

## Transition Town Project

15-16 March 2008, Hosted by Natural Heritage Society Oamaru Inc.  
Venue: The Penguin Club

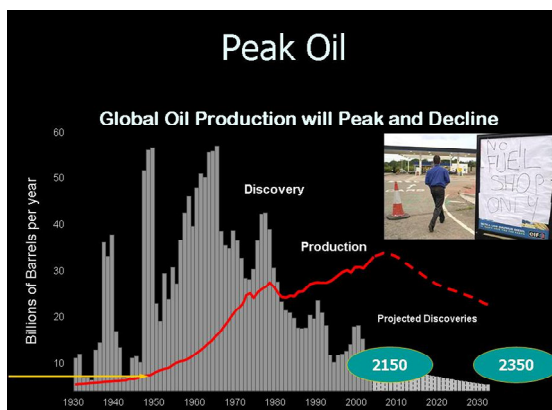
The first Transition Town active research forum was held with a group of 55 participants and the organisers from Oamaru and surrounding communities. The purpose of the forum was:

1. To provide the facts about Peak Oil, Global Climate Change, Electric Power System
2. Help people explore their individual and group responses
3. Provide a forum to generate projects in the community for sustainable value, resilience, adaptation

### Session I: The Facts of the Matter

The project started out with a presentation by Dr. Susan Krumdieck. The theme of a transition journey was explored. The first question was “Why do we need to go on this journey?” The facts about oil resources and global climate change were set out, with particular attention to the difference that would have been made if the priorities and paradigm of people in the 1950’s had been more about sustainability and less about economic growth. For example, if oil consumption had been constrained at 1950 levels, “peak oil” would have occurred until 2130, and it wouldn’t have been an issue, as it would not have involved a change from growth to decline. Also, if oil consumption had been constrained to this sustainable level, the carbon dioxide build up in the atmosphere would not be at a level to be causing the climate change we now have.

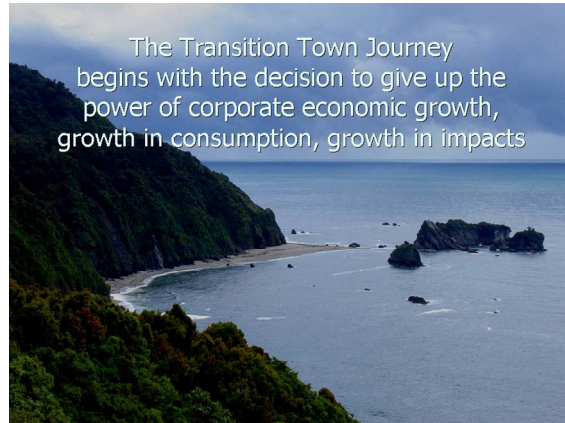
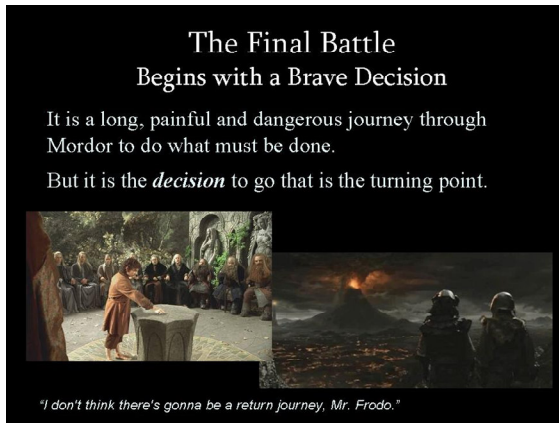
The idea was presented that the paradigm of economic growth without social or environmental responsibility produces a “boom and bust” pattern to development. While the “boom and bust” pattern may enrich a few, it always exhausts valuable resources and degrades the wellbeing of future societies. A *Modern Pop Mythology* was presented which explored the struggle of a fellowship and a few brave, though basically powerless, individuals to overcome a great but corrupting power. This corrupt power was compared



*Let's face the facts and understand the how our world is changing (Session I)*

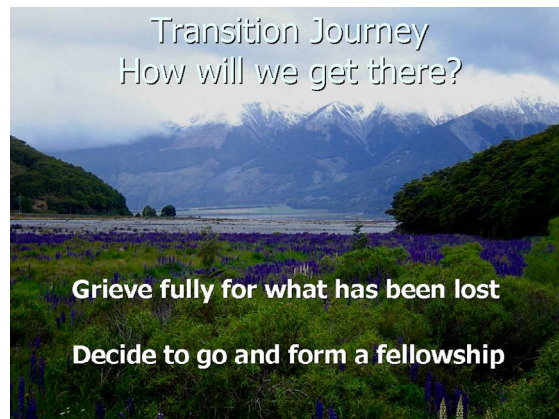
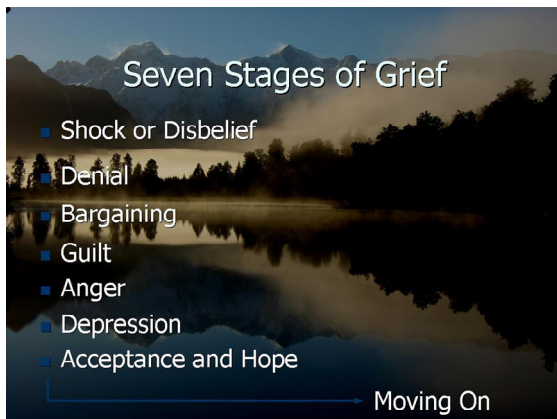
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to uncontrolled consumption growth. The mythology further explained how powerful leaders, warriors, and wise ones may hold off the destruction for a while, but the struggle of the local people is needed to make a paradigm shift. Hope is possible if ordinary people can help each other and make the decision to seek sustained value rather than unrestrained consumption growth.



*Modern Pop Mythology helps to understand the paradigm shift needed for the Transition*

The final point of the first session presentation was to recognise that tragic and stupid things have been done, and will continue to be done. The scientific facts of resource depletion and environmental destruction are often experienced like other dreadful news. The reality of the damage already done should be grieved for, but the suggestion was left that people need to work together and move on.



*Moving forward is a process; don't be surprised if others are not there yet (Session 1)*

## Session II: Your Response, and Learning from it

A short presentation put forward the assertion that people have the capability to develop ways of life that are well suited to their local environment without destroying it. Examples of people around the world also illustrated that people are highly adaptable and resourceful, even though they lived in very different environments.

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Transition Method: The method involved participants writing things on different color cards for their response to each of four scenarios. Then the cards were carried outside and placed onto three posters representing the three dimensions of the transition→scape: People, Place and Time. These first 4 scenarios told stories illustrating the things that people are going to have to deal with, and there's probably not a whole lot that people can do now to change that.

There really aren't 10 things you can do to save the planet.

So, here's the situation, what are you doing to cope?

The participants were challenged by the experience. They learned that the things they may have been worrying about, like using less fuel or having the lights go out are things that can be handled. However, if the environment is degraded and if society breaks down, then it can be very difficult to manage.

Later in the evening the team collected the responses and assembled them into themes.

### Session III: Acceptance and Hope

The session started out with participants being asked a set of questions about assets and shared cultural values. Then a scenario was presented that described how a town of the future was dealing with the resource, climate change, economic and social issues of the time, but how strategic things that had been done in the past had helped the community to be resilient and adaptable. The scenario explained how people in the town had formed a transition town action group, and how they had declared their freedom from the dominant consumption growth economic paradigm. They set up a new local council and court to deal with sustainable resource use and ecological and agricultural restoration requirements. They asked for expert advice on setting aside marine reserves and restoring river and hillside ecology among other things. They established new social and economic ties within the local community and greatly enhanced local services, production and local markets. They also took interesting steps to manage and decrease demand for water, electricity and fuel.

After the scenario was read out, the participants were asked to list barriers to any or all of the transition projects that were illustrated.

The team later collected and organised the responses.

### Session IV: Launching the Transition Project (Day 2)

The session started out with a presentation of the idea of a *Declaration of Independence* for a transition action group. Dr. Krumdieck read out a possible declaration which was adapted from the famous one written by Thomas Jefferson in 1776 to declare the Confederation of 13 colonies free from the rule of King George of England. The response was quite positive, and a copy was left with the organisers for further consideration.

Over the evening, the team had assembled the responses of the previous day and organized them for reflection back to the workshop participants. Dr. Krumdieck explained how the ideas could be grouped into roughly eight themes. The participants

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were arranged around the outside of a “transition-space” and eight papers, each with a theme were placed on the floor in the space.

People were then invited to move into the transition→space to the theme where they have a skill or asset or desire to work. Each of these should already be a “thing we can do”. Participants were instructed to greet the other people who had arrived at the same theme and to discuss a list of possible projects that could be done. Each theme group then chose a project that they could envision accomplishing, and worked through a project planning worksheet as a way to get started.

At this point the atmosphere in the room was electric as people channelled a lot of energy into discussing and planning projects. It was even difficult to get the work to stop for tea or lunch!

Given the great outcome, the team agreed to stay involved in the progress of any projects, and in the continuation of the progress.

### Interest Groups

- Reclamation of Natural Environment
- Demand Management
- Skills, Knowledge & Education
- Community Support Networks &
- Community Governance & Regulation
- Local Production and Markets
- Re-Localized Economy & Finance
- Infrastructure & Technology

*Participants moved into the transition-space to work on projects in their area of interest, or where their talents or passions could be used.*

## Session 2: Your Response:

### **Scenario 1 – Orange Cards: (Adaptation – Oil Supply)**

It's all the news, there is a serious fuel shortage. The price of oil has topped \$200/barrel. The local petrol station has a sign that says people should only buy fuel if they really need it, there's enough for a few days, and purchases limited to 10 litres, with a price of \$4.80/litre. The oil shortages are in the news, the USA has broken with the IEA and has bid up the price of oil to \$350/barrel, thus capturing supply which was previously destined for other countries, including New Zealand. The prospects for further fuel shipments are looking grim. The government announced it will shortly issue fuel rationing coupons, and is reserving fuel for emergency services and agricultural harvesting. The government is seeking fuel shipments from Australia but no deal has been reached.

School busses are not running. City busses are running on reduced schedules. This is the fifth major shortage this year so far, and between the major shortages, the supply is still reduced to where people are limited in what they are allowed to purchase.

The rubbish pick-up has been reduced to once per month. The supermarket shelves are getting empty again.

----- What have you and your family done to cope with this situation? Give examples of your own activities that require travel from home, and how you have dealt with having unreliable and scarce fuel?

-----What has Oamaru done to deal with this situation?

### **Scenario 2 – Yellow Cards: (Adaptation – Electricity Supply)**

It's another power failure. You get out the battery radio to see if it is a rolling black-out with a time announced when power will be restored, or if it is another grid failure due to high loads on the grid, and not enough generation. Since the North Island gas supply ran out, the peak demands, especially in the winter mornings and evenings have brought the grid down at least once per week since May. The price of electricity has also gone quite high, especially since the Huntly coal power plant was decommissioned. The power companies have responded by setting up rolling black-out plans, so that the same people don't lose power every time, where the grid is weak. It's all the news that the power companies aren't letting people know ahead of time because then people use more power ahead of time, and cause random outages. The energy minister was just on the radio explaining that the drought and resulting low lake levels mean that hydro generation cannot be increased, or water supplies may be threatened. With the recession and collapse of the international tourist industry, there is not enough money to build new power plants, but there really aren't many suitable resources to use at any rate. The geothermal fields seem to have been fully tapped. The head of the electricity commission has been on the radio and TV nearly every day explaining that there should be enough

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power to meet everyone's basic needs at all times, but people need to use as little power as possible during breakfast and tea time to do their part to prevent black-outs.

Frozen foods are stocked at only one grocery store, as they have a back-up generator.

There was a big push to put in more wind turbines, but the funds seem to have dried up to maintain them, and they don't seem to have much of an impact on alleviating the power shortages. The Prime Minister is urging people not to use electricity for heating, including heat pumps. Use electricity only for critical needs.

----- What have you and your family done to cope with this situation? Give examples of your own activities, residential and business, and how you have dealt with having unreliable electric supply?

----- What has Oamaru done to deal with this situation?

### **Scenario 3 – Green Cards: (Adaptation - Environment, Water, Food)**

It's the fourth "drought year" in a row. Several irrigation schemes with reservoirs were built to try to capture the rain when it does fall, but even they are dry now. The dairy herds have dwindled down to just a few. Fontera went into receivership several years ago and has shut down its milk processing facilities. You read an article that said that the run-away CO<sub>2</sub> emission growth had finally started to slow down a bit, probably because of the fuel shortages and collapse of America's power grid which hasn't been able to be restarted since the eco-terrorists blew up several strategic coal power stations. Now the atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> is around 590 ppm, There hasn't been ice in the Arctic for two years, and it looks like what's left of Greenland's ice is just pouring into the sea – maybe a few years left is all. The sea has definitely come up from where the old pictures show it used to be. There was another boat of Australians that turned up on the West Coast, and the refugees from the Pacific Islands have over-run the military blockades in Auckland. There haven't been any penguins seen for several years. With the collapse of fish populations around the world, you're glad that there are still a few fish off our coast. But it's a worry that some scavenger fishing boat will come in and wipe out what's left. The pine forests have dried up and were harvested before they burned up like the Nelson fire disaster. But now with the old plantations and the grass that has largely dried up, the dust storms are a huge problem. The local orchards and most of the market gardens are really struggling. At least there's the goats. Seems like they can get sustenance from rocks. Not much good for eating, but there's a bit of goat cheese at any rate, and the olive trees seem to be able to tolerate the heat and low moisture.

Your son's sixth grade class celebrated the lifting of the travel ban because of the latest flu epidemic with a picnic along the river. The teacher brought along a photograph that her grandparents had and showed the kids what it used to look like with water in it. None of them have ever seen water in the river. The water table is so low the well water is starting to get salty. Too bad the desalination plant had to be closed down after spare parts couldn't be found. It was a miracle the old thing had kept running so long as it was. No. 8 wire Kiwi ingenuity probably.

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----- What have you and your family done to cope with this situation? Give examples of your residential and business activities, technologies you use, and relationships you have with your neighbours.

----- What has Oamaru done to cope with this situation?

### **Scenario 4 – Pink Cards: (Social and Government)**

Another call for an election? The last one was only 4 months ago! It seems that the only thing the politicians do any more is try to blame the economic problems on the previous government if they're in power, or blame it on the current government if they're out of power. Do people really care anymore? There doesn't seem to be anything the government can do anyway.

Manufactured goods from overseas are too expensive, but we don't seem to have anybody in this country who knows how to make anything anymore after all the production moved off shore all those years ago. Now that the bloody Holcim Cement plant has packed up and gone, the population will probably drop further.

It looks like your neighbours left during the night. The father was still employed at the school, but there was no way they could afford the mortgage payments, and no way to sell the house for anywhere near what they owed on it. So, they just walked away. The bank will reposes it, but then it will just sit there and rot like the others, with windows getting broken out, and looters going in to take anything that might be sold off. The best thing about the collapse of the property market is that at least rent has gone down. However, all the old folks who were counting on that investment are now howling at the government to bring back the superannuation. Of course, the government's been running at a deficit for so many years that money seems like a silly useless thing anyway. It certainly isn't worth anything to the rest of the world! Pacific Peso indeed. There's another news story about the number of elderly people being found starved or dead of heat stroke in Auckland. Don't all those older people have families? Sure, most people with any skill got out when they could and went to Europe or China to try to get a job, but you'd think they could send some money home.

Oh Great! Another story on the radio about another university closing down. The universities tried for a while to keep up their student numbers by advertising to foreign students. But with the global economic crisis, that's all but dried up, and New Zealand just doesn't have the number of young people to justify keeping all the universities open. That proposal by National to try to get retired people back into school and back into the work force was precious. Without decent medical care, and with the new tropical diseases and flu that seep through every year, the old folks aren't living long enough to take on a second career anymore. And the Greens – if they could ever stop saying “told you so” and try coming up with some ideas about how to get young people to do something besides smoke dope and smash in shop windows, that might be useful. No money for more police? We can't work to provide taxes with all this mayhem! Then there's the ultimate solution from the NZPower party – confiscate all of the property and accounts from the immigrants, and put them on boats off the islands back where they came from.

All the different governments have tried the types of public works programmes that worked way back in the Great Depression last century, but those people were different somehow, they were younger, more connected to families and communities, and most of

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them actually knew how to do something like farming or carpentry. At least we haven't gone the way of the Aussies with assassinations and organized crime taking over. Yet.

----- What have you and your family done to cope with this situation? Give examples of your residential and business activities, technologies you use, and relationships you have with your neighbours.

----- What has Oamaru done to cope with this situation?

### Session 3: Acceptance and Hope

Question set one – Blue cards: (Values) What is a good reason for living in Oamaru? What do I like about it here? What should we keep and preserve no matter what?

Question set two – Red cards: (Values) What is really wrong with Oamaru? What do I really not like about it here? What should we work hard to change or eliminate, no matter what?

Question set three – Green Cards: (Assets) List natural resources available for Oamaru. List your capabilities that others need. List capabilities of several people you know that you need. Can you think of three critical Infrastructure resources?

Where are we going? Is there Hope? Can we do this?

- People like us living like we belong here for the long term

Scenario 5 – Purple Cards: (Transition)

There's a nice little town on the sea. The oil shortage, power system insecurity, and economic troubles have really hit the country and the world. The droughts, floods, storms ecosystems collapse and diseases make it seem like troubled times indeed. But Oamaru is doing ok. Sure, back in the day, the "Economic Growth" culture tried to portray the transition movement as ignorant or Greenies, or any other radical stereotype. But it wasn't long before the benefits started to show up in many ways, and so many other towns were rushing to catch up, that the government had to start cooperating.

The biggest difference between Oamaru and a place like, say, Queenstown which is now nearly a ghost town, is the transition paradigm shift. The things the people did weren't really so high tech, it was the idea to do them that was so revolutionary.

The transition committee actually wrote a declaration of independence from the Growth Economy and the Tragedy of the Commons that it has brought about in the local region as well as the country and the world.

When in the course of human events, ... (refer to Transition Declaration of Independence)

The transition committee soon became an organisation of people from the region with a wide range of backgrounds and talents. The committee organised research into other communities that seemed to be also declaring their intention to shift their paradigm from growth in consumption to sustainability of value. They learned a lot, but decided in the end that the transition would need to be a journey and it needed to start now, with them.



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They organised a weekend forum with a research group from a university, and that forum became anniversary date, the recognised beginning of the transition that led to Oamaru and the surrounding area's resiliency and adaptation through the climate disruptions, political instability, fuel shocks, and power shortages that have caused the collapse of growth economies all over the country and the world. In fact, many transition committees from other communities came to Oamaru in the early days to discuss what the town was doing, and find out how they were doing it. Now there is a confederation of Free Places where the local civic structures have the councils and courts for continuity of the commons that were first pioneered in Oamaru. It turned out that all of the good ideas and good intentions of individuals or groups to "live sustainably" could not produce the transition paradigm shift without the CCCC governance structure. This structure allowed freedom of individuals and organisations to profit from their own talents and productivity, but within the context of the continuity of the community resource base and sustainability of the environment.

The projects started back then were usually seen as "non-economic" according to the growth paradigm, but they have been critical to the town's current viability.

The committee brought in marine scientists from the university to survey the coastal ecosystem and to map out the areas that should be set aside as "no use" sanctuaries. These areas slowly recovered and became well-springs of marine life for local markets and trading to other Free Places. The Marine reserves are now fiercely safeguarded by the whole community. Similarly, the committee brought in scientists to develop reclamation and restoration plans for the rivers, hills, coast line, and agricultural areas. Riparian areas were stabilized and protected, the hills were carefully cultivated in native canopy plants which stabilized the local hydrological cycle. Drainage canals were sealed and raised up to raise the water table.

Agriculture was actually one of the easier areas for the paradigm shift. People had worried that the shift to industrial agriculture for economic growth would be difficult to counter and repair. However, it turned out that the benefits and satisfaction of farming had been so stripped away by the industrial agriculture practices, that many farmers gladly made the shift to community continuity farming. The local CCCC governance structure required that all farms must submit their practice to scrutiny by the committee and sustainable farming experts from the university. All farms were required to develop practices that improved their land and water quality. Many of the foreign farm landlords sold out, but a new generation of farmers took their place and the revolution has been remarkable.

In the town, Permaculture teachers and practitioners have turned the urban landscape into an integrated production and waste management area. Another important move was the establishment of a seed and plant bank at the botanical gardens. Biological diversity of all types of crops were sought out and continuously cultivated in the community gardens to ensure adaptability to climate changes. Poultry and other animal husbandry operations were also required to maintain maximum genetic diversity in their stock. This move alone has been responsible for the farms of Oamaru making it through the weather disruptions and diseases epidemics that have wiped out the monoculture operations around the rest of the country. Now Oamaru's diverse stocks are used as starter populations for other Free Places.

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Transition of the automobile culture has been one of the biggest achievements. Of course there are still vehicles in the town and on the farms and going between the towns. There are even the race car club and the 4 wheel drive club for recreation. But the new form of the town, and the new transport service organisations have replaced the old individual car ownership system. It started with institution of a fuel retail management system in Oamaru, where the shipment of fuel into the region was deliberately controlled, and distribution to customers set up as a reservation system. Very quickly, and several years before the oil shocks that devastated the rest of the country, whole different systems for transporting goods and accessing activities arose in and around Oamaru. It turned out that, with the help of the transport engineering research group at the university, the energy efficiency of daily life in the region was improved to the point where Oamaru functioned just fine on 20% of the oil it was consuming at the time of the declaration. Very few people now own, nor even want to own a car. But everyone agrees that the nightmare of automobile domination, and the health and safety plague that went with it is now over. Yes the town looks quite different from the car old days, with the unique neighbourhood clusters and gardens. But you really can't find anyone who wishes for the way things used to be.

The power system break-down that has plagued the rest of the country has been managed well by Oamaru, thanks to their community response system, and all of the changes in households and businesses over the years. A true transition from the old "we need more capacity to meet our growing demand" way of thinking. It started with the pilot project of the demand response device, and the contract with the lines company and Meridian. The town and surrounding region got a guarantee that the power situation would be communicated to the people, and they in turn would adjust their consumption to match supply. This has meant that Oamaru has been nearly free from the disruptive power black-outs that have caused such problems elsewhere, and it also kept the price under control. This system was instrumental in shifting the paradigm of the people from "demand" to "need". This awareness changed the way people used power in profound ways. New businesses and services were started up that provided value while reducing power consumption.

Of course, local markets and local manufacturing, local re-use of packaging and recycling of materials have all flourished under the new paradigm. Now it all seems perfectly sensible, but one can reflect back on the huge effort and struggle that was involved in this transition. The first small step was banning of the plastic shopping bags and a 50 cent deposit on all containers, e.g. milk bottles, jam jars, yogurt pottels, cereal boxes... All manufacturers with a registered trademark were required to accept back these containers, as they were not allowed to go into the community compost or incineration plant. The revenue from the deposit was used to provide local currency grants for local producers that established products with re-usable containers. Now, the market is full of local produce preserved in Agee glass jars at the local cannery or by cottage dairy crafters. People walk or bike to their local market centre bakery, veggie stand, butchery and tea house nearly every day for bread and a chat with neighbours.

----- List all of the reasons you can think of why the transition measures that these Oamaru citizens have taken **COULD NOT BE DONE** now.

## Session 4: Launching the Transition Project

Lecture presentation describing the transition→scape

Participants invited to look at the transition→scape and find their ideas.

Description of the work of moving into the transition space to find your point of participation and to understand the spectrum of work and who is participating and how. Participants then move into the big triangle on the floor, find their projects, and meet other participants.

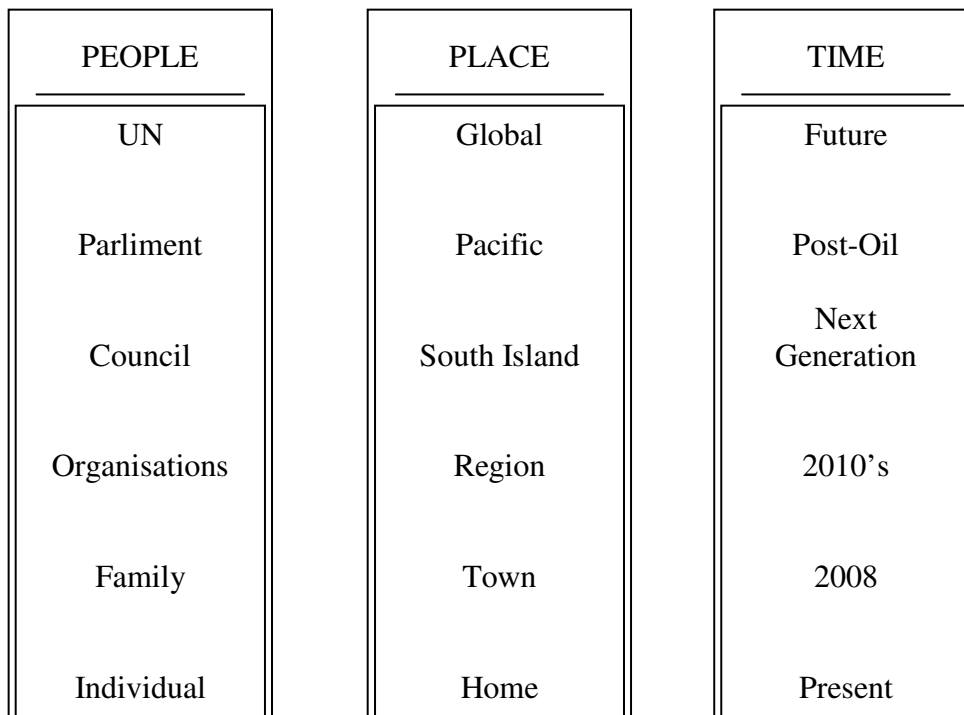
Areas of the room designated for different interest groups to work

Participants charged with tasks:

- identifying the barriers to doing these things
- identifying the assets they have to accomplish the thing
- identify the expertise or help they will need
- identify the work with govt. that will be needed
- identify how someone could be productive and make a living off this

Work collected for recording.

End of weekend forum.



**Transition→Scape**

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