement or both are examined to provide further context detail and were used for creating the foundational background of the analysis in chapter 5.

4.2.1. Interviews
The in-depth interviews conducted are part of a case study of the Swedish and Danish Transition movement and the main tool for data collection. Therefore, leaders of these Transition regions, according to the leader definition in section 1.2, were interviewed. The questions were categorized into themes prior to the interviews. Out of this categorization, four different themes emerged: (1) being part of the movement, (2) movement structure, (3) leadership and (4) future outlook. Within the four themes more detailed questions about each one is asked with the purpose to explore the individual’s perception of these topics within the Transition movement. Thus, interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews, to create a rather natural conversation about the individual interviewee’s perceptions and reasoning behind those perceptions (Olsen, 2012). Follow-up questions, that were not exactly planned or communicated before could emerge out of the situation and the interview was able to adapt to the respective interviewee (Gill et al., 2008).

The interviews with about one-hour length each were conducted partly face-to-face and partly via Skype, due to geographical distances to the interviewees. Prior to the interview, interviewees received an interview guide which includes the themes of the interview and some key aspects to each theme. The interview guide as well as the interview questions can be found in the Appendix.
4.2.2. Interview Purpose
The interviews serve to explore the Transition movement from multiple perspectives to gain an insight on the parts of the Scandinavian region and how leadership is perceived within it. The authors want to understand what the interviewees, members who have been identified to have a leading role, think about leadership in the Transition movement to answer the posed research questions from section 1.4. The perceptions collected in these interviews are supposed to serve as benchmarks for leadership in self-organized movements later on.

4.2.3. Selection Process and Profile of Interviewees
In order to conduct interviews for the case study, purposeful non-probability sampling is used, as this will make it possible to interview active transition members who have been identified to have a leading position within the movement or have been involved in founding the national hubs (Merriam, 2009). Criteria for interview partners are that they:

a) are active Transition leaders or if inactive, have been involved in the founding of the national hubs
b) are or have been part of the Danish or Swedish Transition movement.

These criteria are important to ensure that the research stays within the frame of the case study and that the interview partners have insightful as well as relevant knowledge about the movement.

The target group of the interviews were leaders of the Transition movement as defined in 1.2. As there are no assigned leadership positions within the movement, interviewing leaders is a challenging process. Therefore, the sampling method used to find relevant interview partners is snowball sampling (Tracy, 2013). The first interviewees were approached based on suggestions for Transition leaders in the Swedish and Danish region. After each interview, it was then asked whom the interviewees consider a relevant leader of the movement within their country to interview. This kind of interview sampling supports the research question of this thesis. As it wants to find out about leadership perceptions, it is relevant to know whom the individual interviewees consider as leaders. The interview partners include board members, Transition movement founders as well as a Transition town trainer. Below, a brief overview over the interviewees is given:

Table 1: Overview of Interviewees (own source)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Position in the movement</th>
<th>Form of communication</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 1</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Transition Town Founder</td>
<td>video call</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 2</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Board Member</td>
<td>personal meeting</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 3</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Transition Founder</td>
<td>phone call</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 4</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Board Member</td>
<td>video call</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 5</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Board Member</td>
<td>video call</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 6</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Board Member</td>
<td>phone call</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 7</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Transition Founder</td>
<td>personal meeting</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 8</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Board Member</td>
<td>phone call</td>
<td>45 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 9</td>
<td>Denmark / Sweden</td>
<td>Transition Town Trainer</td>
<td>personal meeting</td>
<td>35 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.4. Interview Guide

The interview guide was provided to all interviewees at least one day prior the interview. It was given out in order for the interviewees to be prepared for the type of questions and topics they would be asked about. It includes a brief overview over the structure of the interview with the themes of questions. The first part, being part of the movement, contains rather broad opening questions, which aim to establish some comfort for the interviewee within the interview (Galletta & Cross, 2013). The two middle themes, movement structure and leadership, pose questions which address the research questions of the study in more detail (Galletta & Cross, 2013). The ending then gives the interviewee the opportunity to make a future outlook and asks them for additional thoughts they have on the subject (Galletta & Cross, 2013). A complete version of the interview guide is presented in Appendix I.

4.3. Coding and Analysis of Data

The interview data is coded through the categorization method of thematic analysis. This means that after a general familiarization with the whole dataset and some first ideas about how to organize the empirical material the raw interview data is coded into relevant keywords. These first keywords are applied to the whole dataset. Among the keywords themes are looked for and similar or connected keywords can be placed into one theme. In a first revision, the empirical material is checked for its relation to the created themes. Eventually, in a last step, the themes are finally set under the consideration of relations and associations between the themes (Grbich 1999; Braun & Clarke 2006 in Silverman, 2011).

In this research, the empirical material is looked at through organizational and leadership lenses. This makes it possible to see connections, similarities and differences as well as possible interdependencies between the interviewees statements and perceptions. The emerging themes can then give insight into the workings of the organizational and leadership aspects of the Transition movement. The conducted analysis builds the basis for a theoretical interpretation of the gathered data.

In this research, the interviews were read through again and answers relevant to leadership or organizational structure were filtered out. By reading through all interviews and filtering the answers eleven categories were created to structure the data. The initial categories were:

1. Intrinsic Motivation
2. Network
3. Success Factors
4. Coordination/Facilitation
5. Leadership Perception
6. Tools
7. Self-Governance
8. Communication
9. Challenges/Boundaries
10. Core Values
11. Qualities

After categorizing the statements about leadership or working structures within the Transition movement the categories were sorted to the research questions. There it was important that the connection to the research question but also between the categories were clear, to be able to answer the questions. For the first research question the categories about perception of leadership from the interviewees the categories ‘leadership perception’, ‘network’, ‘coordination/facilitation’, ‘intrinsic motivation’, ‘tools’, ‘communication’, ‘self-governance’ and ‘personal qualities’ emerged. These statements were then categorized further into main themes for analysis. The main themes are the headlines of the Findings in chapter 5:
1. Informal Leadership
2. Functions: Coordination and Facilitation
3. Empowerment
4. Self-Governance
5. Working Processes
6. Rob Hopkins as a Charismatic Leader

Following the coding of the interview data is the analysis. The first research question is analyzed, focusing on the perceptions of the Transition leaders. For this, the categories emerging from the coding are looked at from a leadership perspective. Not one single theory is used, but several independent yet connected theories, introduced in the theoretical pre-understandings in chapter 2. To frame the analysis within theory an introductory paragraph analyzes first how the Transition movement fits into the concept of complexity theory and especially how it can be interpreted as a complex adaptive system.

The analyzed perceptions are then used for the analysis of the second research question. As this question deals with the relevance of the leadership discussion in the movement, challenges as well as success factors are examined. For this research question the categories ‘core values’ and ‘challenges/boundaries’ display the greatest content for analysis. Taking the findings from chapter 5 into account these categories analyze why leadership plays an important role in the Transition movement. The main themes that came out by further breaking down the statements of the categories for the category ‘core values’ were:

1. Holistic View of Transition
2. Localism
3. Community

Challenges and Boundaries the movement is currently facing were found to be:

1. Engaging People
2. Political System
3. Funding

In order to be able to analyze why the movement faces these challenges and how these are connected to leadership, the leadership perceptions of the leaders are important to look at. The analysis of the two research questions then gives a more in-depth insight into the leadership styles, understanding and workings of leadership within the movement. This analysis is then used for a more general discussion about leadership theory in such movements.

4.4. Quality of Data

The data collection and analysis within the context of a Master Thesis implies the supervision and examination of the University. This research has not been subject of peer review. However, the references used are mostly peer reviewed sources. Furthermore, literature from the Transition movement itself will be reviewed to complete the set of data.

4.4.1. Reliability and Validity

The method to code the interviews was a categorization of the data. For this, certain keywords were used in all interviews. All interviews were coded in the same way presented in 4.5. This assures that the same kind of outcome is produced when coding the individual interviews. This ensures the consistency and repeatability of the process (Brink, 1993).

This research focuses on a case study of the Swedish and Danish Transition movement. As the principles of the Transition movement and the self-organizing structure can also be found in other national Transition hubs, this research’s result is generalizable in its main findings to other parts of the
Transition movement, which increases the validity of this study (Golafshani, 2003). However, as national culture and environmental preconditions may influence the way individual countries handle Transition, the perception of leadership may vary in other countries.

Furthermore, it was made sure to firstly use the statements from the interviewees in a way, which reflect the context and secondly also include critical voices, ensuring the credibility, authenticity and criticality of the research (Whittemore et al., 2001).

4.4.2. Limitations
The research is limited by the characteristics of self-organized movements itself. Each group can have their own individual perceptions and processes regarding leadership. Thus, a full generalization of leadership perceptions in the Transition movement or self-organized movements in general is still very subjective. Furthermore, due to time and geographical limitations, only a small number of members of the Transition movement were interviewed. This research also relates to leadership perceptions of individuals in a by us defined leading position. Perceptions of members that do not have a leading position, as of our definition, are not included in the empirical material and could lead to different results. The interviewers as well as the interviewees are not native English speakers, thus it cannot be guaranteed, that both parties at all times meant and understood things in the exact same way. However, both sides have an advanced level of English.

4.5. Ethical Considerations
Before conducting the interviews, the interviewees were informed about the recording and use of their answers in this research. Their consent was asked for and granted in all cases. Furthermore, they were informed, that the data would only be used anonymized. The interviewees are referred to as either Interviewee X or with their position within the movement and their country. Due to ethical considerations, the transcripts are not attached in the appendix of this research, but are available upon request.

The Transition movement itself is not a single organization but a social movement, therefore we decided that the name of the movement will be used and not anonymized.

Furthermore, all information taken from other sources have been cited, thus avoiding plagiarism.
5. Findings

This chapter presents and analyzes the empirical data from a leadership perspective. The first research question is examined in section 5.1. Based on this analysis, the second research question is then examined in section 5.2. In the end, a more general theoretical discussion, based on the analysis of the two research questions follows in 5.3. The data is presented directly in connection to the analysis with theoretical implications.

5.1. Perceptions on Leadership of Transition Leaders

The first research question discusses the perception on leadership within the Transition movement. Thus, main findings about leadership are singled out in the following and analyzed through the lens of different but related leadership theories, complexity leadership and shared leadership. As the Transition movement in itself can be analyzed as a complex adaptive system within complexity theory, this relation is made clear first in section 5.1.1. The interrelated leadership aspects are then analyzed with the empirical data in connection to the theories explained in the theoretical pre-understandings.

5.1.1. The Transition Movement as a Complex Adaptive System

As described in 1.1.4., the Transition movement forms a new way to organize for sustainability and can be described as a system with rich interconnections, many of them unofficial or not clearly defined, with unknown future outcomes (Plowman et al. 2007). Thereby, the movement can be analyzed as a complex adaptive system (CAS). A CAS neither has centralized control nor fixed order regulations. It is based on self-organization and characterized by continuous adaptation to the situation at hand. Environmental conditions provide the direction of development (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The role of leadership is thus different than from traditional leader centered theories. The goal in a CAS for management is to provide the space necessary to self-organize and to enable involved agents to innovatively tackle the challenges the system encounters (Lichtenstein, 2000). In the case of the Transition movement characteristics of a CAS are displayed by the existential independence, yet rich interconnectivity and relations of the individual Transition groups and initiatives. Every activity and initiative emerges out of an intrinsic motivation or the individual perception of necessity for something to change or be done. Yet, all initiatives pursue the overarching vision of the Transition movement however, applied to their specific geographical and situational context. This way, they are all connected under the umbrella of the Transition Network, through formal national hubs and boards, but also informal personal relations. The interconnections are unspecified and thereby the future development and state of the system remains unknown. The hierarchy in the Network from the Transition Network Ltd. down to national and regional hubs and eventually the individual groups merely exists for support and guidance and is only a hierarchy breaking down into geographical areas, not in power.

Actions of single individuals or groups are not predictable, relations between initiatives might develop or not and most initiatives are in a constant flux of being a stable activist group or struggling to keep their motivational flow (Interviewee 1, personal communication). However, the system is self-supporting and thus resilient in its existence. One inactive Transition initiative, which is welcome to startup anytime again, does not affect the existence of the overall movement (Interviewee 4, personal communication).

These characteristics underline the essence of the Transition movement as a CAS. When asked to pick a shape or illustrate the movement as a whole, interviewees describe it as single, interconnected entities. Two of the board members use the structure of sociocracy, where many overlapping circles are connected, with dots where the lines of the different circles meet, to describe a possible shape of the movement (Interviewee 2, personal communication; Interviewee 4, personal communication). A more in-depth explanation about sociocracy will additionally be given in section 5.1.6.1. Furthermore, the image of a fishnet to illustrate the resilience and interconnections in the Transition movement was described: A fishnet is constructed out of ropes tied together and if one or also multiple knots open up it is still a fishnet and somewhat supportive of the weight it holds and fit for its purpose. However,
eventually, if all the knots are untied there is only single ropes left without any connections or support. What the movement aims to do is to tie the individual ropes together with knots to build a supportive and strong net, resilient in itself (Interviewee 4, personal communication). Another similar image mentioned when asked about the structure of the movement is the description: “lots of dots that connect criss-cross” (Interviewee 6, personal communication). Picking a different shape but a similar explanation, the movement can also be seen as a big tree with small trees found in the branches. Each Transition group is and works as a whole in their local area and community, but it is also part of a larger whole, which is the Transition movement. Many or even most of the other members within that whole have not met and are unaware of each other’s existence but if they meet they find commonalities among each other (Interviewee 8, personal communication).

Thus, in summary, the movement is seen as a complex web of projects, diversity in people and ecosystems. The interconnectivity of all aspects makes the movement a large whole (Interviewee 9, personal communication). These depictions show that the movement does not want to work in the traditional hierarchical structures but in a more free and adaptive network structure, as shown in Figure 3.

![Hierarchical Structure](image1.png) ![Complex Adaptive System](image2.png)

Figure 3: The Transition movement as a Complex Adaptive System

(own source)

However, the movement is not a system operating in a vacuum. It is also connected to many other organizations working in the field of change for holistic sustainability. This perception can be illustrated by putting the Transition movement in one circle together with other environmentally focused organizations and environmental NGOs. Outside of the circle are the civil society, business, agencies and authorities. These actors need and often also want to be integrated in the efforts for creating a more sustainable world. The Transition movement itself is perceived mostly as a method for initiating sustainability and community-led transition for resilient societies among some of the interviewees. Other actors also need to be included and engaged for a holistic transition because each actor holds knowledge and resources the others do not have and combined a collective intelligence and capacity is created that eventually leads to the desired outcome (Interviewee 7, personal communication). Interviewees acknowledge that outside of the Transition movement there are actors and organizations working with the same logic and outlook all over the world. They are also somewhat connected to this complex system that are described as a sort of global tribe unaware of each other but standing for the same or similar purpose (Interviewee 8, personal communication).

The descriptions of the structure of the movement support the characteristic of an interconnected system, complex and adaptive, that together builds a strong network through interconnections and is resilient in itself, but adaptable to change. Thus, the following analysis is based on the assumption that the Transition movement is a complex adaptive system. The sections below look at leadership aspects to be found in this CAS in order to answer the research question of how leadership is perceived in the Transition movement in Denmark and Sweden.
5.1.2. Informal Leadership

In the Transition movement, it is common not to elect leaders or managers of a specific group or initiative. The only formal election is the one of the board because for collaborations and in order to have a bank account usually an official registration as an NGO is necessary, which requires formal positions such as a chairperson. Still, nobody is perceived as more important than the other, it is simply a formal necessity (Interviewee 6, personal communication). However, also a self-organized movement with no appointed leaders will always have informal leaders. It would be idealistic not to have any sort of leader (Interviewee 4, personal communication). The questioned interviewees all take on responsibility voluntarily in the movement, nevertheless, they do not label themselves as leaders. They perceive it as being more engaged than others and doing coordination and facilitation work (Interviewee 1, personal communication; Interviewee 6, personal communication). Thus, an informal organization without a hierarchical and set structure brings about informal leaders emerging out of intrinsic motivation and drive for the cause of the organization, or in this case of the movement.

The feeling of connection to the purpose and the intrinsic motivation to become active is very present among all interviewees. They learned about the Transition movement in one way or another, some having an ecological or sustainability focused background and then got deeply involved by starting up their own Transition town, founding the national Swedish or Danish Transition movement or becoming a member of the national board. Another motivating factor mentioned by some interviewees is the love for the own community, the people and the place around the individual that made them become involved in the Transition movement. The motive is to take care of one’s own neighborhood for the future and involve the people around, building up trust and relationships (Interviewee 7, personal communication). Bringing people together seems to be one of the common motives among the identified yet informal leaders, which is discussed in more detail in section 5.2.1.3.

The informal leadership, taken on voluntarily by the interviewees, gets approved or disapproved of in the same informal way as the election itself. The community either accepts the person as a natural leader or does not (Interviewee 6, personal communication). Some of the interviewees, who describe themselves as more involved or engaged, now give talks, hold workshops and lectures in other Transition groups or help newly formed groups to start up. They do this by being knowledgeable about the theoretical concept of the Transition movement, having experience with Transition and being able to share this to help other groups launch their own Transition. Some are the connection between the local, national and even international level and disperse information throughout the levels. Others are mainly concerned with the local area. It is up to personal preference, which role is taken on and which actions follow the motivation. They state that an important driver of the movement is to only pursue things the energy is there for. Nobody can complain about something not getting done or about a lack of something. If someone is bothered by something, the energy to change it should be there as well. Things nobody feels inspired by or responsible for are simply not carried out (Interviewee 6, personal communication). With this base, decision making becomes everyone’s duty and people who feel the need, responsibility or ownership about a certain activity can step forward and take the lead. Thus, even with a board or regional, national and international hubs power is dispersed equally and no person is more important than the other, or at least should not be. This distribution of power is aligned with the theoretical concept of shared leadership where people take parts in leading, according to their knowledge in order to work towards a common goal (Pearson et al., 2009).

In the specific case of one interviewee who founded a Transition town, it was hard to step back from the leading role and let other people take on responsibility. The people in this Transition town always looked up to this highly engaged and experienced person for help, guidance and eventually leadership, nobody else had ever taken on. When this person wanted to focus on other things than the local Transition group a lot of energy was lost and people did not know how to carry on the work, because the supposed leader had always taken care of many things without sharing the knowledge or dividing necessary activities among other members (Interviewee 1, personal communication). The lesson learned is that resilience cannot be established with a dependency on single individuals. Thus, the leadership approach of enabling everyone to make decisions and step forward to take on the lead on
something they feel the energy or responsibility is fundamental to the Transition movement for it to be sustainable.

Shared leadership applies, as mentioned briefly already, in relation to the informal leadership in the Transition movement. The interactions between single individuals sharing their knowledge and experience combined with the ever-changing tasks and challenges to make Transition a reality calls for engaged members that emerge from a situation, where their skills and motivation are applicable to in order to have rapid responses to the challenges in the specific context (Pearce et al., 2009). The case of the leader that wanted to step back shows that not the knowledge of one appointed leader creates the desired outcome but the interactions between the involved people with the situation at hand (Spillane, 2005).

Thus, to start up a Transition group it takes intrinsically motivated individuals who are deeply engaged in the theoretical concept of the Transition movement and have the drive to follow through with the organizational and formal requirements of becoming a Transition town. Furthermore, they need to have the ability to engage the local community on a level that minimum numbers of participants can be reached and an active Transition can be pursued. To have an active Transition group, the community itself needs to get engaged yet it is helpful to have experienced transitioners to guide newer members. Getting them deeply motivated, to spread equality within the leadership of the movement then maintains the sustainability of the group for the future (Interviewee 9, personal communication). Hence, in order to start Transition, it is not about the numbers of people but about developing depth in their engagement and motivation to coordinate and facilitate sustainable Transition and to use one’s skills collectively to achieve a common goal (Interviewee 4, personal communication).

5.1.3. Coordination and Facilitation

As stated in the last paragraph, the Transition movement is characterized by informal more than formal leaders. However, a feature standing out in the interviews with Transition leaders is that they never refer to themselves as leaders. When talking about their work in Transition, keywords which often fall instead of leadership are “coordination” or “facilitation”. This shows how the leaders in Transition put a clear focus on the work all transitioners are doing and not viewing themselves as a more important part of the movement in comparison to other transitioners. Often in Transition “people just meet and do stuff” (Interviewee 4, personal communication). This indicates that not a lot of strategizing is done prior to initiatives starting their work. Consequently, coordination done by the informal leaders is a vital aspect in order to keep the work in the movement together and to be able to achieve a joint goal. When asked about their role in the Network, practical tasks seem to be the most common, which can also be referred to as traditional organizing activities (Interviewee 1, personal communication). These include spreading information, connecting transitioners, coordinating among groups and setting meetings. All while having the bigger picture of what is happening within the initiatives. Furthermore, coordinators often work on specific tasks, which other members of the movement do not want to work on themselves, such as filling out funding applications (Interviewee 5, personal communications).

Thereby, the work done by local leaders of Transition is similar to the work done by Transition leaders on the national level. When asked about the role of the national Transition board, the answers related to coordinating tasks, spreading news and helping newly interested people find initiatives. Furthermore, the board members try to support local groups as good as possible (Interviewee 5, personal communication). Additionally, the national board has the task to represent the national movement on an international level.

However, the fact that the answers about the work and roles of local and national Transition leaders are mostly aligned shows, there is no hierarchical importance within the Network, which could indicate a higher importance of the work of national leaders than the one of local leaders. This is emphasized by the possibility for local transitioners to directly get in touch with the national board. If
they have questions or concerns, the board members will try to facilitate the working process for the local groups (Interviewee 6, personal communication).

Thus, Transition leaders dedicate their work to the mostly practical activities needed to keep the movement intact and connected, not on being strong leaders. Thus, they do not focus on how they imagine the movement to ideally be, but on the needs of the local community and all transitioners at hand.

“To really change things, the first thing that all of us have to do if we’re going to really support change is to support, facilitate, listen, respect and that means that we have to stop thinking we have the answers” (Interviewee 9, personal communication)

The work of facilitating and coordinating is part of complexity leadership. As explained in 2.1., the framework for complexity leadership covers operational leadership, organizational leadership and enabling leadership. Coordination and facilitation can thereby be placed in the area of operational leadership. The task of operational leaders is to coordinate the activities and facilitate the work of innovators, which in this context are the local transitioners.

In the case of the Transition movement it is important to note, that the national boards never face any leadership or performance pressure from the international Network, as they only commit themselves to helping the initiatives as much as they can and as much as they want to (Interviewee 5, personal communication). This again indicates the importance of community and well-being within the movement, which obliges no one to do more than they want to do themselves. With this philosophy, the movement wants to counter the pressure of modern society to constantly having to promote yourself and to show that you as a leader have great ideas and are more special than the rest (Interviewee 9, personal communication).

This kind of leadership reflects the core values of the movement of community and common action, but also brings downsides with itself. One interviewee and former founding member points out how in this kind of organization and approach to leadership, there is no place for strong individuals who have an individual agenda conflicting with the movements values. Still, such individuals are usually attracted by movements such as the Transition movement. This can result in problems, as the coordinating and facilitating work is devoted to the community and in turn individual goals might contradict with the needs of the organization (Interviewee 3, personal communication).

Furthermore, the loose organization of only coordinating things that are needed at this specific moment brings about problems. As it can be seen in the movement, particularly young people nowadays prefer to organize rather freely instead of having an assigned board and designated roles and statutes within the organization (Interviewee 3, personal communication). On the one hand, this makes spontaneous work and adaptive changes within the initiatives easier, however, on the other hand the system is less professionalized and big differences among national hubs and even local initiatives are existent. This could in the long run pose problems for the movement as a global actor.

In summary, the main task of the mostly informal leaders within the movement is not about leading directly, but about supporting the initiatives by coordinating and facilitating. However, this does not show that leadership in the traditional sense is never needed.

“When do you need top-down? When do you need strong leadership? Several times. When you’ve got a very specific project with tasks that new people don’t know how to do those tasks. They need teaching. They need guidance. They need a framework. They need someone to think through the process of them gaining confidence and skills to be able to do a part” (Interviewee 9, personal communication).

As this statement shows, strong but natural leaders are needed at certain points in order to be able to empower new transitioners to become coordinators and facilitators themselves in the future. Hence,
the next section will look more closely at the aspect of empowerment within the leadership of the Transition movement.

5.1.4. Empowerment

To become a coordinator or facilitator it takes confidence in one’s own abilities and knowledge about the system one wants to get active in (Interviewee 1, personal communication). In a complex system with no inherent structure and an individually overwhelming challenge to overcome, such as climate change, it can be difficult for people to find their place, where they feel comfortable and also useful. Some of the interviewees had been active in working on sustainability, ecology or social issues all their life and Transition seemed as a next logical step. For some it appeared to be the perfect setting they were looking for to integrate their ideas. Nevertheless, how they got engaged also has a lot to do with feeling empowered by the movement and its methodology (Interviewee 7, personal communication).

One interviewee told about a personal experience which made her more aware of what is going in the world. Consequently, she developed the intrinsic need to do something about the threats climate change is posing on society and the planet. She found the movement and went to a Transition town in Denmark where she participated in workshops, seed swaps, got to hear about other people’s experience and found inspiration among the members of the movement. She got so engaged that she was then asked to join the board despite of not knowing about too many things or not having any ecological or social background, just because of her enthusiasm and the method of Transition that empowered her. She describes it as a learning by doing process to use Transition as a tool and feeling connected to the other members (Interviewee 6, personal communication).

Other interviewees already had an ecology background but when they found the Transition movement they felt they could finally frame all the issues and fears they had in mind about the situation of the planet and felt empowered and inspired to get active. Going to a Transition workshop that introduces Transition as a method and teaches relevant tools to tackle the feared issues empowered some to join the movement (Interviewee 8, personal communication). In consequence, by being empowered and feeling as if their actions can make a difference, the Interviewees themselves took on leading roles in the movement and developed with the methodology of Transition. They became coordinators and facilitators themselves through the empowerment of the already active informal leaders.

This can be seen in connection to the interviewee wanting to pull out from organizational activities and instead get active in the local municipality, mentioned in section 5.1.4. However, once she had left, people did not know what to do and the Transition town destabilized. It was not about people not being engaged but simply about not having the confidence in taking on responsibility due to lack of experience. This is when she realized that she had done too much alone without the sharing and empowering tasks of being an informal leader. The initiative had become dependent on a single person as the leader. She went back to the group focusing on building up other people’s functions, knowledge and confidence (Interviewee 1, personal communication).

From an enabling leadership point of view, this interviewee did what is necessary to create a resilient and sustainable system. She came back and focused on growing people’s capacities and abilities to coordinate and carry out important activities for the movement to continue without her at the top. This is not about telling people how to do things, but about empowering people’s confidence in themselves in order for them to take on leading roles and make their contribution to the movement. From a theoretical angle this is the leveraging network structures and using complexity dynamics part of enabling leadership (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Novelty and innovation for the complex and unknown future challenges in the movement can only be responded to by an open and dynamic space that lets people develop themselves, not by how it has been done in the past (Mendes et al., 2016). The flow of information, experience and knowledge should be free to create a collective intelligence that enriches the movement eventually and leads to its sustainability and resilience without depending on a single individual. Another important factor to enable and empower people is to let go of control, a key aspect
when it comes to complex adaptive systems. By responding to complex situations with a pull to order, innovation gets restricted and people feel less empowered and engaged to innovate for adaptive solutions. Empowering people enriches the system as a whole, strengthens its interconnectivity and builds up a greater collective intelligence to counter future challenges (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Thus, the informal leaders also exhibit operational leadership by facilitating novel approaches and amplifying confidence for members’ own contributions.

For people to stay engaged they must understand the importance of their work. Interviewee 4 describes the empowerment of members as developing personal resilience which eventually results in collective resilience. The requirements for this are a sense of inspiration but also the recognition of the importance about one’s own engagement and effort (Interviewee 4, personal communication). Nevertheless, even with a motivational and growing function of the informal and accepted leaders in the community, it is vital to let people do things themselves and let them develop confidence and expertise (Interviewee 1; Interviewee 2, personal communication). A vital function the informal leaders carry out by training and empowering people is to foster what people are intrinsically motivated for and make them use this to pursue the vision of the Transition movement. It was explained that: “you have to take people how they are” (Interviewee 3, personal communication) and that from that position or state of mind the people can develop. There are no quality requirements and people can get active in whichever area they want, nevertheless, a general interest to become active and to initiate change is necessary. From there, the learning level increases gradually and an inner transition to a more holistic view on sustainability and sustainable development in the understanding of the movement becomes possible.

Leadership as according to enabling and operational leadership in the complexity leadership theory, characterizes itself by not having exclusive leaders but rather people, deeply engaged and intrinsically motivated, emerging from a situational context as an informal leader approved or disapproved by the acceptance of the community they take on responsibility for. Letting go of control paradigms and fostering innovation also belongs to the tasks the informal leaders have and how they empower members of the CAS. In the empirical data for this thesis, this view on leadership is congruent to the theoretical suggestions of enabling leadership in the sense of complexity leadership and also includes parts of operational leadership.

5.1.5. Self-Governance
A key aspect in the Transition movement but also in the theoretical concept of complex adaptive systems is self-governance. There is no top down approach in organization or decision making. The idea is to have a community-led, grassroots, bottom-up approach to change the current societal, environmental and economic status quo. Each group is independent in itself and in their actions. What connects the groups in a complex adaptive system and in the Transition movement is the common vision of Transition, taking care of their local community and environment and becoming resilient (Interviewee 7, personal communication). It is further connected through people that come together from different geographical areas on a national as well as international level and discuss what Transition means to them, creating a big picture and what is needed to achieve it. Those so-called hubs serve as a model to organize within the Network but do not play any larger role than the one of supporting, connecting and creating a network to create the free flow of information and inspire and exchange what groups are doing on the local level to spark more innovation and support the development of the groups. They are also there to let Transition initiatives know of each other and tell the Transition story (Interviewee 6, personal communication). The Transition movement Ltd. keeps the heart and the history of the whole movement, collects the knowledge, supports with available funds but does not interfere with initiative’s activities as a ruling mother organization (Interviewee 6, personal communication). Hence, the installations of hubs, boards and eventually also the Transition movement ltd. take care of operational leadership tasks corresponding to complexity leadership theory. They protect the individual groups from the usual organizational pressure for order and efficiency and ensure the creative tension between organizational structure and entrepreneurial thinking (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).
The Transition movement, as explained in section 1.1.3., is based on 12 steps and the vision of Transition. How the individual groups or Transition towns reach this vision is up to them. This was also confirmed by the interviewees. The common understanding among the interviewees was that there is not only one way to approach the 12 steps and that every organization is somewhat running their own agenda, due to different contexts they find themselves in (Interviewee 3, personal communication). Some groups choose to organize themselves as a formal NGO, usually enabling them to have their own bank account and making it easier to collaborate with other organizations but others choose to stay as a loose group without any kind of formalization (Interviewee 5, personal communication; Interviewee 8, personal communication).

An important part of the movement, is not only doing what people want to do but also to let things happen the way they want to (Interviewee 2, personal communication) and to “give it freedom and just let it work like this” (Interviewee 1, personal communication). People do their own individual Transition activities based on their own interpretation and context of Transition. The focus of each group lies within their local community and surroundings, what needs to be done in their direct area but also what would be fun, what inspires the people carrying out the activities and what motivates the members enough to follow through (Interviewee 5, personal communication; Interviewee 6, personal communication). What would be fun to do and what inspires the people, every groups decides upon themselves. The interpretation of Transition and the 12 steps are thus very free and can develop in many directions. One interviewee described the development of the movement as a child growing up:

“[...] want to see the movement grow but to grow in the way that it's like with a kid, I think. You can now create the frames and maybe some structure, but you have to let them evolve in the way that they do it naturally and not, you know, try to force it [...]” (Interviewee 6, personal communication)

However, all of the initiatives, in any form, no matter how they develop and grow, go back to the 12 initial steps and this is how the Transition movement combines these independent and self-organized groups under one umbrella and as a complex adaptive system everything in the Transition movement is interrelated. Thus, also the activities carried out by Transition groups which affect, inspire and motivate others to do the similar things and learn from each other (Interviewee 8, personal communication). The network exists as a greater entity but only for connections and exchange, to inspire each other and help out if needed.

Through the empowerment by the informal leaders as described in section 5.1.4., as well as the knowledge of being part of something bigger and getting to learn about and from other initiatives it becomes possible to be an organization without appointed positions as suggested by the theory of complex adaptive systems (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The members themselves exhibit entrepreneurial leadership by developing novel and innovative approaches for the specific challenges at hand facilitated by the operational leadership of the more formal installations such as the national hubs and the enabling support shown by informal leaders on all levels within the movement. Furthermore, shared leadership applies in this context again as leadership emerges where a person needs to step in temporarily and carry out a leadership function. Thus, a collective leadership network can evolve and guide the development of the movement (Carson et al., 2007). The overall task in a self-governing complex adaptive system is to create conditions in the system that enable effective but not necessarily specified future adaptive spaces which is aligned with the Transition movements desired state of existence: locally active groups criss-cross connected by a free flow of information, enabling anyone to do what inspires them under the umbrella of the Transition vision.

5.1.6. Working Processes within the Transition Movement
Due to the loose organization and very practical leadership within the movement, it is of great interest to look at the working and decision-making processes within the initiatives and the national board. As described in the last paragraph, the individual initiatives work within a system of self-governance. This is one reason why there is no top-down decision-making within the initiatives (Interviewee 2, personal communication). The aim of the movement is to be a movement for the whole society, where
everyone can implement Transition in the way he or she is interested in. Therefore, top-down decision-making processes would not only speak against the principle of self-governance, but also against the core values of the whole movement. The decision-making process is part of the operational leadership of complexity leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Decisions are made to facilitate more efficient work for the individual initiatives. However, it has to be noted, that decision-making in complexity leadership usually refers to some sort of top-down decisions of the levels in charge (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007), whereas this would speak against the values of Transition. This adaptive approach to making decisions acknowledges that it is not beneficial to control and structure everything in detail, but that the mindset and advantages of a wide network are an asset of the movement (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).

As mentioned in section 5.1.2, when it comes to implementing new ideas, one principle of the movement is to never try to achieve a goal for which there is no energy for. A method which supports this kind of philosophy is an open space method, which means that meetings are held without any agenda and topics are discussed when being brought up by the attendants of the meeting (Interviewee 1, personal communication). This method is also part of the 12 steps for initiatives (Hopkins, 2008) and reflects the values of the movement well. In general, a principle is that

“the people that come are the right people and the things people want to talk about are the right things. So, we always go with what people have energy for” (Interviewee 1, personal communication).

It shows the independence of the movement of specific individuals who lead the way. Everyone who has ideas can lead this discussion and be the leader to this specific project. This person will then be the informal leader to this working process. Therefore, again a shared leadership approach is visible within the working processes of the initiatives. By applying open space methods, everyone can be a leader in their field of interest or expertise. By doing this, the movement can make better use of their potential, as work and leading is shared among the members who have the highest motivation and resources to reach this goal.

5.1.6.1. Sociocracy as a Method for Decision-Making

The possibility for everyone to take a lead and make decisions simplifies the possibility for all actors to make a change. However, this kind of decision-making also entails risks. The question arises of who is actually entitled to make important decisions. Someone in the end will take a decision, but why is it this person who has the power to decide and another one (Interviewee 3, personal communication)? A possible answer to this question lies in the method of sociocracy. This method was standing out as a common strategy for making decisions within the initiatives and boards. The Transition leaders see sociocracy as a more open way of making decisions and a better way to hold meetings. The following figure illustrates the workings of sociocracy within the movement:
In the sociocratic method, there are three important aspects to making decisions: circles and double linking, as well as consent decision-making (Buck, 2014). The first aspect describes the different circles that exist, which in case of the Transition movement are the initiatives as well as the national board. These circles then meet regularly. In line with the philosophy of Transition, the board for example should then be composed of individuals, who each represent an initiative and so not only speak for themselves but for a whole subgroup (Interviewee 4, personal communication). This reflects the aspect of double linking (Buck, 2014). The third aspect, consent decision-making treats the way decisions are reached. Here the method is to move in circles and to listen to everyone until a decision can be made without anyone having objections to it (Buck, 2014).

The concept of sociocracy again illustrates how leadership is perceived within the movement. It is common consensus, that as many people as possible should be involved into taking a decision, that every voice is equally important and that everyone should agree with the decision made. It shows the actual leaders in the board are not leaders but facilitators and coordinators of the work done instead of leading the way all alone. By including everyone in the decision, the concept of shared leadership is even extended. Shared leadership encourages people to step forward and take a lead when they feel capable of being the informal leader to the project. Sociocracy takes this one step further by including even those into the decision-making who either are not self-conscious enough or underestimate their abilities. This practice emphasizes once again the importance of community and empowering every member to be a leader as well.

However, it has to be noted, that most interviewees refer to sociocracy as the ideal way of making decisions and that they want to implement this method. This suggests in most groups it has not yet found application.

5.1.6.2. Countering the Founder’s Syndrome

Another part of working within the movement is handing work over to other transitioners. This discussion is particularly applicable to the only officially assigned roles within the movement, the national boards. When asked about their future within the movement, most board members interviewed have the same view on their plans. They have the intention of not being on the board for too long, as new energy and change is important in order to keep up innovative work and new ideas. Especially the interview partners who also were founding members within the countries emphasize that they do not want to block the development of the movement (Interviewee 5, 6, personal communication). By doing this, they try to prevent a problem called founder’s syndrome. This
syndrome describes the negative power founders can have on an organization (Block & Rosenberg, 2002). As founders mostly have been involved for a longer time than any other member, they in most cases can also exercise greater power (Block & Rosenberg, 2002). In the following statement, one board member describes her reasons for stepping down from the board:

“I will step down and make room for new people, because it's one of the things that is really important is not to get what we call the ‘founder’s syndrome’, meaning that we take so much identity in what we are doing that we forget to make room for others and by that also the change that is needed” (Interviewee 6, personal communication)

This statement shows, how in most cases staying in the board for too long would be countering the basic principles of the movement of everyone being equally important and equally powerful. Thus, the dedication of the board members to value new energy and empowering others higher than their own power again shows that direct top-down leadership is not important within the movement. A more frequent change in ‘leading positions’ ensures that the concepts of enabling leadership and shared leadership are upheld by giving more people the chance to also take a lead nationally, if they feel that they could bring about change. Furthermore, encouraging transitioners to take on an official role within the board is closely connected to the aspect of empowering. By empowering others to be a leader they are encouraged to be a coordinating and facilitating leader as well, following the example of other Transition leaders.

In connection to considering the role of the national Transition founders, the next paragraph will talk about the role of the founder of the whole Transition movement itself, Rob Hopkins.

5.1.7. Rob Hopkins as a Charismatic Leader

Even if there are no assigned leadership roles and only informal leaders, one person is unique within the movement. The founder of the movement, Rob Hopkins, was a very present aspect in the Interviews. Many interviewees considered Hopkin’s philosophy and hearing him talk about it as a reason to join the Transition movement in the first place. Therefore, Rob Hopkins can be considered an inspirational or charismatic leader. Within the movement, he and the Transition Town Totnes are seen as an inspiration to start similar initiatives, according to the interviewees. It was emphasized, that Hopkins did never aim to be the ‘star’ of the movement, he only wants to be an inspiration for people to act on climate change (Interviewee 2, 6, personal communication). This can also be found in Hopkin’s handbook on Transition, where he states, that every initiative can do and act out on Transition the way they want to (Hopkins, 2008).

However, it seems that the members of the movement view him as more important to the movement than he does himself. This finding is in line with the research Howell & Shamir (2005) developed, who claim that not only the leader has an impact on charismatic leadership, but also followers play an active role in this leadership context. According to them, charisma is “a relationship jointly produced by leaders and followers” (Howell & Shamir, 2005 p.108). In case of the Transition movement, the members place Hopkins on a higher position than he aims to be placed on.

Connecting to this, Larsson and Ronmark (1996) conducted a study about charismatic leaders in social movements. They state that newer movements aim to create some kind of meaning for individuals or groups instead of having a uniform application the movement acts out (Larsson & Ronmark, 1996). This can also be found in the Transition movement with its local initiatives, as it strives to empower individuals to act for change. Furthermore, they claim that leadership in social movements is so successful, as leaders focus on the “participants resources and potential” (Larsson & Ronmark, 1996 p.8). This is directly applicable to Rob Hopkins, as he sees the community and the individuals within the community as the most important factor to achieving global Transition locally.

“He never has this “I'm the founder”. [...] He's celebrating all the things that all the others are doing, he is not celebrating what he has created, he's celebrating everybody else and that’s such a huge difference” (Interviewee 6, personal communication)
By giving all power and empowerment to the people around him, he distinguished the movement from others working mainly a top-down method centered around the leader (Interviewee 9, personal communication).

Nevertheless, the movement has been continuously growing since it was started. Therefore, the idea of Transition has spread so far that now it is more about the actual idea of Transition than about Rob Hopkins as a center person (Interviewee 7, personal communication). This suggests, that the movement has grown so far that it could nowadays also survive without Hopkins as the one person to keep the movements single parts held together. It was pointed out, that since the national hub structure has been established, the hubs have become more important and now also have more power in the sense of how the movement is developing internationally (Interviewee 6, personal communication). This not only shows the development of the Transition movement as a whole, but also the leadership of the Transition Network Ltd., who acknowledge the principles of complexity leadership. By giving the national hubs a voice and more power, Rob Hopkins and the Network demonstrate, that a complex network like the Transition movement should not be led by direct control from the top.

In summary, the ‘leaders’ of the Transition movement do not see themselves as such. For them, action on climate change and building a vital community life is at the center of their motivation. In order to reach this, they do not focus on their own goals but try to coordinate and facilitate the work of others so all local initiatives can thrive. Additionally, they also try to empower other individuals to also become engaged on a higher level and be able to facilitate for others as well. The only person standing out individually is Rob Hopkins, the founder of the movement. As he, however, also applies the principles of facilitating and empowering, the movement was able to grow big enough to now being able to function without Hopkins’s influence. This leadership perception shows aspects of complexity as well as shared leadership, which both are post-heroic leadership theories. By not focusing leadership on single individuals, the movement is able to adapt to the changing environment and differing actions, which are needed to act on climate change.

5.2. Relevance of Leadership in the Transition Movement

Based on the findings of the first research question, the second question aims to show why the discourse about leadership is relevant and important to the Transition movement. In order to answer this question, at first the core values will be explained and it will be illustrated how they are connected to leadership. Following this analysis, challenges the movement is facing will be detailed out and analyzed through the lens of leadership as a way to approach these challenges and develop the movement further.

5.2.1. Core Values of the Transition Movement

The core values of the Transition movement are those aspects, which distinguish the movement from other green groups and movements and make it unique. They represent the core of what Transition means to the movements members. The core values discussed in the next paragraphs reflect the values which have been named by interviewees the most, as this part of the research aims to reflect on the core values in connection to the leadership perception. However, the official core values of the movement can also be found in the 12 principles of Transition explained in section 1.1.3. or the Transition Handbook (Hopkins, 2008).

5.2.1.1. Holistic Approach on Sustainability

One aspect which differentiates the movement from others is the holistic view of sustainability the movement offers. The importance of seeing the bigger picture and how every aspect of life is connected was emphasized a lot. In this context, it was considered important to not only think about the outer perspectives, but also be aware of how the inner perspective changes people and mindsets (Interviewee 2, personal communication).
“The basic thing for Transition is to lift up these systemic questions on a high level and speak about how dependent these things are to each other, but nature should be on top” (Interviewee 3, personal communication).

This shows the focus of the movement on sustainability and the environment and connecting it to every aspect of human actions. This aspect is closely connected to the movements value of being happy with fewer things. People need to think about what they really need in life and how a lot of things are a result of distractions (Interviewee 2, personal communication). This reflection shows the ability of the movements members to consider the environmental as well as social impact of their behavior and therefore a holistic perspective on life.

“The Transition movement is like, how can we as a community become resilient in relation to all different kinds of challenges that modern society had created for itself” (Interviewee 5, personal communication).

Consequently, the most important factors are to become resilient in the whole community, as society has created most of the problems at hand themselves and these complex problems therefore have to be solved together.

As analyzed in 5.1. the leadership perception of Transition leaders is to a big extent congruent with the characteristics of complexity leadership. In line with this finding, the need to look at things as interconnected and in a holistic way also depicts the movements need for complexity leaders. Complexity leaders acknowledge the fact that there are many interacting factors within a system, which cannot be dealt with in a straightforward way (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Even though the movement takes on a holistic approach of sustainability, another core value is to take local action, which will be explained in the next paragraph.

5.2.1.2. Localism
The Transition movement partly has its philosophical roots in permaculture, which is why localism is key to Transition (Interviewee 2, personal communication). Especially globalization and the constant availability of goods has made many local communities vulnerable and incapable of dealing with threats to their local environment. Hence, the question arising in many rural areas is how to build up resilience in their region (Interviewee 7, personal communication). This is one of the core problems the movement wants to tackle. Local activity is thus a core value and also central to the success of the movement. The locality gives people the opportunity to meet in their local surroundings and act on the components they consider important for their community (Interviewee 4, personal communication). Local change is easier to achieve and additionally creates an increased feeling of community, which will be further explained in the next paragraph. By acting locally, global sustainability can be reached through local change. When meeting with people from the local community, it is also easier to get the conversation about sustainability started, as it can be done on a personal level (Interviewee 3, personal communication).

Thus, the philosophy of Transition is rooted in “glocalized development”, a term which refers to global development made possible through locality (Interviewee 4, personal communication). This core value of local action is connected to complexity leadership as well. Within the complex global environmental system, local action is the way to adaptively cope with complexity. The society “must learn to enable adaptive, rather than ordered responses to complexity” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2017, p. 19).

5.2.1.3. Community
Another core value of the Transition movement mentioned by all interviewees is the creation of and belonging to community. Through building community, sustainability can be created because if people come together the diversity of knowledge and ideas and exchange is higher which, as already mentioned before, creates a greater collective intelligence. To build community fundamental pillars are equality, trust and relationships and respect and this is also how the term resilience can be coined. Key components for people to get along are equality, leaving out superiorism of individuals and not
putting yourself first (Interviewee 9, personal communication). One interviewee, whose professional background is in community organization claims that from that perspective and wanting to bring people together, the 12 steps of the Transition movement are very clever and initiate exactly that: community creation and a sense of belonging (Interviewee 9, personal communication). This is increasingly important as trying to be sustainable and doing something for the environment can be very lonely because the society individualized many things that help you to become more sustainable, such as bringing your own bag when shopping. This perception stood out when talking about community wellbeing and sustainability development. The prioritization of individual activities and Don'ts rather than forming a community base and coming together for sustainability efforts can become very overwhelming and the Transition movement aims to tackle this problem (Interviewee 1, personal communication). This view is supported by the statement that the Transition movement, especially the Transition towns are strong because the community is getting together. People find themselves in the diversity of their own local community where everybody is welcome and included if they want to be. This aspect of Transition breaks the individual bubble of sustainability which can be dark and scary (Interviewee 1, personal communication). A common understanding among the interviewees was, that they need to meet the people right where they are, regarding their state of mind and work with them starting from that point (Interviewee 2, personal communication). There is no list of criteria needed for someone to be able to join the movement. Diversity is welcome and wanted, in knowledge, in character, background and anything else. One interviewee, who is an ecologist, states that biological diversity is key for a resilient ecosystem and that this can also be projected onto the Transition movement (Interviewee 8, personal communication). As soon as someone is participating there is a strive to do something that connects people because activities in the Transition movement try to connect people by supporting each other, sharing experiences and building a community (Interviewee 3, personal communication). The social issue is a key aspect in the Transition movement. Ultimately creating community means becoming more dependent on neighbors and the people in your local area. With the current economic system and fossil fuel dependency people do not need each other to survive but in a case of emergency or collapse of the system a resilient community could still uphold itself through neighborly support and caretaking (Interviewee 5, personal communication; Interviewee 9, personal communication). The climate change movement thus shifts into a human caring space of community and belonging (Interviewee 9, personal communication).

Community as a core value connects to the concept of complexity leadership as well as shared leadership. The welcoming inclusivity, the sharing and supporting mindset and the sense to be part of something bigger can enable member’s engagement and capabilities to contribute to the group efforts. The system of the Transition movement is thus able to form a collective intelligence by enabling interactions among all members that then lead to a greater outcome than anyone’s individual work. Building “best practice communities” can be an inspiration and role model for other communities to come together and become resilient themselves. A web of resilient communities eventually results in a resilient society and enables people to tackle the current climate challenges (Interviewee 7, personal communication).

Enabling leaders are essential in that sense, that newly included members might feel overwhelmed with the disconnected society and the pressures they are facing individually. With enabling leader’s support and an initiating push for engagement these members can use the adaptive space in the system and be innovative and creative under the overarching vision of the system, in this case the Transition movement. Windows of opportunity can be utilized through the adaptive space that is allowed by free-flowing information and interaction streams that are interconnected. The loosely structured but highly interconnected community enable individual’s capabilities and thus create a collective impact on a larger scale.

Shared leadership is positively connected to group solidarity and caring about other members, both things are essential to the community component of the Transition movement. Through the common and overarching vision and values the cohesion and community feeling can even get increased (Houghton et al., 2015).
However, feeling a sense of community, sharing power and amplifying support for each other’s work does not guarantee that problems from the external environment but also internal problems will not arise.

5.2.2. Challenges the Transition Movement Currently Faces

Based on the interviews, it was possible to find three main challenges the movement currently seems to face. In the following paragraphs, these challenges are explained in more detail. Furthermore, it will be shown how those challenges are related to the leadership perception and core values.

5.2.2.1. Engaging New Transition Members

The Transition movement is a movement for the whole society and relies on community action taken by engaged citizens. At the moment, the movement operates with only few people who are highly engaged also on a higher level. Therefore, already one of those key people leaving the movement would create a noticeable difference (Interview 8, personal communication). Hence, it is critical for the movement to generate new members who then can start or join Transition initiatives or even engage on the national level. In this factor lies a challenge, which was acknowledged in the interviews. Interviewees state that they either didn’t know anything about the movement until they got involved themselves or that they had expected the movement to grow more rapidly than it actually has until now (Interviewee 1, 2, personal communication). Furthermore, it seems easier to get people involved in rural areas than in the cities (Interviewee 2, personal communication). Thus, the question arises of how to effectively get people engaged in the movement.

This challenge is directly connected with the leadership discourse about the movement. On the one hand the loose organization of the movement with no appointed leaders and the possibility for everyone to take a lead and create an initiative provides the possibility for people to become engaged in exactly the field they consider relevant for themselves. On the other hand, this requires each individual to do the first step and get engaged and in touch with the initiatives themselves. This again raises the question whether a more formalized organization with appointed leaders could be a solution. One interviewee, however, states that more control is not a way to create engaged citizens (Interviewee 2, personal communication). Furthermore, having more formalization would counter the principle of the movement of everyone being able of acting out the change they want to see in their community. Therefore, a way to get people to know about the movement and to get them engaged has to be found without compromising the core values of the movement. This engagement and involvement of new transitioners poses a leadership challenge, as the movement needs to become more known in the society.

5.2.2.2. Systemic Boundaries

The Transition movement states that it is not a political movement supporting one party’s agenda or opposing another by lobbying (Hopkins, 2008). However, it is in some way a movement opposing the political system and societal structures of many of the countries, Transition hubs are located in general. It aims to move from the current oil dependent system to a locally resilient one (Hopkins, 2008). Furthermore, the Transition movement does not support economic benefits coming out of Transition and is disintegrated from the economic system since all information flows freely among anyone who seeks the information (Interviewee 5, personal communication).

An aspect colliding with the political system but also asking for interaction with the system are the systemic boundaries. A Transition group can only go so far with establishing permaculture or educating people about Transition but for big change the political system needs to be involved and the political agenda to be adjusted with Transition aspects regarding rules and regulations for example about land use in the municipality (Interviewee 1, personal communication, Interviewee 7, personal communication). In a way, the movement is a reflection of society and cannot be looked at completely independent from established systems (Interviewee 4, personal communication). Transition does not happen in a vacuum, there are boundaries posed by structures and regulations on national levels and active Transition groups, at some point, reach the situation where they feel restricted and want to step
into municipality level or even higher politics to develop the movement further for an impact exceeding the local community level (Interviewee 1, personal communication). As ambassadors and advocates for the cause of Transition, some interviewees have started to interact on the political level and advise political parties at the government. The response was positive in that specific case and the Transition activists got invited to the parliament a few times to give advice on how to approach certain topics. Even while being an explicitly non-political movement, everything they do is very political, but without forming a political party (Interviewee 6, personal communication). However, there are cases where transitioners either formed a political party or got elected without a party into political positions for the cause of Transition on higher levels than the local community. Municipalities acknowledge the need of grassroots, bottom-up approaches. The municipalities in some regions bridge the national government level and the local communities, since the municipalities are much closer to the people but feel on the budgets the governments oppose on them. Furthermore, municipal politicians are often highly engaged in their communities and thus know what is going on the community level. They can then give information bottom up through to the national government which helps networking for the Transition movement (Interviewee 7, personal communication).

The main work for Transition is done in voluntary time and as soon as an activity takes on entrepreneurial characteristics it is not considered Transition anymore, according to some interviewees. This is seen as a problem by some interviewees. In Sweden, the Transition movement is also connected to HSSL or study organizations like Studiefrämjandet and thus some people get paid to do, for example, applications for funding or coordination work for some activities (Interviewee 5, personal communication). Furthermore, in Denmark Transition does not seem to exclude the business side of Transition and tries to connect with them (Interviewee 7, personal communication). However, voluntary work, the core, usually happens at the very local level, where the people feel their effort is most evident. This is exactly what the Transition movement aims for, but for the development and spreading of the Transition concept nationally and internationally another level of organization and also engagement becomes necessary, for example when it comes to funding (Interviewee 5, personal communication). The Transition initiatives create local change but there is the need of a ladder from the local to the national level for big scale transition (Interviewee 3, personal communication). Therefore, the discussion around more formalization of the movement especially on the national level has been going on and professionality of operations has been in question for a possibility to create bigger impact regarding national politics, making Transition activists electable and thus putting Transition on the top of the governmental agenda (Interviewee 3, personal communication). This is difficult if members need to support themselves for a living and work voluntary to grow the Transition movement, because then the voluntary work is rather focused on the local level and specific activities such as forest gardening or permaculture rather than developing the movement as a whole (Interviewee 5, personal communication).

From a leadership perspective, the whole issue of interacting but also opposing certain things regarding the political system in existence, complexity leadership reappears. As a bottom-up and community-led approach, the existing system is supposed to be adapted to the challenges at hand including climate change, peak oil and the people’s insufficiency to be a resilient community at a local level. transitioners engaging to change and adapt this system can be seen as complexity leaders facilitating the Transition process and creating the environment for change that can lead to a new reality with the vision of Transition in mind. Enabling leaders opening up space for innovative alterations and acting as a bridge between the operational system and the innovators emerge. Entrepreneurial leadership becomes necessary to develop the innovation and novelty necessary to adapt to the environmental pressures and can provide the CAS with solutions fit for the time and context it finds itself in. Even though the actions and interactions of the individual groups lead to unknown outcomes and a future state cannot be predicted, in a CAS all these forms of leadership develop the system towards the common vision.

5.2.2.3. Funding

Another challenge, which the Transition movement has to deal with is how to fund Transition. The movement does not have any kind of funding or other resources than from the charity of the Transition
Network Ltd. which supports local Transition across the world. One reason for this being a challenge is that the work within the movement is dependent on the voluntary engagement of its members. Activities need to be organized out of intrinsic motivation, since there is no one paid to be the project manager or coordinator (Interviewee 2, personal communication). This slows things down and lets opportunities pass as it cannot be expected from people to do certain things in their leisure time (Interviewee 5, personal communication). Additionally, the people engaged in the movement typically want to join Transition in order to do something practical in their local community. Consequently, they do not want to occupy themselves with filling out applications for funding. This problem can be linked to the leadership perception the Transition leaders have of themselves. As explained in section 5.1.3., the members do not perceive themselves as the leaders of an initiative. In most cases there simply is an informal leader, who only stands out because he or she is the most engaged within the group. Due to this lack of direct leadership, there is no one to feel responsible of handling bureaucratic actions. Even the most engaged transitioner will rather want to change something practically than to spend voluntary time in paperwork. However, even if applications for funding are being done, it is hard to receive funding according to one of the board members, as the movement tends to be too critical of the system and the focus of the movement seems to be too holistic (Interviewee 5, personal communication). Furthermore, even if transitioners should receive money for their engagement, funds often only fund materials and not salaries (Interviewee 6, personal communication).

This is a leadership challenge and additionally closely related to the challenge of engaging new members. When engaging new members as well as when trying to receive funding it is essential to frame the goals and values of the movement in an approachable manner, which will make the movement understandable without changing the core values of what Transition tries to achieve.

“I think basically the challenge is to try to frame what we are doing in a way that that can be interesting to funding bodies [...] and often we are a bit hard headed. We don't want to compromise with what we do. But then we have to try to communicate in a way that is intelligible even if you don't know the Transition movement” (Interviewee 8, personal communication)

As there are no direct leaders within the movement and every country is free to design Transition the way they want to, the challenge for the different hubs is to frame the movement in the context which they find the most relevant. As even within one country the vision of what people see in Transition can be different from each other, the leadership challenge is not to compromise important parts of people’s perceptions in favor of funding. Here, the operational side of complexity leadership is needed, as this is a task which is rather formal and aims to create a structure or frame in which the transitioners can work in. Thus, framing the movement in an understandable way for funding bodies will eventually not only generate more funding but also make work easier for transitioners.

Based on the conducted interviews the core values of a holistic approach on sustainability, localism and community were identified. This section connected these core values to the leadership perceptions analyzed in section X. Challenges in relation to the leadership perceptions as well as core values were found to be engaging people, political systems and funding. These show that the discussion about leadership in the movement is of relevance for its further development and resilience.

5.3. Discussion of Findings
The aim of this research is to explore the leadership perceptions of leaders of a self-organized movement. For this purpose, the Transition movement in two different countries, Sweden and Denmark, was chosen as an exemplary case. After looking at the empirical material in connection to relevant leadership theory, a theoretical and practical discussion brings together the findings for both research questions.

5.3.1. Theoretical Discussion and Contributions
Throughout the analysis, it stands out that the Transition movement operates in a very complex system. Climate change poses different challenges in different parts of the world, which makes
individually conceptualized action necessary. Furthermore, the Network and the initiatives are mainly connected under the umbrella of Transition because of its cause. This loose organization offers the possibility for very different kinds of work and structures to emerge. The initiatives work within a system of self-governance and can thus decide their future plan independent from each other. Hence, it was found that the movement can be considered to be a complex adaptive system. This complexity opens an adaptive space, which people can freely work in and in which leadership can occur in various forms. One main finding, significant in all cases, is that the ‘leaders’ of the movement never refer to themselves as leaders. This shows, that in a value based social movement like the Transition movement, the vision is more important than the single individuals who engage.

In general, the Transition leaders showed leadership perceptions, which are similar to two different leadership theories: complexity leadership and shared leadership. Complexity leadership on the whole consists of three different types of leadership, which are operational leadership, enabling leadership and entrepreneurial leadership. Operational leadership as well as enabling leadership will more likely happen on the leadership level, which in case of the Transition movement means the more engaged, informal leaders.

Operational leadership was shown by the leaders, as they see themselves as coordinators and facilitators, thereby making more efficient work possible for the initiatives. The leaders engage themselves in also dealing with tasks other member do not necessarily want to deal with, such as filling out funding applications. This again demonstrates the devotion to the Transition vision. Another important component of operational leadership in the Transition movement is the resistance to order to ensure the self-organization and innovative as well as novel approaches of individual initiatives. However, creating some systemic guidelines such as the 12 steps is also part of operational leadership.

Additionally, enabling leadership is a very present concept within the movement. With community being an important core value, the leaders try their best to empower and encourage new members and possible leaders. By enabling others to take a lead within the movement, they put the vision and wellbeing of the community on a higher position than their own power. Especially, the informal leaders exhibit enabling leadership by leveraging dynamics and structures to ensure the adaptive space necessary for the initiatives to develop.

Entrepreneurial leadership refers to adaptive actions. These are mostly happening on the local level. This means, that entrepreneurial leadership in the Transition movement is the Transition work done by the individual initiatives. In line with the entrepreneurial thought, the work incorporates innovative and novel ideas for the challenges faced on the local level. This is the level where change gets implemented, ideas get developed and communities are created.

The adaptive space created through the complex adaptive system opens the possibility for shared leadership to develop as well. The self-governing characteristic of the Network adds to the possibility to let shared leadership emerge as an important part of the working-processes. Even though there are some officially voted for leaders, such as the national boards, leadership is mostly taken on by informal leaders. In line with the theory of shared leadership, these leaders can change depending on the different initiatives and competencies of the members. Shared leadership is applied by using open space methods and even extended by using sociocracy as a decision-making tool. The theory is, however, also applied in the board. The leaders there try to counter the founder’s syndrome by not staying in an official leading position for too long and therefore change positions rather frequently, giving other transitioners the chance to step up and take on a leadership position themselves. Furthermore, the feeling of community and group solidarity is fostered by the emergence of shared leadership, a core value around which the Transition movement develops.

From these findings it can be seen, that in everything the leaders do, they try to place the vision of Transition on the highest position. They operate with having a strong community feeling and the desire to empower others. This finding gives room for implications for leadership theory in self-
organized social movements in general. The self-organization creates complexity, which leaders of such a movement take up and work with. Nobody tries to control the complexity with explicit rules, but lets the developments occur in a natural way. Post-heroic leadership theories, like complexity and shared leadership, can thus be applied in this context. However, as these leadership theories mostly address the normal organizational context, the theories have to be complemented when applied to social movements, as these movements rely on voluntary engagement. As social movements have strong core values, which are omnipresent in the actions of every single individual, they also affect leadership stronger than in other organizations. Therefore, when analyzing leadership in self-organized social movements, it has to be considered that these values will influence the workings and outcomes of leadership.

As found out in this research not one single leadership theory fits perfectly to leadership in the Transition movement but variations and mixes of post-heroic concepts apply. Nevertheless, in the specific case of the Transition movement it was found that also concepts in addition to shared and complexity leadership are involved. The movement is a community-based as well as community-led movement which focuses on social components in order to promote equality and inclusivity between the members. Thus, it contributes to leadership theory by incorporating two methods. First, sociocracy plays an increasingly important role when it comes to decision making and equality within the movement. Even the voice of members not stepping forward themselves and taking the lead for something are heard and included in a sociocratic organization. Secondly, the founder’s syndrome is neither addressed in complexity leadership nor in the shared leadership concept. Even if there is no designated individual leader, people can get stuck in their role and forget about the aspect of dispersing leadership simply by staying too long in one position and not switching perspectives every once in a while. In the Transition movement, board members, who are elected do not have a limit to their active terms and can stay on the board for a long time. In the position of an informal leader, no one gets elected or replaced in this position as well, thus the possible threat of the founder’s syndrome can apply in this context. These aspects are important when looking at the theoretical leadership within the Transition movement but also self-organized movements in general, the research gap this study aimed to explore.

5.3.2. Practical Discussion and Contribution

There is no doubt among the interviewees that leadership plays an important role within the movement, nonetheless, nobody explicitly states that they are or see themselves as a leader. The roles and functions these members carry out imply different tasks of leadership such as coordination, creating adaptive space or empowering. What most interviewees have in common is that they do not want a formalized organizational and leadership structure, however, they agree that it is difficult, if not impossible, to level up the impact of the movement to the higher national systemic level without people having Transition as their actual profession. Transition activities on the local level are gladly carried out voluntarily to benefit one’s own community and engage in own Transition groups, but the national level seems to be disconnected from that and only a handful of people can find the resources to voluntarily engage on the more operational level of the Network. Thus, the discourse about leadership is directly connected to the question how the Network aims to continue. The local Transition groups appear to be quite strong or viable without someone employed for coordination. If political agendas are aimed to be altered on national or even more overarching levels, the organization of leadership and leadership functions need to be reevaluated.

When working within a loose network with almost invisible leadership structures, challenges can occur which are to some extent connected to leadership styles. The presented challenges from section 5.2.2. can be collectively linked to the overall challenge of developing the movement further for a higher impact on increasing sustainability. For this, more engaged members and funding are needed. Furthermore, the movement needs to be aware of how to deal with existent political boundaries. As leadership is almost invisible and rather intangible within such a movement, the challenges regarding leadership are connected to framing the movement in a way, which makes coping with these problems more practicable, while not undermining its underlying values by formalizing leadership more.
Many of the practical components applying to the Transition movement can also be used for self-organized movements in general. Such movements need to be aware of the existence of leadership, even if it is implicit and intangible without direct or official roles. The development of a self-organized movement is usually highly dependent on the engagement of people, who work on a voluntary basis. Thus, leadership can affect how engaged people are and therefore also how the movement can develop. Being aware of the workings within such an organization even without explicit structures helps using dynamics and adaptive space for the vision of the movement in an effective and efficient way.

5.4. Limitations to Findings
Limitations to the findings include the choice of Transition Denmark and Sweden as a focus case. These countries are in close geographical but also cultural proximity and thus, the answers of interviewees may have been different in other countries. Because of the characteristics of self-organization, perceptions can differ from region to region.

5.5. Future Research
As mentioned in section 4.4.2. about limitations of this research, future research could explore the topic from the angle of members without a leading position. Furthermore, Transition hubs from other countries could be considered to strengthen or contradict the results of this research for the Transition movement itself. For self-organized movements in general, other self-organized movements could be explored in relation to their perception on leadership and which relevance it has and challenges it implies. The results could then be compared to find a more generalized perspective about leadership in self-organized movements. As leadership in self-organized movements presents a research gap, this field should be further explored because these movements display a new way to organize and lead for sustainability.
6. Conclusion

The findings in relation to the introduced research questions from section 1.4. and the discussion lead to the following conclusion. Leadership in the Transition movement is perceived quite similar among the Danish and Swedish Transition leaders. Hence, it can be assumed that leadership is perceived similarly all over the Network, which further research could confirm.

The importance of leadership but also its subordinate role has been found out. In the perceptions of the interviewees, leadership as such was not as present as it becomes when looking at the actions, values and workings of the movement. It is more related to practical tasks than to executing power as an individual. Leadership is exhibited in all components of the movement as displayed in the discussion. Even though it seems to be rather intangible and quite hard to grasp, it is present everywhere due to the self-organized core. This paradox is confirmed by the paradox of the CAS where complexity leads to simplicity (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017).

The presented challenges and the discussion bring about the inference that although the perception on leadership is free of official structures and hierarchies, exactly these points display a barrier for the development of the movement. The various national systems as well as the inherent systemic boundaries are existent and need to be worked with, even though the aim is to replace or adapt these current systems with a resilient, community-led approach. The barriers set by the system are the reason for most of the challenges the movement is facing and are contradictory to the movements core values. Thus, the movement needs to find a balance between challenging systemic boundaries and its core values. However, the perceived leadership also presents barriers because of the unstructured and informal way it works. The advantage of such an unorganized informal organization is the liberty and adaptability to local contexts and situations. The disadvantage is that a good solution cannot be standardized and transferred. Of course, successful approaches can serve as a role model yet each Transition initiative needs to adapt to their local context.

In general, self-organized movements need to be clear about the role of their leaders and how to frame this within the organization but also to the outside if there is an aim to collaborate with the external environment. New developments regarding objectives might call for a reevaluation or adaptation of this framework. Furthermore, different components of a movement might call for different organizational and leadership aspects. Nevertheless, self-organization and the explored leadership perception present a way to lead and organize for sustainability. Thus, the discussion about leadership but also inherited challenges and how to overcome these are of importance for the future of self-organized movements to adapt to future unknown states.
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Personal Communication

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Interviewee 2, personal communication, 23.04.2018
Interviewee 3, personal communication, 23.04.2018
Interviewee 4, personal communication, 24.04.2018
Interviewee 5, personal communication, 09.05.2018
Interviewee 6, personal communication, 11.05.2018
Interviewee 7, personal communication, 12.05.2018
Interviewee 8, personal communication, 14.05.2018
Interviewee 9, personal communication, 15.05.2018
Appendix

1. Interview Guide
INTERVIEW GUIDE
Master Thesis Lena Mehl and Viktoria van Stegen

1. Introduction + Information about confidentiality
2. Interview Themes

2.1. Being part of the movement
Key aspects: Getting involved, personal Role/Function, Integration of new members, core values of the Transition movement, co-working and communication within an initiative

2.2. movement Structure
Key aspects: Exchange among initiatives, board purpose and organization, structural illustration of the movement, relevance of regional hubs, role of network

2.3. Leadership
Key aspects: Innovation, alignment with core values, culture in the Transition movement, challenges, conflict handling, qualities/characteristics of successful transitioners

3. Ending
Key aspects: your future in the Transition movement, something you want to add

Thank You!
If wanted, we will be happy to provide a copy of the thesis after completion in June.

Lena Mehl and Viktoria van Stegen
II. Interview Questions

1. Why did you get involved in the movement?
   i. Describe the process
2. What is your role/function in the movement?
   i. What does that mean?
3. Optional: How did the process of handing over to other members go?
4. How do members get integrated into the network?
5. From your perspective, what are the core values of the movement?
   i. what is needed to achieve them?
6. How do you work together within the initiatives?
   i. Are there assigned roles?
   ii. What are the communication and co-working processes?
7. Can you illustrate the Transition movement (draw shape)
8. How do you exchange between initiatives?
   i. with how many?
   ii. if not, why not?
9. What is the purpose of the board?
10. How is the board organized?
11. What is the task of the national hubs?
   i. Do you/initiatives contact the national hub?
   ii. if no, why not?
   iii. What do you provide them with?
12. What is the role of the charity (Network Ltd.)?
   i. What do they do?
   ii. if not important, why?
13. What role does Rob Hopkins play from your perception?
14. Which qualities do you perceive most important to be a successful transitioner?
   i. why?
15. In the daily work, do you work closely together?
   i. Is there a strong tie among members?
   ii. What is your relationship to other initiatives, hub, network?
16. What are future challenges for the movement?
   i. Can you give an example of how to approach this?
17. How do you see your future in the movement?
18. Is there anything you would like to talk about which we haven’t addressed yet?
19. Other contacts