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Introduction

As communities and peoples across the world struggle to challenge the forces of inequality, exploitation and unsustainability, and achieve transformations towards a more just world, it is important to understand the processes and dynamics of such transformations. What motivates them, how are they achieved, what are the challenges they face, and how are such challenges overcome?

In this chapter, we share the results of the collective exercise carried out by the ACKnowl-EJ project core-team members to synthesize the key learnings from the project about how transformations to sustainability take place.[1] This was combined with knowledge and understanding of other environmental justice initiatives that team members have been involved with in the past.

As we explained in the introduction to this book, participants in the ACKnowl-EJ project were interested specifically in understanding processes of transformation that occur as a result of communities claiming justice for themselves and for nature, as part of what can be broadly called 'environmental justice', or 'just sustainabilities'.[2] This they do through resistance to ecologically damaging projects and/or situations of related deprivation and injustice, and/or the active construction of alternatives that reflect their ecological, social, cultural, economic, political and/or spiritual values.

Thus, our focus has been on deliberate collective action of communities towards a shared vision as the driver of such transformations (though this does not mean all members of the collective necessarily share such a vision; there are often internal differences). This focus stems from our understanding that movements from below hold the greatest promise for moving towards more just and sustainable futures, more than or often in opposition to state action and managed transitions, though the latter can also at times be a contribution to the drivers of overall transformation. As explained also in the introduction of the book and further expanded below, we have distinguished between 'transformations' that entail fundamental or systemic

changes in the structures of injustice and unsustainability and towards structures of justice and sustainability, and 'transitions' or 'reforms' that do not challenge existing structures.

Such an understanding also necessitates a strong leaning towards research and action that is oriented towards transformation, both in the methodologies used (making them as participatory and community-led or community-based as possible) and in the analysis of the findings. This bias is made explicit and reflected in the various case studies and other outputs of the project.

Building on the conceptual framework we developed to carry out the ACKnowl-EJ project explained in the introduction of the book and our empirical findings from the case studies, in this chapter we provide key concepts about transformations to sustainability that we propose as a basis for developing a theory of just transformation to sustainability from the ground up. We first discuss what our understanding of 'transformation' is. Then in the following four sections we distinguish between how transformation happens (from conflicts to alternatives), how communities/movements seek transformation (strategies), what helps to make transformation happen (enablers), and what is transformed (scalar, temporal and spatial dynamics). Throughout, we illustrate the key points with examples of case studies presented in the rest of the book; these appear in italics.

What Is Transformation?

Transformation
Etymology: *trans* = across + *form* = mould, character
Dictionary definition: marked or substantial change in form, structure, character or appearance

While the above dictionary and etymological understandings of the word 'transformation' are important, to elaborate and add nuance, we propose the following characteristics based on the learning of the ACKnowl-EJ project. Transformation from the ground up is:

1. A process in which conditions of injustice and unsustainability undergo profound changes towards situations of justice and sustainability. For instance, this may involve a move towards greater and more widespread participation in decision-making, greater economic security for everyone, greater power of local communities in relation to the state, greater gender, class, caste and other forms of equality within communities, legitimation of diverse knowledges and values, reduction of violence in all its forms (direct, cultural and structural), and so on. Transformation also calls for a proactive and collective vision of *possible* futures. For instance, in the Indian process Vikalp Sangam which brings together praxis of radical transformation from

across the country, there is a deliberative process of envisioning a more just, equitable and sustainable India (Kothari 2019), the framework of which was used as one basis of analysis in the ACKnowl-EJ project.[3] In the case of Boğaziçi University in Turkey, where in 2021 there was an attempt to take over the university through authoritarian politics, academics say that *'until the ideal of a free and independent university run based on participatory principles is realized in Turkey … We do not accept, we will not give up'*. There is therefore a combination of objectives and intentions, practices and visions, and ethics and values guiding the actions of the relevant actors.

2. A process of emancipation that entails revealing, challenging and dealing with some or all root causes of oppressive conditions. These causes include structural and relational properties of the political, ecological, social, cultural and economic spheres of society, including prevalent forms of discrimination and domination such as (singly or in combination with) capitalism, colonialism, modernity,[4] patriarchy, racism, statism and speciesism or anthropocentrism.

3. Systemic and radical change, resulting in new (or revitalization of old) relations, structures and cultures (including narratives, knowledge, beliefs, institutions, norms, values, behaviour) that promote different forms of just and sustainable alternatives. It is in contrast with both business as usual approaches and reformist approaches, which seek gradual change within prevailing structural and relational conditions – though we recognize there is a distinction between those reforms that could, over time and building momentum, result in transformations such as progressive expansion of fundamental rights to humans and the rest of nature, and those that simply reinforce the structures of injustice such as the 'greening' of capitalism. As Andre Gorz (1967) said:

> A reformist reform is one which subordinates its objectives to the criteria of rationality and practicability of a given system and policy. Reformism rejects those objectives and demands – however deep the need for them – which are incompatible with the preservation of the system. On the other hand, a not necessarily reformist reform is one which is conceived not in terms of what is possible within the framework of a given system and administration, but in view of what should be made possible in terms of human needs and demands.

We come back to this later in the chapter.

To be clear, we do not claim here a comprehensive treatment or understanding of processes of transformation in all their diversity. There are significant gaps – for instance the aspect of technological transformations is not dealt with here. Environmental justice is itself a limited field of enquiry and frame of understanding, even though in the project it was very broadly understood. Nevertheless, and acknowledging fully the limitations of any single project and of the people involved in it, we feel that what has emerged from the project is significant enough to put out in this form.

How Transformation Happens: From Conflicts to Alternatives

Conflicts: Antagonistic relations between two or more sets of actors, in which the fundamental rights, values and well-being of one or more of them are threatened or under attack; 'actors' can include non-human species and other elements of nature. In this project we did not consider conflicts arising only out of specific activities such as extractivist projects, but also situations of deprivation and injustice such as real poverty, gender or caste or 'race' discrimination, etc.

Alternatives: Alternatives can be practical activities, policies, processes, technologies or concepts/frameworks that lead us to equity, justice and sustainability. They can be practised or proposed/propagated by communities, government agencies, civil society organizations, individuals and social enterprises, among others. They can simply be continuations from the past, reasserted in or modified for current times, or new ones; it is important to note that the term does not imply these are always 'marginal' or new, but that they are in contrast to the mainstream or dominant system.

*Transformation is usually **inseparable from conflict***, first because contradictions are a stimulant for change and second because movements for progressive change are resisted by those with vested interests in the status quo. This can include 'background' situations like structurally caused deprivation and inequality *(e.g. in the case of the weavers of Kachchh, India, macro-economic policies brought in by globalization in India, leading to unfair competition in the market from industrially produced textiles)*; it can be material/physical deprivation, dispossession or displacement, actual or proposed, often violent *(e.g. the enclosure of grazing commons for exclusionary wildlife conservation by the state, reducing the area available to the Raika pastoralists in Western India; the allocation of forest commons by the state for mining to external companies in the case of the Indigenous/*adivasi *villages of Korchi, Maharashtra, India; wood pirating by timber companies in Lomerío, Bolivia; the building of large-scale development projects in Indigenous peoples' territories, like the power line from Venezuela to Brazil in 1997; large-scale industrial investments and coal-fired power expansion in the Yeni Foça region of Turkey)*; it can be epistemic (forms of knowledge) impositions (*e.g. fire control policies in many parts of the world, such as Canaima National Park, Venezuela*) and displacement; and/or the hegemony of ontological systems (ways of being).

Conflict is rooted in situations that are perceived as violent and unjust and invite us to reflect on the opportunities that such clashes of interest and visions offer to produce transformation. Interestingly, at times a heightened conflict can even be a sign of imminent or ongoing (but not completely manifest) positive transformation, e.g. when the entrenched system hits back at a movement because it is actually being shaken and feeling the pressure.

Indeed, movements may deliberately exacerbate obvious conflicts to force a response, such as setting up blockades and other non-violent civil disobedience

actions *(e.g. the anti-mining movement in Argentina)*, or even in violent ways. Conflicts also occur when authoritarian regimes perceive a threat from institutions promoting freedom of speech and independent academics, such as Turkish President Erdoğan's attempt to clamp down on Boğaziçi University (Kadıoğlu 2021). The presence of conflict can indicate the surfacing of the root causes of injustice and the rebalancing of power relations. It indicates a desire for change, and the development of a consciousness that change is possible and actionable despite obstacles, a necessary step towards transformation. Conversely, the absence of conflict can sometimes be a sign of co-optation by the system, which is very capable of 'tolerating' and even incorporating alternatives at scales and in forms that do not threaten it. This can also be a sign of great asymmetries in power that prevent the issues in conflict coming to the surface, often leading to more silent forms of resistance (Scott 1985). Deep understanding and analysis are needed to tease out the complex signals that conflicts or their absence are giving out.

Transformations often progress **from resistance (conflict) to alternatives**. Resistance can arise in different contexts and different ways: as reactions to an externally imposed decision that forces those adversely impacted to act, or as proactive actions anticipating a situation of conflict. In a sense, resistance itself is an alternative, for it is an assertion of identity and power by the impacted, and usually includes implicit or explicit articulation of a different worldview from those being imposed by the dominant. Nevertheless, it can be considered as conceptually different from the construction of pathways of well-being that are alternative to the ones being imposed. In several case studies in this project, communities and citizens not only opposed a project or situation of conflict, but also proposed or implemented their own initiatives for livelihoods, knowledge, conservation and/or other aspects important for them.

Transformation involves the **pursuit of justice**. This includes actions to reduce structures of discrimination such as patriarchy, capitalism, coloniality and racism; new forms of democracy *(such as the neighbourhood forums that flourished in Turkey after the Gezi movement, including the Yeni Foça Forum and the local assemblies in Argentina)* that empower previously marginalized voices to contend and change decisions across different spheres of transformation; or reassertion of traditional governance systems vis-à-vis the nation-state *(such as in the movements of Indigenous nations in Canada)* and more equitable distribution of rights and responsibilities to promote economic and other forms of security for all *(e.g. in the history of environmental conflict in Canada, resistance to extractivism has been led predominantly by First Nations like the Unist'ot'en, defending land and waters while fighting for self-determination in the face of ongoing colonialism)*.

Transformation relies on the **creation of new meanings**, involving the dismantling of conventional understandings and categories and the breaking down of binaries and divisions, which could be present in both traditional and modern societies. For example, environmental justice is about reconceptualizing nature as

the place where we live, work and play, especially for modern societies; this may well entail re-learning ancient ways of relating to the rest of nature. Recognizing the rights of nature, with its own agency and subjectivity, is one method. *The Haida Gwaii struggle against logging in Canada led to a rethinking of the categories of what a forest is.* Similar re-conceptualization is involved in the movements against plantations being equated to forests and movements across the world fighting (and winning) battles over rights to rivers.

Transformation requires **co-evolutionary change across multiple spheres of society**: the social, cultural, economic, political and ecological spheres of life and the multiple ethical and spiritual values that connect with these (see Figure 2.2 page 61, and Annex 1 page 68). The beginning point of transformation can be in any of these spheres, and we think that it is reductionist to assume that any one of these is always the key sphere. Transformations can begin within the economic dimension, but other dimensions can also be starting points *(in the cases of Canaima National Park in Venezuela and Lomerío in Bolivia, the important transformations started taking place first in the political sphere; movements of resistance to the authoritarian regime in Turkey are focused especially at the level of counter-hegemonic discourse).*

There is a dynamic relationship among the various spheres of society, with a major change in any of them likely to affect the others. At any given stage of the process, the transformation could be harmonious among these spheres and values, or arising from tensions, with spaces for change opening in the interstices produced by contradictions between spheres (e.g. economic and ecological). *The Kachchh weavers' case from India clearly displays these tensions and contradictions, with positive change in the livelihoods and economic situation of the weaver community and an attendant reduction in traditional discrimination on the basis of caste, gender and age, being tempered by an increase in economic inequality within the weaver community, and an overall larger ecological footprint of their products being sold globally rather than exchanged only locally. In the case of Korchi, India, significant transformation in many dimensions is taking place, but is (as in the case of the Kachchh weavers) partly dependent on an external, capitalist market. In Canaima, Venezuela, the Pemon Indigenous people have gained considerable agency and political recognition, but have had to move to extractivism to sustain livelihoods.*

A process of continuous or periodic self-reflection and self-assessment (with or without external facilitation) helps to generate awareness the relationships among the different spheres of society and enable possible corrective measures, though of course this would depend on the conditions available at a given time, including material conditions and what worldviews are prevailing. This conception of change across multiple spheres presents challenges for understanding, because case studies suggest uncertainty about whether transformation needs to occur across all (or most) spheres, or whether changes in different spheres might occur in sequence, over different timescales. *The Kachchh weavers study, for instance, brought out this complexity, posing challenges to the study team in trying to understand multiple*

dimensions of transformation (see below on this) with some depth within the given time and resource constraints of the project.

Additionally, alternative transformations may not even be immediately visible in the midst of conflict scenarios; *at Boğaziçi University, continued resistance has created a credible narrative acknowledged by the public, which keeps the door open for alternative paths, paths that may effectively open up when movements continue believing in collective agency, stay resilient to institutional pressures, and keep proactively imagining and building alternative futures.*

How Communities/Movements Seek Transformation: Strategies

Transformation happens through **confluences and alliances** that build constituencies around progressive alternatives (though of course individual and isolated actions can also trigger processes towards transformation). This involves the creation of solidarities and cross-sectoral, cross-cultural and/or intercultural dialogues – the creation of physical, social and virtual spaces for sharing experiences, constructively challenging each other, engendering collaboration and collectively envisioning possible alternative futures. *The Lomerío case study in Bolivia is a very good case in point, as all the transformative strategies that the Monkoxi Indigenous people have put in place over the last four decades to advance their dream of self-government have been reliant on a wide range of alliances with NGOs, international cooperation, universities and key governmental actors. Similarly in Argentina, the ability of community assemblies to challenge large-scale mining activities, policies and discourses at local and national levels has been possible through the formation of a national network of assemblies and the creation of multiple alliances with institutional (local governments, church, unions) and professional actors (scientists).* Confluences increasingly occur across spheres, for example where movements involve solidarities between organizations that have traditionally sought to instigate change through single spheres (such as labour unions or environment groups). Such confluences can also be across space and time, and not necessarily even explicitly recognized or conscious, e.g. when news of resistance and alternative initiatives in one part of the world can inspire similar action in another part *(for instance Indigenous Life Plans, which started in Colombia in the 1990s and have become an inspiration for Indigenous peoples throughout Latin America and beyond)* or revived memories of historical incidents of transformation can inspire movements in the present. *For example, fighting against oil and gas pipelines, and working together to stem the expansion of the Alberta tar sands in Canada has brought together unprecedented coalitions of people, communities and organizations, serving to help break down 'issue silos' that have separated efforts for economic, social and environmental justice for decades. This emerging movement of movements forged in the fight against proposed pipeline after proposed pipeline has been opening up space in Canada to think together about just and sustainable alternatives to extractivism.*

*Transformation takes place through a **diversity of strategies**.* For example, urgent efforts to resist imminent threats require different strategies from longer-term efforts to build alternatives. Even longer-term efforts to transform power relations across different spheres require multiple strategies because different forms of power are amenable to different forms of action. As repeatedly demonstrated in the different chapters of this book, following the Conflict Transformation Framework (Rodríguez and Inturias 2018), such diversity of strategies may range from political mobilization, legal advocacy, lobbying, creating new institutional arrangements and modes of production, strengthening social and political organization, revitalizing local knowledge and histories, creatively using spaces within the system, recognizing that the system is not a monolith (e.g. rights-based laws enacted by the state), and others. *The analysis of multiple movements of Indigenous peoples in Canada and anti-mining movements in Argentina present in this book show a large diversity of such strategies; the campaign against mining and asserting local governance in Korchi, India, and the movement against the Brussels jail also reveal such diversity.* The strategy that is prioritized in a given moment in time largely depends on the actors that are leading the struggles, the alliances that can be built and where they seek to produce change, but also on the nature of the conflict (e.g. latent versus manifest). Conflicts over knowledge systems, which tend to be silent and involve invisible forms of power such as discourses and narratives of environmental change, require strategies that help create a new social consensus over meanings and values of nature. In this vein, the Argentina anti-mining movement has deployed diverse strategies and alliances that have successfully challenged extractive discourses, narratives and supporting actors and institutions.

Conflicts over extractive activities, which tend to be overt and are about an unfair distribution of harms and benefits or about lack of participation in decision-making, often require producing urgent changes in institutional and decision-making frameworks. This is why resistance strategies like political mobilization or creating new institutional decision-making structures are often privileged in these types of struggles. Yet long-term transformation requires also building new capabilities and networks, which is why working on issues such as strengthening local organization and sensitizing decision-makers or the business sector are also often part of the necessary strategies for change. *Similarly, the anti-coal movement in Aliağa, Turkey was always very busy with the continuous daily struggle and bureaucracies in the courts on the legal front. Hence, while trying to stop the coal-power plant projects, they had little time and resources to develop an alternative energy discourse that would offset or at least weaken the hegemonic modernist discourse of the state centred on looming energy scarcity from the 1980s onwards. Offering an alternative energy vision would surely be crucial for the long-term viability of the resistance as it would help them to break from a rather reactive and negative stance and enter a proactive one.*

As explored in the Argentinean and Canadian chapters (8 and 11 respectively), the EJAtlas documents how environmental justice groups have mobilized diverse strategies in their struggles, and how this diversification has been associated with their ability to succeed in their aims (stopping and suspending projects).

What Helps to Make Transformation Happen: Enablers

*Transformation requires a combination of **praxis and theory**,* the hands-on and the conceptual, the local or grassroots and the wider scales (regional, national and/or global), the individual and the collective (behaviour, worldviews, etc.). Any one of these without the other will be incomplete (though at a given moment in time one may well be found without the other), and likely to be unsustainable.

Transformation requires a ***sense of community or collective***, something larger than an individual with which the individual can identify, something that is bigger than the sum of the individuals that comprise it, and something that produces and safeguards a set of commons (physical, material, intellectual, cultural, ethical). This can be a traditional village or urban community, in its old or modified form; or a completely new collective formation such as a new settlement, an educational institution, or others. A common purpose and identity, and norms that govern the commons, binds this community together. The collective strength that a community provides is a significant enabler of transformation, including at the level of individuals *(for instance, in Turkey, in both the Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi cases, cause-oriented activism brought a diverse set of actors to understand each other better, enabled collaboration despite differences, enhanced the sense of belonging and collective agency by strengthening the community culture, and reminded participants why they cared about localities and identities and how they relate to local and institutional histories).*

A community that is internally thriving, enabling spaces for meaningful participation to all members, providing a balance between individual freedom and identity and the health of the community, capable of intergenerational learning and respect (including enabling youth energy and innovation), is likely to be more successful in transformation than one that is ridden with internal inequities, divisions and rigidity. *An example of what happens when there is no conscious or proactive collective initiative is the case of the weavers of Kachchh, India, where significant positive transformation at the level of individual families is not necessarily translated into economic enhancement for the community as a whole (several weaver families are left behind), or does not enable an effective community response to negative state policies (such as taxation on handloom products that further disprivileges them vis-à-vis industrial products) … though the absence of collective action is not the only cause of these problems or weaknesses.*

Within the sense of the collective, however, there will be complex dynamics between that collective and the individuals within it. Various participants of an

initiative towards transformation will view it differently, will themselves be transformed (or not) in different (and not necessarily mutually complementary) ways, and will respond differently to various situations in the process. The process itself can often help resolve or reduce differences that can be conflictual; *in the case of the Boğaziçi resistance in Turkey, within participatory processes among academics, strategies were built in small increments, and while deciding on arenas of contestation to be mobilized, care was taken to respect the common wisdom emerging from discussions.*

Transformation has ***multiple enablers***. These include:

- actual presence of and/or sense of injustice and the desire to change these;
- facilitation or leadership from within or outside the relevant actors/community – empowered local collectives or communities;
- horizontal (local to local or peer to peer) and vertical (local to wider scale) networks or alliances of learning and support;
- enabling policy frameworks;
- material conditions enabling action beyond survival; and
- cultural drivers including progressive worldviews and the intercultural exchange of such worldviews.

Some enablers or catalysts are only sparks, such as a sudden government move to displace people, or an earthquake; others are more sustained, such as leaders who sustain processes of transformation over a period of time. Different combinations of these will work in different situations; generalized 'recipes' for transformation need to be viewed with caution as they may not be sensitive to local conditions. The role of various forms of the state (including law), market and civil society, will differ in different contexts.

Additionally, some enablers may be direct and visible, and others indirect and invisible or 'behind the scenes', e.g. technological developments in one part of the world could have significant influence in another, enabling or disabling transformation in profound ways; or general changes in educational opportunities for marginalized people may create the social conditions for or against transformation. Another way of stating this is to see some enablers as having agency, while others are circumstantial.

*Transformation requires or is likely to be **more sustained when it includes a vision of alternatives***, a collective understanding of directions in which to head, based on shared ethical values that bind collective action and instil strength. This does not need to be fully cooked from the beginning, and indeed needs to constantly evolve and to encompass multiple perspectives and internal divergences, but without some such collective sense and agreement on direction and values (including individual ethical and spiritual persuasions) that are part of an evolving cultural ethos, transformations are likely to be short-lived or even counterproductive. *An example of such a vision of alternatives can be found in Bolivia and Venezuela, with the Monkoxi*

and Pemon Indigenous peoples respectively. In both, the longer-term vision of alternatives in their struggles involved making fundamental changes to the model of the nation-state in order to open up a space for the acknowledgement of pluricultural citizen rights in the national political and legal frameworks, including the right to territorial ownership, self-determination, political autonomy and defining their own forms of development, among others. Both cases involved intense social and political mobilizations to bring about these changes, which go well beyond the local scale of the conflicts. In the Brussels jail campaign, the resisters also came up with alternative strategies, which strengthened their position vis-à-vis the state. In the case of the Beirut resistance movement against waste, the absence of any alternative to how the city was handling garbage could have been a factor in its eventual collapse; possibly the same could be said of the Canaima case. On the other hand, the fact that a resistance movement comes up with an alternative does not guarantee its success; in the case of Canaima in Venezuela, for instance, despite this combination being strongly presented, the extractivist economy and state were too powerful. Overall, though, the project was not able to go as deep into the connection between resistance and alternatives as desired.

Similarly, over the last few years in Canada there has been a new and powerful strategy for transformation emerging in Indigenous communities opposing ongoing oil and gas development; they are building solutions in the pathway of the problem. From the Healing Lodge and permaculture gardens at the Unist'ot'en camp in British Columbia, to the Treaty Truck House at the Mi'gmaq protest camp in Nova Scotia, to the Tiny House Warriors in Secwepemc territory, to the Watch House on Burnaby Mountain, Indigenous people are building low-carbon, beautiful, culturally grounded alternatives and placing these alternatives strategically to block the way of new oil and gas projects being pushed into their territories. These alternatives are offering inspiration by making clear that there are other ways to build economies. At the same time, they are enacting Indigenous sovereignty and lifeways.

*Transformation requires movements that encompass **plural forms of knowledge and values**.* Epistemic and cognitive justice and the acknowledgement of other worlds and other ways of being are pre-conditions for abandoning previous ways and towards transformation. This may entail considerable decolonization of the mind in many parts of the world. It also requires that knowledge and its use is linked to ethical norms and values (such as those of equality, solidarity, reciprocity; see Annex page 328), if knowledge is to transform into wisdom, and contribute to transformation. The assertion of knowledge as a commons, enabling not only democratic sharing but also multiple points of synergistic innovation, is a crucial part of transformation. Where movements are built on confluences across scales and cultures, they will need to incorporate both universal narratives and contextual knowledge and values. For instance, a shared narrative of radical democratic decision-making processes and institutions in a Latin American Indigenous people may look different from equivalent narratives in a European city. *In Canada there*

are attempts at plural legal understandings where common law perspectives are joined with Indigenous law. On the ground this often entails the assertion of Indigenous law. For example, the Unist'ot'en are practising Anuk Nu'at'en (Wet'suwet'en law), based on a feast system of governance. Such legal approaches are based on an ecological wisdom and respect for nature lacking in colonial laws. Similarly, the Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation government took over the management of the salmon fishery by passing, implementing and enforcing their own Indigenous law. But the transformation may also be based on the merging of elements from various knowledge systems, as in the case of the Kachchh weavers in India where traditional skills and motifs have been combined with modern designs, products and technologies in innovative ways. Or the transformation may be entirely within modern contexts, as seen for instance in the emergence of counter-knowledge in the campaign against the Brussels jail proposal.

What Is Transformed: Scalar, Temporal and Spatial Dynamics

Transformation occurs across **spatial scales**, from the individual to humanity as a whole, from a single geographic unit to the entire landscape or seascape through a change in behaviour. This can happen to individuals, to social movements, communities or societal levels and the interrelations between them. We refer to this as the human or societal scale of transformation. The transformation of human behaviour is considered to be an essential part of transitions and transformations to global sustainability (Gifford 2011; Swim et al. 2011). The personal sphere considers the individual and collective beliefs, values and worldviews that shape the ways that the systems and structures (the political institutions) are perceived, and affects what types of solutions are considered 'possible'. *In the case of Lomerío, Bolivia, the movement created transformation from local to national levels, which in turn reflected back to further transformations at the local level.[5] Argentina's Union of Community Assemblies, a coalition of local assemblies, was able to transform local and national socio-environmental narratives and institutions.*

Even the smallest of transformations could be important; indeed macro-scale transformation may result from the confluence of smaller ones consciously or subconsciously linking up with each other until they reach critical mass. Conversely, such small initiatives, if scattered and unconnected and devoid of larger alliances, can also be more prone to being undermined or reversed by macro-forces. *In the case of Turkey, for instance, the primary source of tension seems to be the presence of an unquestioned commitment to rapid economic growth combined with energy scarcity and independence discourse on top of the absence of a deliberative planning process, a democratic scientific culture and a free press. While the movement was successful in stopping the coal-power plant at different periods in time over the forty years of struggle and surely made a difference, in each case, the state reacted to the success story and activism in Aliağa in typical hegemonic counter-movement fashion. The main challenge for the Aliağa resistance was to create synergies with other local*

environmental movements, and even an overarching national movement capable of sustained action. The anti-coal struggle in Aliağa marks a significant point in the history of environmental movements in Turkey in building politically conscious environmental resistance towards the emblematic Bergama gold mine case and beyond.

Given the fact that there may be simultaneous transformations taking place across various spatial levels in (or because of) an initiative, it is very likely that these may not always be complementary. What is transformative for one community or set of individuals, or one section of society, may be regressive for another. *For instance, for some job workers in Kachchh, India, who have been left behind in the community's overall economic enhancement, the transformation may not be looking so positive. In the case of the Raika pastoralists in India, sheep-shearing as a communal activity is no longer commonly practised. This has created a livelihood opportunity for Muslim families who have had to give up their own herds due to a lack of state and policy support. While this has meant a forging of new bonds between the Raika and the Muslim shearers, both communities have experienced a loss of communal activities and livelihoods.*

Transformation involves different **depths of change**, with a distinction between addressing superficial 'symptoms' and deeper, underlying 'causes'. While transformation must always involve deeper systemic or structural changes, it is not always possible to distinguish these from reformist changes, because movements typically require strategies to address both symptoms and causes, and sometimes a situation that is undergoing longer-term transformation may appear to be only reforming and it will depend on the strength of our analysis if we are able to discern this at a particular time and place. For instance, affirmative action for historically marginalized sections of society could remain non-transformative if it simply helps to absorb a few individuals from these sections into dominant society; however, it could lead to transformation over time by enabling sufficient numbers within these sections to challenge dominant power structures. Several movements engage with the state in order to expand spaces within the system, e.g. through rights-based legislations, even as they also struggle for more systemic change in the nature of democracy itself. *This is seen, for instance, in the movements of Indigenous peoples in Canada working to reclaim territory and gain autonomy, and by communities engaging with the Chavez government in Venezuela to seek constructive changes in law.*

Transformation involves multiple **temporal dynamics**. It is a continuously evolving and dynamic, non-linear process, with continuities and ruptures and reversals, rather than a full and final end state. Pathways to the future will have roots in historical context but will not necessarily repeat history. Some forms of activity and change can be spontaneous, abrupt and episodic, such as protests to oppose individual projects. Other activities are long-wave, slower and more continuous, such as the construction of constituencies and alternatives. *The Beirut (Lebanon)*

waste protests built on similar movements over a decade. The movement against mining and towards self-determination in Korchi, India, builds on a long history of resistance movements, but also includes specific episodic actions that appear as flashpoints. Cumulative and sudden episodic events are also the story of the Raika pastoralists in India.

Some changes can be reversed in an instant or over time – *the adoption of extractive activities by Indigenous peoples who first fought them in Canaima, Venezuela, and the co-option of the Lebanon waste movement by the state are cases in point.* Others are more resistant to violence and co-option, including values, knowledge and subjectivities (things we produce in common). For instance, a process of community mobilization against the arbitrary power of the state regarding what to do with forest commons, and the creation of institutional processes to govern these commons, could well be reversed in future if the state hits back with greater force or if internal power hierarchies undermine the institution, but for the moment, this does constitute transformation. Indeed, transformation requires the development of these long-wave resources in order to build the capacity to respond and adapt to unexpected challenges and setbacks, and a faith in the possibility of transformation even in the midst of such setbacks – in sum, a culture and capacity for resilience. Even slower, longer-wave changes evolve in non-linear ways characterized by waves (ups and downs but still an overall progression towards goals), cycles (coming back to more or less original states over time), spirals (slow progression towards goals within what seems to be a cyclical pattern) and tipping points (when a critical mass is reached that produces a state-change in the system). Some transformations may even emerge from actions that do not seem to be immediately transformative.

These multiple and complex dynamics contribute to the difficulty of observing transformation at any one point in time. This is why efforts at systematizing and learning from transformations with the protagonists of resistances and alternatives over a sustained period of time, as we have done with the ACKnowl-EJ project, are so important. We hope the lesson we have learned in this process will inspire others to continue adding to this 'just transformations theory' in the making.

Annex: Ethical Values of Transformation

(Adapted from Vikalp Sangam n.d.)

Practical and conceptual alternatives vary widely, and none are replicable in precise form from one place to the other, given the diversity of local situations. Search for such alternatives is perennial. New circumstances will demand new responses – hence, alternatives will have to keep evolving and changing.

The way alternative transformations are attempted by the actors concerned, and observed by others, is based very much on their worldviews. These encompass spiritual and/or ethical positions on one's place in the universe, relations with other humans and the rest of nature, identity and other aspects. Initiatives towards

alternatives espouse or are based on many values and principles that emanate from or are encompassed in such worldviews, keeping in mind also that even within single communities there may be more than one worldview, with differences emanating from how members are placed regarding gender, class, caste, ethnicity, age and other considerations.

It is possible to derive the crucial, commonly held principles underlying alternative initiatives. Given below is an initial list of such values/principles; these are not necessarily distinct from each other, but rather interrelated and overlapping.

We note here that there is a list of even more fundamental human ethical values that should be the bedrock of the principles below, including compassion, empathy, honesty, integrity and truthfulness, tolerance, generosity, caring, and others. These are espoused by most spiritual traditions and secular ethical systems, and are worth keeping central to a discussion of the values/principles described below.

Ecological integrity and the rights of nature

The functional integrity of the ecological and ecoregenerative processes (especially the global freshwater cycle), ecosystems and biological diversity that are the basis of all life on Earth.

The right of nature and all species (wild and domesticated) to survive and thrive in the conditions in which they have evolved, and respect for and celebration of the 'community of life' as a whole (while keeping in mind natural evolutionary processes of extinction and replacement, and that human use of the rest of nature is not necessarily antithetical to treating it with respect).

Equity, justice, inclusion and access

Equitable access and inclusion of all human beings in current and future generations (intergenerational) of decision-making and participation, to the conditions needed for human well-being (socio-cultural, economic, political, ecological and psychological), without endangering any other person's access; and social, economic and environmental justice for all regardless of gender, class, caste, ethnicity, race and other attributes, (including a special focus on including those currently left out for reasons of physical/mental/social 'disability'). There is also a need to acknowledge unjust and unfair dynamics within families and try to address them.

Right to and responsibility of meaningful participation

The right of each citizen and community to have *agency*, to meaningfully participate in crucial decisions affecting their life, and the right to the conditions that provide the ability for such participation, as part of a radical, participatory democracy.

Corresponding to such rights, the responsibility of each citizen and community to ensure meaningful decision-making that is based on the twin principles of ecological sustainability and socio-economic equity.

Diversity and pluralism

Respect for the diversity of environments and ecologies, species and genes (wild and domesticated), cultures, ways of living, knowledge systems, values, livelihoods, perspectives and polities (including those of Indigenous peoples and local communities, and of youth), in so far as they are in consonance with the principles of sustainability and equity.

Collective commons and solidarity, in balance with individual freedoms

Collective and cooperative thinking and working founded on the socio-cultural, economic and ecological commons (moving away from private property), respecting both common custodianship and individual freedoms and choices (including the right to be 'different', such as in sexual orientation) and innovations within such collectivities, with inter-personal and inter-community solidarity, relationships of caring and sharing, and common responsibilities, as fulcrums.

Resilience and adaptability

The ability of communities and humanity as a whole to respond, adapt and sustain the resilience needed to maintain ecological sustainability and equity in the face of external and internal forces of change, including through respecting the conditions enabling the resilience of nature. Sustaining initiatives in the midst of changing generational values/priorities, larger economic and political systems.

Subsidiarity, self-reliance and ecoregionalism

Local rural and urban communities (small enough for all members to take part in decision-making) as the fundamental unit of governance, self-reliant for basic needs,[6] linked with each other at bioregional and ecoregional levels into landscape, regional, national and international institutions that are answerable to these basic units. (The term 'self-reliant' here means self-sufficiency for basic needs as far as possible, and the right to access what is not possible to meet locally, from more centralized systems guaranteed by the state.)

Autonomy and sovereignty

Collective rights and capacities to self-govern or self-rule and be self-reliant, as peoples and communities, including custodianship of territories and elements of nature they live within or amidst; including mechanisms of direct or radical democracy.

Simplicity and/or sufficiency – need over greed

The ethic of living on and being satisfied with what is adequate for life and livelihood, in tune with what is ecologically sustainable and equitable. There is a need to elaborate and distinguish between need and want.

Dignity and creativity of labour and work/innovation

Respect for all kinds of labour, physical and intellectual, with no occupation or work being inherently superior to another; giving manual labour and family/women's 'unpaid' work and processes of sharing/caring their rightful place, but with no inherent attachment of any occupation with particular castes or genders; the need for all work to be dignified, safe and free from exploitation (requiring toxic/hazardous processes to be stopped); reducing work hours; and moving towards removing the artificial dichotomy between 'work' and 'leisure' by enabling more creative and enjoyable engagement; encouraging a spirit of enquiry and inquisitiveness.

Non-violence, harmony, peace, co-existence and interdependence

Attitudes and behaviour towards others that respect their physical, psychological and spiritual well-being; the motivation not to harm others; conditions that engender harmony and peace among and between peoples. Wasting and irresponsible use of resources – food, water, energy – is a type of violence against the unprivileged.

Efficiency in production and consumption

Efficiency in the use of elements of nature and natural (including human) resources, in terms of eliminating or minimizing waste (and *not* in modern industrial terms of narrow productivity).

Dignity and trust

Respect of every person's entitlement to be treated with dignity and trust, regardless of sexual, ethnic, class, caste, age or other identity, and without being 'judged' as a person on moral grounds.

Fun

Inculcating the spirit and practice of enjoyment, fun and lightness of being in all aspects of life, without causing harm to others.

Notes

1   Unless otherwise indicated, throughout this chapter we use the term 'transformations' to denote positive moves towards sustainability and justice, noting here that transformations could also be regressive.
2   We use these terms to mean processes leading to situations of increasing equality and equity among peoples, and between people and the rest of nature, and an active respect of the ecological limits that humanity lives within on Planet Earth. See also Bennett et al.'s (2019) proposal of a Just Transformation to Sustainability approach that includes recognitional, procedural and distributional considerations.
3   www.vikalpsangam.org, see also Vikalp Sangam (2017).

4   We distinguish between 'modernity' as a colonizing project of cultural and knowledge homogenization and a unilinear view of progress, and 'modern values' that may have positive features such as an emphasis on equality.
5   We use the term 'local' in relation to 'global' in terms of spatial scale, or place, not in terms of the scope of knowledge or visions being generated, where the local–global dichotomy is somewhat artificial.
6   Food, water, shelter, sanitation, clothing, personal security, learning/education, health and livelihood. This does not for the moment incorporate some of the other non-material needs such as those identified by Manfred Max-Neef et al. (1989).

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