

Abstract

Transition Neighbourhoods: Re-Imagining the Suburb in a World Without Oil

This research report was inspired by two urban concerns: the first being the intrinsic structural and functional inefficiencies of the typical suburban environment and secondly, building on that, what the future of these environments will be in a scenario where cheap fossil fuels will no longer be readily available.

A review of the literature available on the subject showed that although the notion of peak oil and/or oil depletion is not necessarily universally acknowledged, there is a growing group of scientists and scholars globally that believe that it is only a matter of time before we will no longer have the level of access to oil that we are used to. As a potential urban scenario it therefore warrants some consideration.

The central question of the research report is whether the built form and function of existing suburban residential neighbourhoods can be retrofitted to become more resilient and to enable its residents to adapt to a life without oil (or at least drastically reduced availability of oil) while at the same time maintaining or (where absent) introducing accepted norms for a liveable neighbourhood.

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate how the principles of localisation and the Transition Movement can be made applicable to suburban environments. The theory is that the more a community is able to survive locally the less it will depend on external inputs and linkages. The outcome of the research is a model for how to adapt a conventional suburb to become a Transition Neighbourhood that will enable the survival of the suburban neighbourhood as a functional place in the larger cityscape.

The research report uses Menlo Park, a centrally located residential neighbourhood in the City of Tshwane, as a case study. An Urban Design Framework was developed for the neighbourhood that applied various dimensions of resilience, localisation, liveable neighbourhoods and the Transition Movement to a practical context, and illustrated how the suburb will look and function after such a transformation.