



Community-led economic change.

An exploration of REconomy by
5 (more) national Transition hubs

Oct 2014 - Mar 2014

Brazil

Germany

Mexico

Portugal

USA

Background

In October 2013, the Transition national hubs of Belgium (Reséau Transition Wallonie-Bruxelles), Croatia, Italy, Latvia and the Netherlands joined forces with the UK's REconomy Project to explore what REconomy might look like in each country. A year later the national hubs of Brazil, Germany, Mexico, Portugal and the USA joined the project, in part informed by the experiences and processes of the first group of hubs, but also forging new directions of their own.

Each participant agreed to produce a high level proposal exploring how REconomy type activity might be initiated and/or supported by the national hub. They also staged at least one REconomy event to elicit input from a range of Transitioners, and similar organisations. Each hub also found at least 5 examples of Transition Enterprises relevant for their country, and created a small set of case studies.

We hoped this approach would: (a) help each of the hubs begin to create a viable strategic approach for REconomy, which can also be used in funding bids; (b) build a peer support group to help us all shape and deliver our plans; and (c) give insight into common themes, as well as differences, at the national level such that the Transition Network can better support the work of the hubs.

We are delighted with the results. This document gives a summary of our outputs and our learning for the second group of hubs (the [summary report for the first group of hubs is here](#)), and our next steps - we hope these reports will be useful to other national hubs interested in REconomy.



From top, left to right: Steffi Germany, Fiona UK, Marissa USA, Raul Mexico, Annelieke Portugal, Monica Brazil.



The massive US economy, built on the exploitation of labor and extraction of resources from around the world, is reaching a tipping point as skyrocketing inequality, a fragile financial system, crumbling infrastructure, and unemployment converge.

Corporate influence on American politics has created a very unequal playing field, where industries are unaccountable to their detrimental impacts on human and environmental health. The decline of domestic manufacturing has contributed to the decay and rebirth of major cities.

The country's food system is very vulnerable, with 25% of the nation's food grown industrially in California's Central Valley, which is now heavily drought-stricken. Debt is also a challenge for many Americans, with the average college graduate entering the workforce with more than \$30,000 in student debt and very steep competition for jobs.

The failures of our current economy are encouraging many Americans to pursue alternative angles to the "American Dream," and there are exciting new economy developments across the country including a rise of cooperatives, urban farming, community power projects, and more.

Many of those efforts came together in June 2014 for the first New Economy Coalition Conference in Boston. There's also a strong social justice movement in the USA that seems to be at a tipping point in some areas, with opportunity to combine part of all of several movements.

Activities & plans

Our REconomy event will be held on 26th May 2015 after which the write up will be added here.

We collected a set of 20 case studies [which are summarised here](#), and the complete versions will soon be available on our website.

Our proposed approach to REconomy is to:

- Raise awareness of REconomy and "new economy" models, strategies, and resources within the US Transition Network through teleseminars, telesalons/organizer calls, and online channels (website, newsletter, social media).
- Seek funding and technical support to implement the REconomy model (convening local economic stakeholders and producing an economic blueprint) locally or regionally in Northern California.
- Support a cohort of Transition leaders/initiatives around the US in developing and implementing the REconomy model in their communities.
- Build strategic partnerships locally, regionally, and nationally to support the implementation of REconomy in the US.

Several key elements of the proposal are dependent on Transition US securing additional financial resources for implementation, while other elements of the proposal can be implemented with existing resources. The above is an extract from [our full strategy document](#).

Contact [Marissa Mommaerts](#) at the [Transition US hub](#).



In 2010, The Economist highlighted **Brazil** in a cover story which praised the good performance of the economy and the positive prospects that had opened for the country; only 3 years later, the magazine published a story arguing that the economy had unravelled. It's not hard to see why the magazine had so radically changed its mind: GDP growth fell to 4.3% per year in 2005-2010 to 2% annually in 2011-2013, while the expansion of investment fell from 9.2% to 2.3% per year. Moreover, in the last three years, average inflation was 6.1% per year, and the current account deficit increased by 1.5% of GDP.

Today, we face, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Estatística a recession, which opens first of all an opportunity for the REconomia processes. For the first time we see industry, even in the most difficult situations, investing in relationships with their cities, and seeking local producers.

We see people talking and thinking about solidarity economy, and conscious consumption, and maybe we're in front of a very promising social phenomenon opening to the process of REconomia, and growth of the creative economy and small local businesses.

Activities & plans

Our main event was a 'class' about REconomia, which included the building of a REconomia High Street! We are putting this approach into the Gaia Education Curriculum, as a partnership with Transition Brasil , in Brasilia, São Paulo e Alto Paraíso de Goiás.

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We also aim to put this class as a workshop in Transition Communities, so this way we can influence and improve the development of more REconomia businesses in Brasil. This pilot class was a 4 hour event held in November 2014, and around 70 people came.

We also held a 'Deepening REconomia' meeting with some of the enterprises that were used in our case studies research – to talk about how we can deepen the concept of REconomia, and what else we can do together. We aim for this to be a bi-monthly event, and we continue to find more great enterprises to add to this group.

We collected a set of 10 case studies which are [available here in draft in English and Portuguese](#).

To develop REconomia in Brazil we choose four strategic lines of working ([more detail here](#) in English):

- 1) Creation of IBEST (the Brazilian hub)
- 2) Promotion and support for REconomia businesses;
- 3) Production and sharing of content (ideas and stories) via web etc.
- 4) Deepening concepts and sharing information via bimonthly meets

We have since translated the Transition Website to Portuguese and we are working on a special blog only for REconomia, so we can write about the challenges, about the research that the REconomia group does, and keep on show-casing new REconomia businesses.

Contact [Monica Picavea](#) at the [Brazilian hub](#).



Mexico has the 15th largest economy and is the 9th country in global oil production. We're located in a region rich in resources such as uranium, silver, gold, coast and biological diversity. But there's a dichotomy between resources, economic wealth and its distribution, since Mexico is one of the most unequal countries in Latin America. High levels of corruption, narco-traffic and human rights violations all hit Mexican local economies.

At least 68 indigenous languages are spoken between the north, centre and south of the country, regions that are touched by ancient multiculturalism, providing a surreal dance scene between ancient Mexico and modern civilization.

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Mexico is one of the top countries in terms of International Trade Agreements signed, unfortunately this isn't helping develop the country for real since poverty increased in the last decade. NAFTA (North American Free Trade) has betrayed farmers and rural workers, making a bigger gap between countries and communities, and letting corporations run the food production and turn this into big business.

Mexico is a region of resistance and finding creative ways to survive despite our government. The Zapatista Movement in the south of Mexico, Cherán community in Michoacán or Local currencies movement such as Tumín, Tlaloc or Mezquite are great example of community resilience.

Activities & plans

We held a series of 3 REconomy events in partnership with 3 Transition Initiatives: Transition Queretaro, Transition Playa del Carmen and Transition Tepoztlán as reflected in the poster on the right.



We collected a set of 5 case studies which along with write ups and photos from our event, are [available here in English](#).

Our proposed approach is:

- To build on success of events to make local plans and changes.
- “Exploring with T communities how to re-think and re-create - We find ourselves with the need to RE-think and RE-create not only what we understand for economy, but also how we practice it and live it day-to-day. Also exploring how the multiple forms of life and knowledge hold possibilities for alternative types of economies beyond the “Western” ones”.

Contact [Raúl Vélez](#) at the Mexican hub.



The unemployment rate amongst young people in **Portugal** is 36% today and many young people emigrate because they do not see a future in their home country. This has severe impacts on the social fabric of the country (already for several generations), weakening local community further.

Creating a livelihood is about more than earning a living. It's about quality of life, about being in relationship with the local community. What does it take for a community to support its inhabitants to find their place and co-create a healthy, resilient local ecology that attracts others to do the same? How can young adults that have ideas to create their own livelihood be supported to ground their ideas, and at the same time producing continuous benefits for the local community?

To explore this, over the last four months, we have been working with great pleasure on the start of a “marriage” between REconomy and One Year in Transition in Portugal. In the numerous conversations and presentations about Um Ano em Transição, it has been inspiring to sense the enthusiasm with which our ideas were received and the willingness of almost everybody we approached to get involved and to contribute. It confirmed the relevance of our mission. The combination of creation of livelihoods with community development within the context of developing a local economy, especially alternative economy models, is seen as vital for Portugal.

Activities & plans

We have developed a story about Um Ano em Transição, presented this story to more than 150 people at 8 events; now we are still in the process of capturing 8 case studies of some “enablers” of local entrepreneurial activity, and some examples of young people that created their own enterprise – these will be [available here](#) shortly.

Our proposed approach is to pilot this programme in the autumn of 2015, when 6-7 teams of young adults will start a one year shared journey. They come from both urban and rural settings. Each team has a clear purpose to develop and implement an economic activity that brings them good livelihood, nourishes their personal development and enriches their local community. More information is available here in English in [a blog post](#), as well as these [project reflections](#), and at the [project website](#). We have a plan, let us know if you would like to see it!

Contact [Annelieke van der Sluijs](#) at the [Portuguese hub](#).



Germany is at the moment one of the 'winners' of global crisis. Our economy is growing, unemployment is relatively low in comparison to others European countries, and interest rates are very low, therefore people especially now invest in houses and land. This makes rents especially in bigger cities unfavourably high and widens the gap between the very rich and the very poor. Food prices rise, according to more expensive land, fuel and speculation.

Even if our economy in general grows, more and more people live under the poverty line and social instability is also growing, because of the cut on state investment and the sell-out of state property (public baths, youth centres and work, etc.).

In the short run, an alternative and local based economy is one of the most important objectives to meet to enable people to grow their own food, to strengthen communities and open the possibilities for self-run initiatives, as the state withdraws and private business just offers big and alienated infrastructures.

Activities & plans

We held a REconomy event in Hannover, as part of the Utopianlae Festival. Over 80 people came together to give birth to our new REconomy project together! We also collected together 5 case studies of inspiring German enterprises some of whom presented at our event.

Our proposed approach is to:

- develop an action-handbook for sustainable Start-Ups and a toolbox for sustainable entrepreneurship
- promote Reconomy-Start-Ups with a specific „REcoach program“ (eventually with renowned mentors)
- present our concepts and existing REconomy-ventures on the website "Transition Initiatives" (after its re launch in spring/summer 2015)
- use all of the above especially to network the various Transition Projects on local level as well as the regional Transition Initiatives on national level to bridge and bond the movement.

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- using REconomy externally as well to establish strategic alliances with like-minded organizations and events.
- A national conference on „solidarity-economy“ takes place in Berlin in September 2015 which will be significantly enriched by the Transition REconomy project. We also consider organizing a German meetup of Reconomy-projects at this venue.

More information on our event, case studies and proposed approach are available both [in English](#) and [in German](#).

Contact [Stephanie Ristig-Bresser](#) or the [German Hub](#).

What worked well and what might be done differently?

Some similar learning arose from this group as for the previous group – that this approach of virtual teams meeting online works well, and that the group provides inspiration, support and helps focus activity and thinking. It's a model worth exploring for other Transition hubs groups, and our learning is being fed into hubs organisation discussions.

Most of the group met in person for the first time at the TN Conference in Devon in September 2015, and it would have been nice if timing has permitted this to be at the start of the project period rather than the end!

For everyone, it still felt like a lot of work to do in the period given (though recognising that the deadlines do help ensure things get done, in a good way!). Having to work in English adds to the effort for most people, especially in having to translate things for sharing – though done willingly. Despite trying to prepare people more about the effort likely required, it still only really became apparent in the doing – as is often the way. Some more specific comments:

“Participating in this project was a door to understand better what the economy is, in a Transition Town model, and all the exchanges we made in our online meetings made me feel inspired. It made me wake up to form a REconomy group of enterprises in Brazil, that can collaborate with each other and support maybe start-ups that can be interested in make business in this new way. The exchanges with all the group was really very interesting, and this week I got to Hannover, and exchange experiences with Steffi and the REconomy group there. I'll try bigger events now, because I think that REconomy is a new concept that we have to explain and show to more and more people.” Monica from Brazil.

“This was a good experience of virtual working, and I was inspired by others in group. I now trust that smaller projects as are more likely to succeed. I had thought we were maybe not ready for this project, so I had little or no expectations and a small team – but this felt too vertical and more should be shared horizontally. We need to get more people involved in holding this with me. It was the first time some money came from the TN, this raised lots of questions for us! We used this to support/grow existing energy, this turned out very well, and our events were great!” Raul from Mexico.

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“I really liked the support from the UK, and found this very helpful. Compiling the case studies was also really useful for TIs and building relationships with enterprises and other organisations – we’re continuing to add to this work. The timing felt tight even though we had 6 months. We have a question about our role (as a hub) if we don’t have business development expertise to support the enterprises directly – we will ask TIs to help define what this role of a hub should be here in relation to REconomy.” Marissa from USA

“There were really good virtual meets and I loved the sense of being part of an international movement, in spirit and in actual connection too. It would have been great to have started with a face to face meeting, but the peer group worked well. We’ve been connecting with some start-ups. Gave them some space and some coaching, but little time yet to share REconomy more widely across the movement in Germany – will get to this! We’re convinced that REconomy is a good thing and chance to make Transition more professional.” Steffi from Germany.

“This was a rich experience, the time passed too quickly! It was empowering to connect with groups here all wanting to help young people –it feels right. I learned about our TI and hub in terms of organisation and need to share load else I’m burning out – I had no idea how much work was involved! I would now get more people involved from the beginning, been less focused on outputs and so asked questions more openly. We also learned about relationship to having funding – despite freedom given I still felt worried that required outcomes would not be produced. Will look for small amount from flexible funders from now on as this worked well for us”. Annelieke from Portugal.



The REconomy Skills day, TN conference, October 2015 with REconomy hubs and a wide range of other countries.

What's next?

The REconomy hubs have agreed to continue to meet. The co-ordination of the group has moved from the UK to Transition Croatia, with Gordana Muraja (gmuraja@gmail.com) being the main contact point – Gordana will hold this role until March 2017 based on a small amount of funding provided via the Transition Network.

The group will meet 3-4 times a year in order to share learning and experience around REconomy, offer mutual support, and inspire and support other hubs to get involved as appropriate. They will also look for joint funding opportunities and develop project applications.

Other Transition hubs that wish to explore REconomy should contact Gordana. Some seed funding for such hubs may be available via the Transition Network international budget, but this is not guaranteed.

We're delighted with the outcomes of this experiment in connecting and supporting Transition hubs to work together to explore REconomy. It's been enjoyable and productive with important outcomes and rich learning for everyone. We're very grateful to our funder for their understanding and support – thank you.

Author: Fiona Ward for the REconomy Project, September 2015.

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