

Resilience Researcher Noticing Shifts in Social Power

Image



Initiatives to build resilience enabling positive social transformation

Whether it's the Scottish government's top-down initiative to develop community resilience or the grassroots resilience-building initiative that is Transition Town Peterborough, as people come together to strengthen their community's capacity to bounce back from or adapt to crises or changes, they're changing how they relate to one another in a positive way.

PhD student Christopher Lyon of the University of Dundee in Scotland is discovering this energizing phenomenon as he conducts research on the success and challenges of resilience-building initiatives.

Originally from Peterborough, Ont., Christopher's interest in the concept of resilience was strengthened through his travels to places such as Bosnia, Australia and New Zealand in his early 20s, followed by his completion of an undergraduate degree in international development studies at the University of Winnipeg and a master of science in rural sociology from the University of Alberta. The global purview that these experiences afforded sparked in Christopher an increasing sense that something was off about the way the world was moving, particularly as manifested in climate change.

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Christopher Lyon

"For me, it's a deeply troubling problem and I don't really know what else I would be doing with my life if it wasn't trying to address this problem in this way," Christopher says.

Christopher is focusing part of his study on the Scotland government initiative, which entails supporting villages or neighbourhoods to develop capacities within themselves to create an effective, co-ordinated response in the event of an emergency. There is a limit to the support that government or official emergency responders can provide in certain scenarios and, also, communities have the capacity within themselves to help themselves, the initiative recognizes.

"There is a drive to harness those (community) capacities in a way that complements the role of emergency service providers," Christopher says.

As an example of how this might work, villages or neighbourhoods would have a formalized capacity or training in the event of an emergency, such as a flood, to open a community centre or run a generator.

As this initiative unfolds, the Scottish government is developing a different kind of relationship with local communities than it has had previously. "(These relationships) are built along the lines of trust and engagement. They're less hierarchical,"

Christopher says. “(Government) is listening to communities and being responsive to feedback.

The other portion of Christopher’s study focuses on [Transition Town Peterborough](#), a grassroots-driven, resilience-building initiative in the Ontario city of about 78,000.

Launching into his investigation, Christopher quickly noticed the number of other efforts in Peterborough that share a similar intent to that of Transition Town Peterborough. Many are aware of one another, some overlap and in some cases there is some informal collaboration occurring.

As a former resident, Christopher is encouraged by the broader, grassroots-driven change afoot in the traditionally conservative city.

Elements and demonstrations of this change range from citizens succeeding in getting participatory budgeting on the city council agenda to progressive leaders winning by a closer margin than they ever have to the launch of the innovative initiative, the [Peterborough Dialogues](#), which is geared to enabling a new kind of community conversation and story to surface.

Similar to Scotland, the focus on building resilience is changing the way Peterborough community members relate to each other in positive way, as well as the way politics works in the community, Christopher says.

Christopher may be adding a case study of an east African jurisdiction to his research.

He will also be focusing on further understanding and conceptualizing this discovery of positive social transformation occurring through resilience-building initiatives.

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