From Individual to Collective Change and Beyond: Ecological Citizenship and Politicisation

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1. Introduction

Sustainable consumption is fast becoming the 'holy grail' in the attempt to tackle climate change both in current environmental policy, the conventional environmental movement and even in academic literature. However, grassroots environmental movements which recently arose, question the 'post-political' consensus around the central role of sustainable consumption as the preferred strategy towards change. They prefer to address individuals as citizens rather than as consumers, and focus on the collective rather than the individual level. Two of the most prominent of these new movements in Flanders (Belgium) are Transition Towns and the Climate Action movement. They explicitly present themselves as a renewal of and a break with the practices of current environmental policy and the conventional environmental movement. However, both put forward very different strategies, discourses and practices about what has to happen instead. More precisely, they give a different content to what it means to be an ecologically committed citizen, and especially differ in how they conceive of the collectivity, the 'we' within which citizens act. The extent to which they politicize this 'we', and thus the environmental struggle, strongly differs.

In this paper, we engage in a preliminary comparative study of these grassroots movements in order to analyze their different conceptions of ecological citizenship. It is based upon qualitative empirical research studying how Transition Towns and the Climate Action movement were launched in Belgium (Flanders) and how they developed during their first ten months. This paper is work in progress, and presents the first conclusions of a research project which just started. In the next section, the theoretical framework we will use is introduced. Section 3 lays out the research framework. We discuss our findings in section 4 and section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Sustainable consumption as the 'holy grail' to tackle climate change

Sustainable consumption is fast becoming a kind of 'holy grail' for sustainable development policy today (e.g., Jackson, 2005; Defra, 2008; Stevenson & Keehn, 2006). The goal of this policy is to "encourage, motivate and facilitate more sustainable attitudes, behaviours and lifestyles" (Jackson, 2005, p. iii). These attitudes involve "more sustainable patterns of consumption, covering the purchase, use and disposal of goods and services" (p. 13). A broad spectrum of measures is developed to reach this goal: from awareness raising campaigns, via education, to economic rewards. Through a whole range of incentives, policymakers try to steer individual consumers' behaviour in the desired 'sustainable' direction. This tendency to strongly focus on sustainable consumption is also present in some of the new strategies that the conventional environmental movement puts forward today. Next to practices like lobbying and symbolic press actions, the cornerstone of many campaigns of movements such as BBL, Greenpeace or WWF seem to be to change individual consumers' behaviour.

This new focus has its counterpart in the academic literature. Several hundreds of studies have been undertaken to gain a better understanding of why and when people behave in pro-environmental ways (Rickinson, 2001). In particular, a lot of studies have been concerned with the so-called 'knowledge-action' gap (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). This research literature deals with the question why people who are aware of the environmental problem often do not change their behaviour, despite the knowledge they have. The goal is to explain, predict, or even influence the performance of pro-environmental behaviour. It is remarkable that in this literature, 'pro-environmental behaviour' is almost always framed as individual (consumer) behaviour. Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002, p. 240) for example argue: "By 'pro-environmental behaviour' we simply mean behaviour that consciously seeks to minimize the negative impact of one's actions on the natural and built world (e.g., minimize resource and energy consumption, use of non-toxic substances, reduce waste production)." However, the question must be asked whether it makes sense to reduce pro-environmental behaviour to individual (consumer) behaviour and why this is done so often?

2.2. Changing individual consumer behaviour: a critique

It is not a neutral choice to define pro-environmental behaviour as individual (consumer) behaviour. With such a definition, one tends to ignore a whole range of "actions that often go beyond simply consciously seek(ing) to minimize the negative impact of one's actions on the natural and built world by demanding profound structural and policy change" as Clover (2002, p. 316) argues. In the literature, the distinction between the first and second type of action is mostly referred to as the distinction between 'direct' and 'indirect' environmental action. Although they do not pay attention to indirect action, Kollmuss and Agyeman do recognize its existence in their overview of the literature. They describe them as follows: "Indirect environmental actions include donating money, political activities, educational outreach, environmental writing, etc. Direct environmental actions include recycling, driving less, buying organic food, etc." (Kollmuss en Agyeman, 2002, p. 258). The evident difference between both is that indirect actions, unlike direct actions, have no *direct* impact on the environment.

A number of criticisms can be formulated against this distinction between 'direct' and 'indirect' actions. First, the distinction is questionable in itself (Jensen, 2002). For example, when activists prevent the building of a coal plant, they can have a very direct impact on the level of CO2 emissions with this kind of 'indirect' action. Funny enough, many activists use the term 'direct action,' with a different meaning of course, for this kind of activities. By calling these kinds of actions 'indirect' and especially by not even mentioning them, they are devaluated and marginalized in a large part of the literature (Clover, 2002). By reducing pro-environmental behaviour to direct environmental actions, important dimensions of what action can consist of disappear from the research focus.

A second problem with this paradigm is that by defining action as 'individual' behavioural change, the result is a tendency towards the privatisation of the solutions for the environmental problem (Courtenay-Hall & Rogers, 2002). Not only 'indirect' action, but also 'collective' action disappears from the research field as a result of this narrow focus. Furthermore, it is overlooked that both direct and indirect actions can be performed both individually and collectively. Examples are cycling (individual direct action), writing an opinion letter (individual indirect action), setting up local food systems (collective direct action) or holding manifestations (collective indirect action).

As a consequence of the marginalization of collective actions, the pro-environmental behaviour model tends to privatize environmental morality. As Sandilands (1993) aptly argues: "[it] shifts the burden of responsibility onto individuals and households, and away

from states, corporations, and global political arrangements. [It] undermines both collective and individual resistance; it turns [environmental] politics into actions such as squashing tin cans, [environmental] morality into not buying overpackaged muffins, and environmentalism into taking your own cloth bag to the grocery store. None of these actions …. makes public or collective or cooperative the act of environmental restoration; none of these actions provokes a serious examination of the social relations and structures that have brought about our current crisis" (p. 46, quoted in Courtenay-Hall & Rogers, 2002, p. 290). Chawla & Cushing (2007, p. 438) conclude: "the most effective actions are collective, when people organize to pressure government and industry to act for the common good".

Third, the privatization of environmental morality is even more outspoken to the extent that the focus is on individual 'consumer' behaviour. Taking action is then made conditional upon having enough purchasing power. In the literature, it is suggested this reveals the "class bias" of the sustainable consumption strategy (Courtenay-Hall & Rogers, 2002, p.289). This problem is most clearly manifested from a North-South perspective. The well-known eco-feminist Vandana Shiva argues for example that the demand of Western consumers for organic food generated the development of a large-scale organic agro-industry in several countries in the South (Mies & Shiva, 2001). Apart from the fact that much of this 'organic' food is not cultivated in an ecological and socially just way, the main problem is that these healthy organic products are exported to the rich North whereas the local people are left with the less healthy, conventionally cultivated ones. In this way, (neo-)colonial relations are reproduced. People in the South do not have the money to assert the 'power of the consumer.' The market laws of demand and supply do not provide a context for pro-environmental behaviour for them. Therefore, the struggle for organic food in the South will have to take place through other means than by 'changing individual consumer behaviour.'

Fourthly, the conceptualisation of pro-environmental behaviour as sustainable consumption threatens to downplay the complexity of current environmental problems. Indeed, they start from "the assumption that today's complex environmental problems can be tackled through unambiguous means" (Jensen, 2002, p. 328). A number of critical remarks can be formulated against this assumption. The question has to be asked whether the climate problem is not structurally anchored in our society and ways of living (Courtenay-Hall & Rogers, 2002). This can be illustrated in a very simple way. For example, the high real-estate prices in big cities are unaffordable to many people, who consequently have no other choice than to buy a

dwelling in the countryside, even though that means they have to commute daily, with all the ecological problems resulting from that. These kinds of examples show that it is absolutely not evident to look in the first instance to the individual level in order to explain the gap between environmental knowledge and pro-environmental behaviour. It is in the first place on the structural or systemic level that the problem of this gap has to be addressed. The conclusion seems simple, but could have a big impact on the research concerning pro-environmental behaviour and the current strategies of environmental policy and movement. Is it not possible that, exactly because of the structural character of the environmental problem, actions that are now marginalised as 'indirect' should have a central role? If this is the case, should the goal not be to empower individuals to act not only on the personal, but also on the societal level? A broader concept of action is required, one which includes direct and indirect, individual and collective actions.

Such a broader concept of action requires a more sophisticated vision of the actor of change. The question has to be asked whether the pro-environmental behaviour approach does not see individuals as the objects rather than as subjects of change. It tries to steer people's consumer behaviour through economic incentives (Berglund & Matti, 2006) and even by non-rational means (Courtenay-Hall & Rogers, 2002). Indeed, from the observed knowledge-action gap, the conclusion was drawn that people do not behave 'rationally' and that their behaviour should be influenced by other means such as role models, social pressure or connecting the desired behaviour to positive feelings of freedom, friendship or even sex, as is done in the advertisement industry. Jackson (2005) underlines for example "the need for policy to […] attempt to affect individual behaviours (and behavioural antecedents) directly" (p.vi). In this way, one no longer has to bother about rationally convincing people and enabling them to draw their own conclusions and to decide themselves about the desired change. Instead, one can steer their behaviour in a 'direct' way, and beat about the bush of rational conviction and argumentation.

In order to gain a better understanding about what exactly is at stake here, it is interesting to draw a distinction between 'behaviour' on the one hand and 'action' on the other (Jensen, 2002). Too often these terms are used as synonyms although their meanings subtly but significantly differ. The central difference is that action includes a moment of conscious decision making, which is not necessarily the case with behaviour change, which can also be reached through social pressure, for example. Actions can therefore consist of the same acts as behaviours, but differ from them because they are intentional. This also means that actions

have to be explained in terms of conscious motivations and reasons, rather than in terms of mechanisms and causes. This is not a superficial semantic discussion. What is at stake is a crucial difference in the way people are approached, as subjects or merely as objects of change.

The distinction that Hellesnes draws between conditioning and education is very clarifying in this context: “Conditioned-socialisation reduces humans to objects for political processes which they do not recognize as political; a conditioned human being is thus more an object for direction and control than a thinking and acting subject. Education means that people are socialized into the problem complexes pertaining to the preconditions for what occurs around them and with them. Educational-socialisation emancipates humans to be political subjects” (1976, p. 18, quoted in Jensen & Schnack, 2006, p. 474). In other words, the sustainable consumption approach starts too often from a kind of behaviourism which does not consider people as conscious citizens. At its best, they are viewed as conscious consumers, but even that is not always the case.

To conclude, sustainable consumption bears the hallmark of the current ‘post-political’ consensus to tackle climate change (Swyngedouw, 2007). It circumvents the analysis of societal structures and remains blind to oppositions of interests, to conflict between multiple future socio-environmental possibilities and strategies to realize them. It avoids the democratic debate that is need on these issues. Moreover, it not only individualizes the question, but also reduces the individual to a consumer, steered from above by all kind of economic and non-rational incentives.

That does not mean that we would simply reject sustainable consumption. Since the second wave of feminism, the personal is rightly claimed to be political, and this is as true for sustainable consumption as for all other kinds of personal behaviour (Dobson, 2003). However, feminists never isolated the personal from the broader political context, as the advocates of sustainable consumption do. On the contrary, their intention was to approach personal actions from the perspective of the broader political context and in terms of their political consequences. Furthermore, the statement that the personal is political was never intended to mean that the private realm is the only space for action. The same is valid for environmental action. As Dobson (2006) argues, “to the extent that our impact on the environment is transmitted through and mediated by social forms of life, the ‘sustainable question’ has an ineluctably public moment” (p. 226).

Crucially, such depoliticized approaches threaten the democratic character of tackling climate change. If there is no place for the confrontation between collectivities defending different conceptions on how to organize society, there cannot be democracy (Mouffe, 2005).The practices that are put forward by the sustainable consumption model do not contribute to the creation of a democratic public space or debate. They do not provide a framework for people to commit themselves in a more political way, to engage themselves as citizens who, through collective action, try to reach a public goal. As Jensen and Schnack (2006) conclude: "Concerns about the environment […] must be coupled with a corresponding concern for democracy. We do not believe in educational efforts in relation to the environment […] which are divorced from this fundamental perspective" (p. 473).

2.3. Ecological citizenship

The notion of ecological citizenship provides an alternative to the narrow sustainable consumption approach. It differs in two dimensions from sustainable consumption – the 'breadth' and 'depth' of how it conceives of pro-environmental behaviour. The first dimension, the 'breadth', concerns the nature of the space within which pro-environmental behaviour can take place (Dobson, 2003). Ecological citizenship goes a step further than sustainable consumption by also including indirect and collective actions within its framework. Not only the private, but also the public sphere becomes a suitable place for action.

The second dimension, the 'depth', focuses on the underlying motivations for this behaviour (Seyfang, 2005). Ecological citizenship approaches individuals as being guided by a broader set of motives than purely individualistic materialistic causes or unconscious drives, such as underlying ethical and/or political attitudes. It can be argued that to the purpose of sustainable consumption, the underlying motivation is not really of importance. The only question which matters is whether the behaviour is performed or not. Ecological citizenship, in contrast, is intrinsically related to its underlying ethical and/or political attitudes. That is why 'knowledge' is crucial as a primary driver for action in ecological citizenship. This has important implications for the so-called knowledge-action gap described above. Promoters of ecological citizenship defend that to bridge this gap not only a broader conceptualisation of action, but also a broader interpretation of knowledge is required. Instead of trying to steer people's behaviour by non-rational means in order to overcome this gap, they argue that it is necessary to enhance people's knowledge about other dimensions of the climate problem. To

translate environmental consciousness into action, people not only need knowledge about the state of the planet, but also about the root causes of the problem, visions on other future socio-environmental possibilities and strategies towards change (Jensen, 2002). These last three domains constitute the core of what we could call emancipatory knowledge as essential motivations for intentional citizen action. In this sense, the notion of ecological citizenship takes people and their convictions more seriously. However, the notion of ecological citizenship can still have very different contents. As we will see, in some approaches, this content is more political than in others.

3. Research framework

Recently, new grassroots environmental movements arose which explicitly present themselves as breaking with the strategies of current environmental policy and the conventional environmental movement. Two of these movements which were recently launched in Flanders (Belgium), are Transition Towns (TT) and the Climate Action movement (CA). They both try to go beyond the narrow focus of sustainable consumption and try to develop forms of ecological citizenship. However, the content they give to what it means to be an ecologically committed citizen is strongly divergent.

The goal of our research is to analyze these movements' different conceptions of ecological citizenship. To this purpose, we engaged in qualitative empirical research studying how TT and CA were launched and how they developed during their first ten months, roughly speaking, from September 2008 to June 2009. With regard to TT, we engaged in participant observation of thirty-five meetings and activities, held in-depth interviews with twenty persons who are actively involved in the movement and analyzed books, leaflets, e-mails, websites and internet fora. Concerning CA, we engaged in participant observation of twenty meetings and document analysis of leaflets, e-mails, websites and internet fora. We are currently interviewing a number of participants of this movement. Twenty in-dept interviews have been planned. The first real activity of the Climate Action movement in Belgium is the Camp for Climate Action that will take place during the first week of August 2009. Because of the deadline for the submission of this paper, this paper will not deal with the camp itself, but will only present the preliminary results of the research undertaken during the preparatory process. In general, this paper is work in progress and presents only the first conclusions of a research project which will continue over the following three years.

4. Research findings

4.1. Grassroots environmental movements breaking with traditional policy and movement

4.1.1. Transition Towns (TT)

Transition Towns (TT) started in 2005 in the U.K., got member communities in different parts of the world, and was launched in Flanders in 2008. The movement arose as a reaction to the twin problems of climate change and peak oil. It states that current environmental policy will not be sufficient to adequately deal with these challenges. Moreover, TT is explicitly sceptical about the goals and strategies that the conventional environmental movement put forward today (Hopkins, 2008).[1]

TT distances itself from the currently fashionable notion of 'sustainable development.' 'Resilience' and 'localisation' are proposed as alternatives. Resilience refers to the ability of communities and settlements "not [to] collapse at first sight of oil or food shortages, and to their ability to respond with adaptability to disturbance" (Hopkins, 2008, p. 54). Localisation principally means that what can be produced locally, should be. Furthermore, TT proposes a so-called "local design for economic renaissance" (p. 135) as an alternative to economic growth, which even a big part of the conventional environmental movement still upholds, albeit then a greener growth.

With regard to the strategies towards this change, the differences with the conventional movement are even bigger, at least according to Hopkins (2008). In contrast to the single-issue focus of many conventional environmental movements, TT promotes a holistic perspective on what has to be done. Instead of the conventional means of 'fear', 'guilt' and 'shock' as motives for action, TT tries to stimulate hope, optimism and pro-activity, especially by developing attractive visions on the future. TT distances itself from (symbolic) protest strategies and emphasizes inclusive community building and the psychology of change as more appropriate strategies. Most crucially, whereas the conventional environmental movement focuses on individual behavioural change and lobbying, TT stresses the importance of collective action. TT emphasizes that the 'man in the street' is not the problem,

[1] See for example the figure "How the Transition approach is distinct from other environmental approaches" (Hopkins, 2008p. 135).

but the solution, and that instead of prescribing answers, movements have to act "as catalysts for a community to explore and come up with its own answers" (Hopkins, 2008, p. 135).

4.1.2. The Climate Action movement (CA)

What we will describe here as the Climate Action movement (CA) is not such a clearly circumscribed movement as TT is, in the sense that there does not exist a kind of founding father or founding book that brings together the core analyses, visions and strategies of the movement. Nevertheless, it is possible to speak of a movement converging around a number of shared principles and goals, which are expressed by its participants and in a multiplicity of leaflets, booklets and webpages.[2]

The movement especially gained impetus after the battle against the G8 summit in the Scottish town Gleneagles in 2005. It took off on the basis of a combination of disappointments with the very poor results of the summit on the level of poverty reduction and climate change and, more importantly, with the fact that the conventional movements nevertheless considered the summit's results as a big victory. That provided the starting point for a new, more radical movement around climate change. Its activists reject so-called "neoliberal illusions" such as carbon trading, nuclear power or bio-fuels and advocate real and socially just solutions instead (Climate Action Camp, 2009, p.1). They refer to the market system of over-production for over-consumption as the main culprit for the current crises. Crucial demands include equal access to the global commons through community control and sovereignty over energy, forests, land and water. Hereby, they consider it essential that there is equity between North and South.

Their strategy involves actions such as mass mobilisations, blockades and occupations, mostly directed against important international summits or big polluting companies. The movement became especially well-known through the camps for climate action which took place for the first time in the U.K. in 2006 and since that moment also in Australia, Germany, France and many other countries in the Western World. In August 2009 the first Belgian-Dutch climate camp will take place. The camps are week-long events focusing on education, carbon-neutral living, direct action, sustainable community and movement building. For the moment, the movement is mainly mobilizing for the fifteenth UN Climate Conference (COP-15) in Copenhagen in December 2009. According to CA, previous meetings have produced nothing

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[2] See for example www.climatecamp.org.uk, www.climateactioncamp.org , www.campclimat.org

more than "business as usual" (Climate Action Camp, 2009, p.1). Therefore, they are mobilizing in order to advance their own proposals and to challenge the world leaders to take effective and socially justice action.

4.2. From sustainable consumption to ecological citizenship

Both TT and CA explicitly present themselves as breaking with existing environmental policies and movements. In this paragraph, we will try to show that they go beyond the sustainable consumption paradigm and embody a kind of ecological citizenship. They are closer to ecological citizenship with regard to both critical parameters we discussed above, namely the breadth of pro-environmental actions, i.e. the place they give to both 'indirect' and collective action, and the depth of pro-environmental action, namely the attention they pay to the intentionality of action and to the kind of knowledge they consider necessary for it.

First, both TT and CA uphold a broad conception of the space within which a whole spectrum of pro-environmental actions can be undertaken. In that sense, they both go far beyond merely changing individual consumer behaviour. Nevertheless, both movements' focus differs. Whereas TT seems to focus more on the so-called 'direct' actions, CA rather stresses 'indirect' actions. However, it is remarkable that the reason for CA's focus on 'indirect' actions seems not to be due to a lack of interest in 'direct' actions, but rather to the fact that they tend to take 'direct' (individual and collective) lifestyle changes as given in a certain way. It seems to be evident for this movement to eat vegan, to take the train, to build compost toilets, etcetera. It is as if they take the principles of these 'direct' actions for granted as a starting point to do 'more far-reaching indirect actions'. TT, in contrast, seems to work the other way around. They conceive of 'indirect' actions primarily as a way to promote 'direct' actions. Their 'indirect' actions mainly consist of education, lectures, writings, etcetera, aimed at convincing people about the need to take (individual and collective) 'direct' action, such as realizing home energy efficiency or community gardening.

Another, related point of difference is CA's focus on what we would call 'direct indirect' actions. These are actions that a big part of the literature describes as 'indirect,' but which activists themselves promote as having a quite 'direct' effect. Typical examples include blockades of coal plants or occupations of threatened forests. These actions not only aim at consciousness raising, but also have a 'direct' effect, for example by reducing CO_2-emissions when provisionally blocking a company or stopping the cutting of a forest. Whereas these 'direct indirect' actions have a central place in CA, TT actively distances itself from them.

Their main argument is that they prefer to 'build bridges' instead of seeking the confrontation with other actors. We will come back to this below.

Secondly, both TT and CA start from a number of ethical and/or political standpoints which underlie their intentional action. These are informed by insights on the three domains (root causes, visions and strategies) of emancipatory knowledge. TT recommends spending the whole first year of a new project to this kind of awareness raising work. CA, similarly, strongly stresses educational practices in the Camps for Climate Action. In this sense, both movements put a lot of effort in enabling people to move beyond the current state of affairs and to become conscious agents of change.

However, it is remarkable that both movements approach these three domains of knowledge very differently. For example, by stressing the "addiction to oil" as one of the root causes of the climate problem (p. 31), proposing "heart & soul working groups" as an essential strategy towards change (p.11), and a world that is more "socially connected" as a desirable future vision (p.4), TT mainly provides a psychological account of these three forms of knowledge (Brangwyn & Hopkins, 2008). CA, in contrast, stresses for example the current neoliberal political economy as one of the root causes of climate change, argues for building counterpowers in society as an important strategy towards change, and stresses justice and equality as central values in their vision for another world (Climate Action Camp, 2009, p.1). CA thus rather privileges a sociological type of knowledge.

An important question which must be asked is whether people consciously choose for one of both movements because it fits better with their convictions and motivations, or whether it is merely by coincidence that people get in contact with one of them and adopt their corresponding positions? And related to that, are people 'shaped' in a certain direction by the movement, or are they genuinely stimulated to develop their own opinion on these three levels of so-called 'emancipatory' knowledge? This issue is inextricably bound up with the question how much space there is for debate concerning root causes, strategies and visions in these movements?

CA is prepared to invite speakers from other currents like the conventional environmental movement, but mostly only for panel debates in which they also have their own speakers. The argumentation is that their own position is counter-hegemonic, and that there is no need to repeat the hegemonic ideas of the conventional movement at their camps because these are already heard everywhere. Voices that are less present in the mainstream debate, for example coming from other grassroots movements like TT, are very welcome, in contrast, also in

workshop sessions where they can speak longer and without antagonist. Likewise, TT engages in public debate with speakers from for example environmental policy administration, green parties or the conventional environmental movement. But at the same time, they seem to have some doubts about inviting more radical and more political movements, especially if these movements are promoting oppositional strategies. This became clear in an incident whereby someone was distributing a booklet which is quite critical to TT to new members.[3] It was obvious that some people of TT were not pleased with this at all. To conclude, there is some space for debate in both movements, but it is limited.

The practices of both TT and CA can certainly be described more accurately by the framework of ecological citizenship than by that of sustainable consumption. However, it is clear that they nevertheless conceive of ecological citizenship in a very different way. In order to arrive at a more precise understanding of what it means to be an ecologically committed citizen in both movements, we have to go beyond our focus on the difference between ecological citizenship and the sustainable consumption approach, and analyze in what way ecological citizenship can have different meanings.

4.3. Two conceptions of ecological citizenship

The hypothesis we want to put forward is that to understand the different nature of ecological citizenship in these two movements, it is crucial to look to how they conceive of the collective level of their engagement, which is central in both approaches. How do they understand the collectivity, the community, the 'we,' within which ecological citizens are embedded? Our hypothesis is that we can distinguish between a kind of neo-communitarian ecological citizenship as represented by TT and a more political ecological citizenship embodied in CA.

Firstly, TT and CA seem to differ in terms of how they define the boundaries of the community or collectivity. TT frames the community, just as most neo-communitarians, as a geographical identity: a town, city, island or neighbourhood (DeFilippis, 2004). Furthermore, in its strategy towards change TT follows a kind of neo-communitarianism which almost exclusively focuses on the internal local community. In promoting the building of local, resilient and social connected communities as a crucial answer to the problem of climate

[3] The booklet that this person was distributing was "*The Rocky Road to a Real Transition: the transition towns movement and what it means for social change*" from Chatterton & Cutler (2008).

change, they seem to suppose that the community in itself disposes of most of the resources necessary for addressing the concerns of these communities and even of broader society (DeFilippis, Fisher & Shragge, 2006).

CA, in contrast, defines community as a 'we' against a 'them,' i.e. as a political entity (Mouffe, 1992). The collectivity they want to build, is a deterritorialized one, based on a vision on society rather than on geographical boundaries. In their motivation text, for example, they state: "we are reaching out to all those who share our vision" (Climate Action Camp, 2009, p.1). That does not mean that they reject organising on the basis of locality. At their camps, they often work with 'geographically' defined subgroups in order to promote local ties and initiatives after the camp. Nevertheless, organizing locally does not mean that locality becomes the main organising factor. What they put forward in such a projects are rather a kind of 'local political communities'. CA is, like a big part of social or political activism, strongly oriented to the outside world (Fisher & Schragge, 2000). Communities, local or not, are only starting points, not ends in themselves.

Secondly, TT and CA differ in how they conceive of the social relations within the community on the one hand and of the relations between the community and the larger society on the other. These differences are at the basis of very different strategies towards change. One of the cornerstones of TT is inclusiveness. With this, they do not only aim at including people who are structurally excluded in society, such as immigrants, but also try to include people who are traditionally not immediately seen as allies in struggles for emancipatory change, such as local business leaders or big landlords. Just as most neo-communitarians, TT rejects conflict models. Consensus organizing and collaboration are the *modi operandi* for solving any problem (Defilippis, 2004). More local social embeddedness is their 'holy grail' to tackle climate change. In this way, they seem to project an ideal of a harmonious or at least cooperative local community, created by all for all (Defilippis, Fisher & Shragge, 2006). Divisive notions such as class, gender or race are not even mentioned in their discourse. The concepts of social equality or social justice are totally absent.

However, TT pays some attention to power mechanisms within the movement in a more implicit way. For example, they stress the importance of broad participation and underline the risk that a few leading people become too powerful after a while. To avoid this they argue: "We recommend that you form your steering group […] and agree that once a minimum of four sub-groups are formed, the steering group disbands." (Brangwyn & Hopkins, 2008, p.24). On the contrary, the broader movement is not really organized in a participatory way.

The fear that too much power will be concentrated in a few hands seems to disappear from the moment one reaches this higher level. The interest of participation seems to be to give everyone a good feeling of being included rather than to really safeguard internal democracy.

In contrast to many neo-communitarians, TT does not necessarily assume that the local community shares the same interests or goals with the larger society (Defilippis, 2004). TT initiatives sometimes tend to present themselves more as local havens of refuge against 'the coming storm' than as a part of a broader strategy to avoid run-away climate change. From time to time, ideas of 'the locality first' sneak into the discourse of TT. For example, local currency systems are advocated "[because] we like our own products" (Hopkins, 2008, p.189) and with the implicit, and sometimes even explicit goal to "prevent money from 'leaking out'"(p.192). Such a discourse not only risks to overemphasize an opposition between the local 'good' and the global 'bad' (Dupuis & Goodman, 2005), but is also very weakly equipped to ward off particularistic or xenophobic tendencies (North, 2008). In so far as TT seems to be concerned about the larger society, it does not present a more extended strategy than a presumed "viral spread" of similar successful local initiatives (Hopkins, 2008, p. 202). As North (2008, p.18) aptly describes, it risks not to succeed in moving "beyond the politics of prefiguration."

CA, in contrast, defends a very different starting point. Like many social or political activists, it states that the problem of structurally embedded power relations is a central issue, not only within society at large but also within the local and/or political community (Fisher & Shragge, 2000). It states that it is exactly because of these power structures that effective and socially just measures to tackle climate change are not taken today. According to CA, people have to organise collectively in order to challenge these oppressive structures and to reinforce the demand for effective and socially just change. In line with most social and political activists, conflict is at the core of CA's activity (DeFilippis, Fisher & Shragge, 2006). CA does not avoid confrontational strategies, opposing a 'we' against a 'them,' which is the political opposition par excellence (Mouffe, 2005). Furthermore, CA argues that conflictual relations are similarly present within the local community itself. People do not automatically share common interests simply by virtue of living in the same locality (Defilippis, 2004). That is exactly the reason why CA prefers political communities above geographical ones. But they also draw attention to the presence of all kinds of possible oppressive relations within these political communities. They developed an impressive number of tools to make them visible and deal with them. They argue that not only the broader world, but also local, and even political communities are conflict-laden and contested spaces. However, because of its strong

antagonism towards a 'them', they build power relations which can often be very exclusive towards people who fall outside the 'political boundaries' the movement defined around itself.

To conclude, it is obvious that for TT and CA community organizing has a very different meaning. For TT, the building of a local, resilient and connected community is the primarily solution to the problems caused by the global scale of today's society. They construct a 'we' which is clearly geographically circumscribed and opposed to a global scale. CA also constructs a 'we', but it is of a very different kind. It is a political opposition, separating a 'we' from a 'them', who are struggling against each other in the name of particular forms of society. This political 'we' is also a kind of community, but this community is not a goal in itself, as it is in the first approach. Therefore, we think it is legitimate to speak about neo-communitarian ecological citizenship with regard to TT, while CA on the other hand seems to embody a kind of political ecological citizenship[4].

5. Conclusion: the place of 'the political'

The different conceptualisations that TT and CA put forward concerning the role of citizens in tackling climate change can be analysed in terms of the different place they attribute to 'the political.' In the beginning of this paper, we started with arguing that in contemporary society, there is a strong 'post-political' hegemony in the way environmental problems are dealt with. The focus on sustainable consumption bears the hallmark of such a post-political consensus.

TT seems to provide only a partial answer to the problem of depoliticization. Although it breaks with the post-political focus on individual behavioural change and emphasizes the importance of both a broader spectrum of action and another kind of internal motivations, the way it conceives of the collective level of its engagement is explicitly non-political. This becomes clear in the way it explicitly rejects a 'we' versus 'them' discourse, conceives of the community as a geographical identity which is internally harmonious, and puts forward consensus-organizing and collaboration as the main strategies toward change.

CA, in contrast, seems to give a more far-reaching account of the necessity of politicization. Like TT, it advocates ecological citizenship, but at the collective level it rather deals with a political 'we' which explicitly takes a position within the hegemonic struggle around how to

[4] Another more well-known distinction between different types of ecological citizenship is the distinction between liberal and republican ecological citizenship (see e.g., Dobson, 2003). This distinction is situated on another level of analysis, and is not suited to frame our empirical findings.

tackle climate change. Amongst environmental policy makers, within the environmental movement and in society at large, this hegemonic struggle mostly takes place only implicitly. It is not acknowledged that different visions on alternative future societies compete and struggle with each other for hegemony. CA goes some way in taking this reality serious. By giving conflict a central place in their approach, challenging hegemonic positions and introducing radical alternative future socio-environmental possibilities they go further in the process of politicization as this was defined by authors such as Mouffe (2005) or Swyngedouw (2007). We argued that it is crucial for democracy to explicitly recognize that collective conflicts between alternative options exist. In this sense, politicization offers the promise for a more democratic dynamic in tackling climate change. To what extent CA and other movements indeed carry out this promise in actual facts remains to be studied.
To conclude, despite their similarities in advocating forms of ecological citizenship, TT and CA greatly differ in their conceptions of ecological citizenship. It is a difference between collaboration and conflict, ignoring power and making it visible, a neo-communitarian 'we' and a political 'we.' It provides two types of citizen commitment which requires the individual to inscribe itself very differently within a collectivity.

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