

Preface

Both in Europe and in Japan, there are a multitude of reasons for pro-actively seeking strategies for sustainability transitions: ageing populations, economic restructuring, and stagnation under globalization, resources issues, and general liveability. This book aspires to show how accelerating urban sustainability transitions work in practice drawing upon empirical case studies into application of transition management in European and Japanese cities. This volume combines in-depth case studies of transitions in urban contexts, descriptions of successful and failed attempts to manage urban sustainability transitions, and reflections upon the implications and lessons of these. It offers insights, tools, and experiences of a group of frontrunner cities (Aberdeen, Ghent, Higashiomi, Kitakyushu, and Montreal) in their quest for addressing current unsustainability challenges and move towards a more sustainable future. Building upon exchanges between action researchers, academics, and practitioners from Japan and the Netherlands, we have composed this volume. It shows the diversity of the urban challenges, differences in cultures, and variety of instruments and concepts. But it has also confirmed that there is more that is shared: a language of transformation, a hopeful eye on social innovation and the future of cities, and a dedication to experimentation, learning, and sharing. It is through these mechanisms that we and hopefully those who recognize and feel empowered by our stories will keep transforming cities.

This book is structured in three main parts. Part I, “Introducing Urban Sustainability Transitions and Their Governance”, prepares the ground by introducing the city as locus and actor in sustainability transitions (Chap. 1), transition management as a new mode of governing these (Chap. 2) and the networking activities between cities supporting them in becoming more sustainable (Chap. 3). Part II, “Transition Management in Japanese and European Cities”, is the heart of the book and includes five rich empirical chapters describing cities and their quest for sustainable development. What holds these chapters together is their engagement with the transition management approach. The chapters on the Japanese cities describe urban governance analysed through a transition management lens, and the chapters on the European cities outline the processes and outcomes of an operational

application of transition management, where co-creative processes between city administration and other urban actors were organized based on a transition management methodology. All chapters are structured along a basic rationale, introducing basic background information on the city and its main sustainability challenge, the main analytical framework and/or focus followed by a description of the governance mechanisms addressing the challenge and its outcomes, and closing with an analytical discussion and conclusion. The third and last part of the book, Part III, “Synthesis and Reflections”, includes three synthesising chapters. The first of these chapters synthesizes insights and lessons from the experiences with the (operational and heuristic application of the) transition management framework in the five European and Asian cities (Chap. 9). The last two chapters focus on two different audiences: while Chap. 10 draws recommendations for practitioners on the governance of urban sustainability transitions, Chap. 11 draws up a research agenda for this topic.

Part I: Introducing Urban Sustainability Transitions and Their Governance

In the following we outline the main foci of each chapter. After having laid the ground for the series as well as for this book in Chapter 1, the second chapter by Wittmayer and Loorbach is dedicated to an introduction of transition management and its application in the urban context. The authors introduce the principles of transition governance, their translation in a management framework, and the operationalization thereof in instruments and process methodologies. Next to outlining these elements of transition management, they also investigate how these have been applied as a heuristic to analyse urban governance dynamics as well as an operational framework to influence and accelerate sustainability transitions in this urban context. The authors conclude by synthesizing the promises and challenges of transition management in cities and zoom in on the meaning of the urban context for transition management processes.

Chapter 3 describes a number of national and international networks that support cities in working towards a sustainable future for their citizens. In doing so, Wittmayer, Mizuguchi, Rach, and Fujino introduce networks of which the cities featured in this book were part. The focus is on describing the funding context of the networks, their underlying rationale and their role in supporting the cities in their sustainability ambitions. This includes the MUSIC project and network for the European cities and three networks for the Japanese cities, namely, the Eco-Model City, the “FutureCity” Initiative, and the Green and Local Autonomy Model City. This chapter also gives an overview and differentiation of the cities that the book will turn to in the following chapters.

Part II: Transition Management in Japanese and European Cities

In the first empirical chapter (Chap. 4), Frantzeskaki and Tefrati introduce us to the city of Aberdeen, United Kingdom, and its use of a transition management-based co-creative process to address the social and financial vulnerabilities of a new transition away from an oil-dominated economy. In their chapter they focus on the envisioning phase as the “critical phase” in which diverse interests, perspectives, hidden assumptions, and ingrained perspectives are expressed, negotiated, and debated.

The second empirical chapter focuses on Higashiohmi, Japan (Chap. 5). Mizuguchi, Ohta, Beers, Yamaguchi, and Nishimura analyse a community business project called the “Welfare Mall”, which clusters local production of food, energy, and elderly care in one location. This chapter focuses on the interactions among these multiple niche-innovations and multi-regimes which occur under the pressure of slow but drastic landscape changes.

Ghent, Belgium, has started up a “climate arena” based on transition management to work towards its ambition of climate neutrality by 2050 (Chap. 6). Hölscher, Roorda, and Nevens focus on the empowerment aspect of a transition management process for policy makers and urban actors involved. It seems to be effective in introducing policy officers to more open and co-creative approaches as well as to cross-departmental collaboration. The challenges regarding the longevity of empowerment effects for other participants are translated into a number of lessons for designing transition management processes.

Shiroyama and Kajiki describe the transition of Kitakyushu, a city infamous for its industrial pollution, towards a focus on environmental conservation, the promotion of environmental business, and welfare for local citizens (Chap. 7). They use transition management as a lens to analyse the Kitakyushu Eco-Town Project, an initiative aimed at promoting environmental business which can be viewed as a catalyst for Kitakyushu’s transition to a green city. They pay attention to the important roles of incumbent players, namely, insiders with new ideas in established private and public institutions, for facilitating the transition.

The third European city is Montreuil, France, where a transition management process took place as part of the elaboration of a local climate plan (Chap. 8). Krauz describes the adaptation of transition management to the French political context and explores the possibility of “hybridizations” between “regime” and “niche” actors; between their roles, relations, and cultures.

Part III: Synthesis and Reflections

In the last part of the book, Chap. 9 focuses on synthesizing the main insights and lessons for transition management as a governance approach for urban sustainability transitions. Wittmayer analyses the major challenges cities face in reorienting urban development in a sustainable direction and the potential of transition approaches to contribute to this radical reorientation. The insights focus on the different governance activities and instruments and their usefulness in actually creating space for alternatives and challenging the status quo. The chapter concludes by drawing lessons for the governance principles underlying transition governance as well for accompanying operational process frameworks.

Chapter 10 takes stock of the experiences of the five European and Japanese cities to draft recommendations for practitioners to more effectively deal with urban sustainability issues. Beers reflects on examples of when and why to use transition management specifically. He highlights the importance and potential of network hybridization: the fact that information provided by scientists can act as a common starting point and that striving for shared actions and connecting different problem orientations is more fruitful for transitions than striving for consensus.

Finally, Chap. 11 outlines a research agenda on the governance of urban sustainability transitions building on the discussion and insights from the different chapters. Frantzeskaki and Shiroyama outline three research directions along the different application types of transition management: theoretical, heuristic, and operational applications to advance the research on transition management specifically, and the governance of urban sustainability (transitions) in general.

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