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Opening up the transition arena: An analysis of (dis)empowerment of civil society actors in transition management in cities

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ABSTRACT

This article shows opportunities and intricacies of transition management as a facilitated empowerment process that seeks to empower ‘frontrunners’ to (re-)define and take up roles in contributing to sustainability transitions. In the context of ‘retreating’ welfare states there is an increasing focus on ‘empowering’ civil society actors to take over service provisions and addressing sustainability challenges. This reorganisation of governments’ responsibilities and tasks vis-à-vis civil society and businesses raises questions about the (uneven) (re-)distribution of responsibilities between different (groups of) actors. We first draw on insights from empowerment literature to elucidate the conceptual understanding of (dis)empowerment in transition management, focusing on the transition arena as the most prominent tool of the approach. We emphasise that transition management also harbours the risk of *disempowerment*, i.e. creating/exacerbating a sense of powerlessness and thus decreasing the ability of actors to take up roles in sustainability transitions. We apply the framework to analyse (dis)empowerment in transition management processes in four North-Western European ‘welfare cities’: Aberdeen (UK), Ghent (BEL), Ludwigsburg (GER), and Montreuil (FR). These processes brought together civil society actors as frontrunners in the transition arena that was facilitated by local policy officers in transition teams. Transition management appears as a fruitful intervention to boost new social relations, (re-)definitions of roles and intrinsic motivations of actors to influence sustainability transitions, yet the implementation of the empowering process principles requires new skills and mind-sets. While experimental process methodologies like transition management seem to offer new ways forward for pro-actively engaging with the intentional and unintentional changes of actor roles in the context of restructuring welfare states, how and to what extent transition management acts as a (dis)empowerment process shows that changes of roles and responsibilities need to be mediated through co-creation processes in which diverse actors jointly reflect on and discuss their roles in contributing to societal welfare.

1. Introduction

Changes in current welfare states¹ manifest in eroding public service provisions and increasing privatisation with the aim to reduce expenses on welfare services (Vis et al., 2011; Razin and Sadka, 2005; Diamond and Lodge, 2013). In this context, citizens and social entrepreneurs play an increasingly important role in the ‘self-organisation’ of services and products and in addressing sustainability challenges (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). Discourses on the shift from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ discuss the role of ‘civil society’ actors in filling the gap left by a retreating state (Giddens, 1998;

Gilbert, 2002; Lemos and Agrawal, 2006; Berkes, 2010). While governance refers to the interactions between multiple public and private actors to pool resources and achieve collective goals (Kooiman, 2003), the re-organisation of governments’ tasks vis-à-vis civil society and businesses raises questions about the (uneven) (re-)distribution of responsibilities between different (groups of) actors, e.g. from public to private actors, that have different decision-making authorities and resource bases (Swyngedouw, 2005; Clarke, 2005; Davies and White, 2012). For example, as bottom-up initiatives often act outside standardised arrangements (e.g. regulations, legislation, administrative organisations), current policies and approaches that aim to empower

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E-mail address: holscher@drift.eur.nl (K. Hölscher).¹ Though there is no such thing as a ‘typical’ welfare state; we understand welfare states as democratic capitalist societies in which the state holds a key role in protecting and promoting the economic and social welfare of its citizens (see also Oosterlynck et al., 2013; Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011).

individuals and communities in taking more responsibility for their welfare (Kisby, 2010; Smith, 2010) need to address how, when and why ‘who’ is supposed to take over in a world where state- and market-logics have prevailed for decades (Avelino and Wittmayer, 2015).

We focus on transition management as a governance experimentation setting that seeks to empower individuals and communities “to shape sustainability in their own environments, and in doing so contribute to the desired transitions to sustainability” (Loorbach, 2007: 284). Sustainability transitions are non-linear, long-term and fundamental change processes towards sustainability that alter the way society is organised (e.g. physical infrastructures, institutions), values services and amenities (e.g. values and norms) and operates (e.g. production routines) (Rotmans et al., 2001; Frantzeskaki and Loorbach, 2010; Markard et al., 2012). As governments are seemingly unable to deal with coinciding ecological, economic and social crises, and the welfare model has been increasingly replaced by market logics, the navigation of such sustainability transitions requires a shift from centralised organisation of services towards more innovative forms of governance that build on multi-actor interactions (Loorbach, 2014). Transition management offers a process methodology to set up “interactive and selective participatory stakeholder searching processes aimed at learning and experimenting” (Grin et al., 2010: 140). The transition arena is the most prominent instrument of transition management. It offers space for pioneers, so-called ‘frontrunners’, to develop a shared direction and concrete initiatives for a sustainability transition as well as to form new coalitions, partnerships and movements (Loorbach, 2010; Nevens et al., 2013).

This article takes up questions related to the conceptual and empirical understanding of empowerment in transition management, such as who is empowered, how and to which end. Transition management is a model for new forms of governance addressing the changing relationships between civil society and government actors in welfare states. By empowering different types of actors to take up roles in influencing such transitions, transition management challenges existing social fabrics and governance settings. However, empowerment is a highly contested concept; more often than not it is used as generic buzzword (Jupp et al., 2010). If used as such, there is a danger of blurring the diffuse dynamics between (groups of) actors in terms of (shifting) roles, responsibilities and power relations, as well as veiling potential *disempowerment* (Mosedale, 2005; Luttrell et al., 2009). Transition management literature has indeed been criticised for remaining unspecific as to the nature of empowerment targeted and for neglecting issues of conflict, politics, democratic legitimacy and power (Hendriks, 2009; Shove and Walker, 2007; Smith and Kern, 2009; Meadowcroft, 2009). Additionally, concerns have been raised that the empowerment of one particular role or type of actor can result in the *disempowerment* of other actors in transition management processes (Avelino, 2009). Also the focus on involving ‘frontrunners’ in transition management processes, to the detriment of other actors, is criticised (Smith and Stirling, 2010). Frontrunners are understood as individuals who are committed to sustainability, have the potential to influence change and hold innovative ideas (Wittmayer et al., 2012). While in its early years of application transition management processes comprised mainly professionals, an increasing focus on geographically delineated systems, such as cities, resulted in a shift towards including social entrepreneurs, inhabitants and volunteers (Frantzeskaki et al., 2014).

We take up these issues by specifying (dis)empowerment in transition management. To do so, we approach transition management as an empowerment process that targets different kinds of empowerment outcomes to enable actors to take up roles in influencing sustainability transitions. We empirically explore how transition management interventions in cities contributed to (dis)empowerment. Cities are particularly affected by the pressures on welfare states and play a key role in managing the interface between public and private actors to solve urban sustainability problems (Raco and Imrie, 2000). Our paper is guided by the following research questions:

- Which principles of transition management refer to empowerment as process?
- What kinds of empowerment does transition management intend to achieve as outcome?
- How and to what extent was (dis)empowerment achieved in four European cities participating in the MUSIC-project?

Firstly, we introduce the methodological approach to our paper (Section 2). We then conceptualise empowerment in transition management. This includes a review of literatures concerned with empowerment, including international development, feminism, governance and organisational psychology literatures (Section 3). We feed this discussion into a literature review of transition management to conceptualise the use and understanding of empowerment in the transition management framework (Section 4). We apply our conceptualisation to the empirical analysis of the (dis)empowerment achieved in transition management processes that were conducted in four North-Western European cities (Section 5). We end this article by summarising the insights and lessons-learned for transition management (Section 6).

2. Methodology

We conducted qualitative case study research to analyse how transition management contributes to the (dis)empowerment of actors. The cases represent four cities that underwent transition management interventions as part of the EU-funded MUSIC-project (Mitigation in Urban Areas: Solutions for Innovative Cities): Aberdeen (UK), Montreuil (France), Ghent (Belgium) and Ludwigsburg (Germany). The project ran from mid-2010 until mid-2015. The MUSIC-project was the first transition management application to cities to “catalyse and mainstream carbon and energy reduction in urban policies, activities and the build environment” (Roorda and Wittmayer, 2014: 8).

The second author was involved in a transdisciplinary engagement as transition researcher in Ludwigsburg and Montreuil from 2011 to 2014. Her tasks were to support policy makers of the city in applying transition thinking and organising a transition management approach fitting the local needs and context. The first author was involved in an evaluation of the transition management processes from 2012 until 2013. The analysis is based on observations during the process implementations and in-depth interviews with the participating actors (Aberdeen: 6, Ghent: 11, Ludwigsburg: 9, Montreuil: 5), involved city officers (Aberdeen: 3, Ghent: 2, Ludwigsburg: 3, Montreuil: 2) and transition management researchers in all cities (6 interviews) during and after the processes. Several internal process documents (e.g. minutes, interview transcripts), project reports (Roorda et al., 2014; Roorda and Wittmayer, 2014) and scientific literature (Nevens and Roorda, 2013; Nevens et al., 2013; Maas et al., 2012) have informed the analysis.

Though the general ambition in the MUSIC-project was to initiate urban low-carbon transitions, all cities differ in their contexts and motivations for choosing transition management and adapted the process steps accordingly (Table 1). Our empowerment framework enables to trace how the respective applications created conditions for transition management to act as empowerment processes and how this in turn influences empowerment outcomes. The experiences of the four cities provide a rich empirical basis to reflect on how transition management gets implemented as an empowerment process, to what extent different contexts and motivations play a role, and what kinds of empowerment outcomes are achieved as a result. This increases the generalisability of the results in terms of the extent to which, and under what conditions, transition management acts as an empowerment process.

3. Empowerment studies in literature

Empowerment is a contested notion and is often used to express “a

Table 1

Key characteristics of the case study cities.

(Adapted from: Roorda and Wittmayer, 2014: 4.)

	Aberdeen, Scotland	Ghent, Belgium	Ludwigsburg, Germany	Montreuil, France
Population	210,000	240,000	86,000	103,000
Key characteristics	Basis for offshore oil and gas industry in the North Sea	Third biggest port in Belgium; rich cultural heritage	Prosperous city in the Stuttgart region; former garrison town	Agricultural and industrial history; 3rd biggest suburb of Paris
General climate ambition	CO ₂ -reduction	Climate neutral by 2050	Sustainable energy	CO ₂ -reduction
Key challenge for MUSIC and positioning of transition management process	Create culture of energy efficiency among public and private actors; TM as separate process, linked to other policy efforts	Involve wider urban society in climate ambition; TM as separate process, strongly linked to the 'Climate Alliance'	Further develop energy concept with urban actors; TM embedded in preparation of Future Conference	Create a culture of efficiency for 'positive energy strategy'; TM as separate project, linked to other policy efforts

family of somewhat related meanings" (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990: 666). The concept roots in international development and feminist literature, describing social emancipation processes that enable otherwise excluded groups or individuals to define and claim their rights (Luttrell et al., 2009). Empowerment includes access to decision-making processes, education or land, as well as the attainment of capacities "to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions" (Worldbank, 2011; Mosedale, 2005; Oakley, 2001; Luttrell et al., 2009). The concept also attained attention from organisational psychology scholars, who approach empowerment as the attainment of intrinsic motivation to fulfil a (work-related) task (Spreitzer, 1995; Zimmerman, 1995; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). It is also taken up in governance literature, describing the permission to enact decision-making authority and/or the learning processes involved in enacting such authority (Fung and Wright, 2001; Healey, 2006; Fischer, 2006; Bakker et al., 2012). Empowerment is also approached from a critical angle that discusses how processes meant to be empowering can actually result in disempowerment, i.e. they might create/exacerbate e.g. a sense of powerlessness, alienation or helplessness (Mosedale, 2005; Luttrell et al., 2009; Rappaport, 1984).

Empowerment is used to refer to both a *process* and an *outcome*: "actions, activities, or structures may be empowering", resulting "in a level of being empowered" (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995: 570; see also Luttrell et al., 2009). We define empowerment processes as interventions, actions or conditions that develop or enhance actors' abilities to achieve desired ends (empowerment outcomes). This definition links empowerment processes to empowerment as outcome, hence highlighting the importance of analysing both in relation to each other.

Empowerment processes enable actors to "gain mastery over their affairs" (Rappaport, 1987: 122). In this paper, we particularly focus on empowerment processes that are designed and facilitated with the intention to empower actors for a specific purpose. Although a third party cannot bestow empowerment, it can facilitate empowerment (Mosedale, 2005). Scholars often stress process principles, such as particular capacity-building activities (Worldbank, 2011; Helling et al., 2005). In governance literature, principles for empowerment processes include the process setting, the configuration of interaction (e.g. communicative styles, definition of roles and responsibilities, time investment), process facilitation and the creation of trust (Healey, 2006; Ansell and Gash, 2008). Empowerment processes can intentionally and unintentionally be disempowering, i.e. decreasing the abilities of actors to pursue a specific purpose. For example, Swyngedouw (2005) discusses how an absence of clear channels of representation and accountability in emerging participatory governance arrangements can arbitrarily empower new (market, civil society) actors while excluding others.

Empowerment conceptualised as outcome of empowerment processes refers to the increased abilities of individual or collective actors to achieve desirable ends. Empowerment outcomes do not represent a static entity (Mosedale, 2005), and they can be of a great variety: They

can refer to established network ties (Jupp et al., 2010; Williams, 2007; Healey, 2006), gain of material and immaterial resources (Stromquist, 1995; Luttrell et al., 2009), awareness of behavioural options and rights in a given context (Stromquist, 1995; Luttrell et al., 2009; Zimmerman, 1995; Williams, 2007), and a feeling of being in a group of likeminded people and of solidarity (Stromquist, 1995; Jupp et al., 2010; Williams, 2007). In organisational psychology literature empowerment is understood as the attainment or increase in the intrinsic motivation of actors towards self-efficacy (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Zimmerman, 1995; Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995; Spreitzer, 1995). Four dimensions of positive task assessment determine intrinsic motivation: (1) meaning (value attributed to task); (2) competence (belief in capacities to fulfil task); (3) impact (conviction to achieve intended effect of task); and (4) choice (sense of autonomy and self-determination in initiating and completing task) (ibid). Examples of disempowerment outcomes include increased reliance or decreased intrinsic motivation that reinforces existing power structures and patterns of domination (Mosedale, 2005; Luttrell et al., 2009; Boje and Rosile, 2001; cf. Avelino, 2011). What outcomes are empowering or disempowering relate to the purpose of empowerment processes, i.e. why, for what and whose abilities should be increased.

Empowerment processes and outcomes can be approached from individual and collective perspectives. Empowerment processes are usually approached from a collective perspective, i.e. they unfold in interdependent (social learning) processes in which actors empower each other by sharing experiences or participating in mutual processes (Sadan, 2004; Drury and Reicher, 2005). Individual and collective empowerment outcomes are two (interrelated) units of analysis: while at the individual level the focus is on individual behaviors, skills and motivations, the collective level refers to, for example, opportunities for citizen participation in community decision-making (Zimmerman, 1990).

The insights from this review of empowerment help us to conceptualise and analyse (dis)empowerment in transition management. Firstly, the distinction between empowerment as a process and as outcomes enables to link transition management process design principles to different kinds of empowerment through which actors are enabled to take up (new) roles in influencing sustainability transitions. The notion of disempowerment introduces a critical perspective into the analysis by highlighting that processes meant to be empowering can also be *disempowering* (rather than being *not* empowering) — in relation to transition management the process might be disempowering by decreasing the abilities of actors to take up roles in sustainability transitions. Finally, empowerment outcomes can be viewed from both a collective and individual perspective. We focus on the latter as a unit for analysing empowerment outcomes to zoom in on how individual actors are enabled to take up (new) roles and responsibilities in influencing sustainability transitions rather than asserting that the group of frontrunners stays together and takes the transition up as a collective. Approaching (dis)empowerment in transition management in this way enables to explore the contribution and implications of such

interventions to role changes in governance in welfare states.

4. Empowerment in transition governance settings

Transition management includes a portfolio of participatory tools directed towards enabling social learning processes in which individuals and communities become empowered to develop and influence a sustainability transition (Loorbach, 2010; Frantzeskaki et al., 2012). The most prominent tool to date is the transition arena (Loorbach and Rotmans, 2010; Loorbach et al., 2015). The transition arena is a particular setting that creates a space for a small group of frontrunners to share ideas. It is also a process that moves along different phases in which the group structures a problem and develops common visions, strategies and actions for sustainability transitions (Roorda et al., 2014). An objective of the arena is to empower the participating frontrunners to take up roles in influencing the envisioned sustainability transition by developing and implementing transition experiments and engaging new actors in this pursuit (ibid). A transition team guides the transition arena and ensures the implementation of the process principles.

In the following, we approach transition management as an empowerment process intended to achieve empowerment outcomes. From transition management literature, we derive empowering process principles and identify the empowerment outcomes of transition management processes. Taking account of how these processes and outcomes can also be disempowering or lead to disempowerment helps to reveal potential ambiguities and exemplify the double-edged sword that these kinds of governance interventions are.

4.1. Empowerment process design in transition management

From theoretical and practical transition management literature, and informed by the empowerment literature review above, we identify four process design principles underlying transition management processes, which (explicitly or implicitly) refer to empowerment outcomes.

The *development of a system change perspective* is the main activity throughout the transition arena process. It comprises the formulation of a problem definition, a long-term vision for a sustainability transition, transition pathways and transition experiments (Loorbach, 2007, 2010; Frantzeskaki et al., 2012). This may link to empowerment outcomes by providing a long-term orientation for future actions, conveying a feeling of urgency for change as well as enabling to position own actions within larger societal developments that might help to identify individual contributions to achieving change (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; cf. Avelino, 2011; Wittmayer et al., 2011). This builds on a process-based understanding of sustainability, i.e. through deliberation among the participating actors and social learning a common understanding is, or should be, arrived at (Frantzeskaki et al., 2012; Wittmayer et al., 2014). While the participants do not have to agree with every element of the change perspective, they should develop a feeling of ownership and position themselves within (parts of) it (Avelino, 2009). Several process elements have been identified as challenging and potentially contributing to disempowerment in the process of developing a shared perspective. Timing and facilitation are crucial, i.e. moving at the right speed and taking all participants along to guarantee ownership and alignment of individual perspectives (Nevens and Roorda, 2013). There might be dangers for disempowerment when existing roles and power structures underlying unsustainable system structures and paradigms remain unquestioned, or the participants are not able to identify their own roles in the transition process (Avelino, 2009; Smith and Stirling, 2010).

The *provision and co-creation of knowledge* helps to provide additional information and insights on the issue in question and possibilities for actions (Luttrell et al., 2009). The system analysis at the outset of the transition arena marks a central means for knowledge provision and co-creation. The system analysis process helps to reveal how the

problem in question links to a complex web of feedback mechanisms, convey a feeling of the possibility for change and create a sense of urgency for fundamental change (Loorbach, 2007, 2010; Maas et al., 2012). Additional provision of knowledge might include expert presentations or particular readings. Knowledge provision and co-creation can be empowering when increasing the participants' ability to question current structures and to identify possibilities for action. It can be disempowering when the problem appears too complex and paralysing (see e.g. Avelino, 2009). The transition terminology also represents a knowledge input, possibly serving as tool to understand and convey complexity. The analysis of a transition management process to sustainable transportation in the Netherlands revealed that this can also have disempowering effects, confirming dominant positions of regime actors: "Because it [transition terminology] was imposed from above participants had the feeling that they did not have a choice in applying it" (ibid: 378).

A start has been made in discussing how the *process setting* influences empowerment outcomes in transition management interventions (Avelino, 2011: 64–66). An empowering setting is co-creative, i.e. decisions on process and content are taken following mutual deliberation and agreement that also allow for criticism. Other scholars discussing empowerment recognise that co-creation is vital for inducing ownership of the results and increasing commitment for implementation (Ansell and Gash, 2008). However, the shift towards an empowerment setting requires everybody involved in the process to "learn new skills, new attitudes, new behaviors, new ways of relating, and even a new language" (Randolph, 2000: 97; cf. Avelino, 2011). A risk is to overwhelm participants with self-responsibility or to push it onto them regardless of whether or not they want it, and to create new dependency relations (e.g. dependence of participants on transition team members facilitating the process). The transition team who initiates and guides the transition management process implementation fulfils a central role in this regard, for example, deciding on who is invited, choosing facilitation techniques and setting the boundaries in which the interaction takes place (Wittmayer and Schäpke, 2014; Wittmayer et al., 2012).

Finally, the *group composition* is a distinct feature in transition management (Loorbach, 2007, 2010). Transition management explicitly targets frontrunners that are committed to sustainability, have the potential to influence change and hold innovative ideas about the future of their city (Wittmayer et al., 2012). It proposes a methodology to select 15 to 20 frontrunners who should be as heterogeneous as possible (representing different societal domains and backgrounds, gender and age groups) (ibid). The joint commitment should lead to a feeling of like-mindedness and solidarity in working towards a sustainable future. At the same time, however, it possibly creates a feeling of small leverage and illegitimacy of the decisions taken (Van Buuren and Loorbach, 2009). This relates to questions about who is considered a frontrunner and hence empowered to participate in transition management processes, and who is selecting them, as well as upon the relationship of transition management and the broader context in which it takes place (ibid). Transition management has been positioned as referring to a new 'type of democratic governance' that bases on contestation and counter-hegemonic discourses in networks beyond existing paradigms of democratic institutions and deliberative democracy (Jhagroe and Loorbach, 2015).

4.2. Empowerment as outcome of transition management

The empowerment literature identifies different kinds of empowerment outcomes. Approaching transition management literature with this lens enables us to discern and operationalise the following kinds of empowerment targeted in the process: developing new social relations and connections for influencing sustainability transitions (Loorbach, 2010; Avelino and Rotmans, 2011; Roorda et al., 2014; Nevens and Roorda, 2013), reflecting on and (re-)defining roles and responsibilities

Table 2
Overview of the transition management phases in the urban context.
(Adapted from: Roorda et al., 2014: 15.)

Phase	Process step	(Main) actor setting
1. <i>Setting the scene</i>	Formation of the transition team Setting up the process plan Creation of space within the local government's body	Transition team
2. <i>Exploring local dynamics</i>	System and actor analysis	Transition arena
3. <i>Framing the transition challenge</i>	Problem definition	
4. <i>Envisioning a sustainable city</i>	Drawing up a transition vision	
5. <i>Reconnecting long- and short-term</i>	Developing transition pathways and a transition agenda	Transition network
6. <i>Engaging and anchoring</i>	Disseminating transition agenda and engaging new actors and networks	
7. <i>Getting into action</i>	Implementation of transition experiments	

in the envisioned sustainability transitions (Loorbach, 2010; Frantzeskaki et al., 2012); and increasing intrinsic motivation to influence the envisioned transition (Avelino, 2011; Roorda et al., 2014). These kinds of empowerment should increase the abilities of actors to take up roles in influencing sustainability transitions.

Firstly, transition management processes seek to connect various actors to each other to nurture new or alternative social relations, facilitate cooperation for mutual benefits, pooling of resources or cooperation and build alternative transition networks to influence sustainability transitions (Wittmayer and Loorbach, 2016; Wittmayer, 2016). Transition management aims to enable the arena participants to link to likeminded actors with different resources for generating synergies in the pursuit of sustainability transitions (Loorbach, 2007, 2010; Nevens and Roorda, 2013). Hoffman (2013), for instance, shows in his case study on wind energy in Denmark how actors may attain resources through reaching out to others. A danger for disempowerment occurs when the new network ties maintain or create dependence relationships to actors that are perceived to have for example more financial resources or authority.

A second empowerment outcome refers to increased awareness about a problem, responsibilities, constraints and possible strategies in a given context. Transition management establishes a setting for actors to broaden their problem perception, seek solutions and reflect on and (re-)define their roles and responsibilities for action (Loorbach, 2007, 2010; Frantzeskaki et al., 2012; Nevens and Roorda, 2013; Wittmayer et al., 2011). A disempowerment risk is that participants feel overwhelmed by the conveyed complexity and uncertainty, or that they fail to question current responsibilities or seek new roles.

Finally, transition management seeks to increase the intrinsic motivation of the participants to actively engaging in and taking up a role in influencing sustainability transitions. Intrinsic motivation determines the commitment and willingness of actors to fulfil a task, create agendas and take actions (Avelino, 2009, 2011). Disempowerment might occur when the participants attain a feeling that they are not able to contribute to the sustainability transition, for example when the dilemma of individual contributions in the context of the complicated problem, the need for (more) radical innovation and the long time horizon cannot be solved (ibid).

5. (Dis)empowerment in four European cities: the MUSIC-project

In the MUSIC-project, transition management was operationalised into seven process phases that (mainly) took place in different actor settings (Table 2). The transition teams in each city consisted of city officers from the respective city governments supported by transition management researchers. These teams have been key actors in initiating and implementing the processes; they have (at least initially) framed the processes, embedded it in the local context and selected the frontrunners for the transition arena.

In the following, we first outline the context as well as give an overview of the transition management processes in each city, before

we comparatively analyse the extent to which the processes and outcomes reflect (dis)empowerment in Aberdeen, Montreuil, Ghent and Ludwigsburg.²

5.1. Aberdeen

Aberdeen is a city with over 210,000 inhabitants. It is the basis for the offshore oil and gas industry in the North Sea. The city pursues the implementation of a carbon management plan and a sustainable energy action plan. Transition management was implemented to develop climate and energy agendas. The transition team was formed in May 2011 consisting of three officials from the environmental policy department and an external transition expert. The team worked on a systems analysis and identified frontrunners based on the actor selection methodology (Wittmayer et al., 2012). Continued replacements of the project leader from the environmental department and of the advising transition management researcher caused difficulties in starting off and implementing the arena process. After first arena meetings in June 2011, the arena was recomposed because the invited participants overrepresented actors from the energy sector, policy officials and academics. There have been a total of nine arena meetings until September 2013. During the meetings, participants questioned whether 'oil rule the city' and argued for building a new socio-economic fabric decoupling the city's growth from carbon growth and introducing new themes into a vision for Aberdeen in 2050 (including mobility and education). At the Sustainable Aberdeen Summit in December 2013 the magazine "Aberdeen in Transition: Journey towards 2050" was launched and the results from the process were presented to over 50 stakeholders with the aim to set up networks and develop transition experiments. The process resulted in six project groups consisting of participating frontrunners, city officers and newly engaged actors and a steering group of frontrunners and city officers to oversee future progress. Projects have been implemented across Aberdeen; e.g., 'Celebrate the Streets' developed an event on low carbon transport uses.

5.2. Ghent

Ghent has over 240,000 inhabitants and is an important port city. Transition management was linked to the city council's goal to become climate neutral by 2050, the launching of the Climate Alliance ('Gents Klimaatverbond') that should involve actors from the city in the process, and to the upcoming council elections in late 2012. The transition team was formed in early 2011 consisting of two officers from the environmental department, external transition management researchers and facilitators. The considerable political support the process received due to its linkages to the council elections in late 2012 gave it a mandate yet also put it under close scrutiny within the government and time pressure rushing its process implementation. In

² For an in-depth overview of the respective processes see Roorda and Wittmayer (2014).

spring 2011, the transition team conducted a comprehensive system analysis and selected the frontrunners for the transition arena; a core of 17 frontrunners participated in the process. Six arena meetings were held between May and October 2011 and a closing meeting for reflection in January 2012 after which the city government declared the process finished without consulting with the participants. In November 2011 a Climate Forum was held and attended by over 100 actors. The transition agenda that included a vision for a climate neutral Ghent in 2050 and themes ranging from mobility, energy, city greening and buildings was presented. Six project groups formed with arena participants and new actors to develop transition experiments. Next to several projects (e.g. a carrot mob and an urban farming project) two additional arena processes were started and other projects sought linkages to the process. The transition agenda was published in the form of transition magazines featuring the participating frontrunners. Additionally, the frontrunners presented their agenda to the city council, resulting in the uptake of the vision and goals in the election programmes of three political parties — and subsequently in the new council agreement.

5.3. Ludwigsburg

Ludwigsburg is a middle-sized (about 86,000 inhabitants) and economically prosperous city. Through the transition management process, the city's government sought to engage more actors in its already ambitious and far-reaching activities to achieve the local energy transition. The transition team involved policy officers from the department of sustainable urban development, the director of the department for public engagement, one transition management researcher and an external facilitator. Before the transition arena, the framing of transition management was important and time-consuming as the city is renowned for their participation processes. Through these the government seeks input from citizens for devising policy and action plans — consequently transition management was initially framed and implemented as such. High working pressures and competing priorities delayed the process start and later hampered the anchoring of results. After a short system sketch and actor selection, a first kick-off meeting was held in November 2011. Six arena meetings took place between March and September 2012, involving at least ten core participants with diverse backgrounds. A vision was developed of “One day in the lives of Ludwig and Ludwiga in 2050”, that included themes such as mobility and green spaces. In the winter of 2012/2013, three broadening events took place where the vision and the resulting agenda were presented to, discussed and further developed with other city actors that were invited by the municipality and participating frontrunners. The vision and two pathways were presented to the Mayor in July 2012. The website “MeinLb.de” was launched and linked to the arena process to collect activities of citizens. The working group ‘local energy transition’ was formed, consisting of some of the participating frontrunners and newly interested persons and a cross-departmental working group on energy was set up. However, by mid-2015 no vision document or viable follow-up had yet materialised.

5.4. Montreuil

Montreuil is a former agricultural and industrial city that faces especially socio-economic challenges as the third most populous suburb of Paris (with over 103,000 inhabitants). Like in Aberdeen, transition management was regarded as an opportunity to develop the city's climate and energy agenda. The transition team encompassed officers from the environmental and planning departments and the general directorate, an external facilitator and — initially — a transition management expert. The lack of experience with participatory approaches and the long-term sickness of the project leader of the government challenged the process implementation. The involved officials enjoyed a high degree of freedom from the mayor and city council in the

implementation. There have been a total of ten transition arena meetings between September 2011 and May 2014 involving about 16 core participants. The process has been particular in that it involved a high level of philosophical and reflective discussions among the participating frontrunners and the transition team on democracy and the relationships between citizens and city government. The vision of ‘Montreuil in 2030’ included three themes that have been stated as preconditions for achieving sustainability: a solidary Montreuil, a modest Montreuil and a Montreuil reinforcing local democracy. In October 2013 the transition agenda was signed by the Mayor and presented at the two-day MUSIC & FabLab Festival that gathered about 200 people. The festival also saw the official launch of the FabLab as the first transition experiment. With the support of the city government seven projects have been implemented. The process has also led to a formal agreement between the frontrunners and the city government to continue the dialogue. The arena was established as an iterative process.

All transition management processes resulted in a reframing and broadening of perspectives on challenges and visions for achieving low-carbon futures in the involved cities than have been previously maintained by the respective city governments and also by the individual frontrunners. The extent to which these perspectives have actually been taken up by broader city networks, in strategies, policies as well as actions and projects differ across cities. The comparative analysis below reflects on the transition management experiences from a (dis)empowerment perspective that links the process implementations to individual empowerment outcomes. This reveals why and how individual frontrunners took up roles in the sustainability transition.

5.5. (Dis)empowerment process in MUSIC

The analysis of the implementation of the empowerment process principles reveals several challenges and strengths in relation to the implementation of the principles according to the transition management literature and resulting (dis)empowerment (Table 3). In particular, it has been challenging to overcome the roles of the officers as initiators and facilitators of and the frontrunners as ‘being subjected’ to the processes.

In view of this, especially the co-creative process setting turned out to be challenging to achieve. The political interest in Ghent put the process under time pressure and control from the government (i.e. ‘measurable’ results needed to be produced before the council elections in late 2012). The abrupt end of the transition arena through the government left the participating frontrunners disappointed. In Ludwigsburg, the abundance of participation processes and lack of time within the government resulted in an initial framing of the process as another of such participation processes seeking input from citizens. In Montreuil and Aberdeen, on the other hand, the relative time and freedom of the involved policy officers in the process implementation supported an open attitude towards the input of the participating frontrunners both with regard to process and content.

The process setting influenced the implementation of the remaining empowerment process principles. Some of the tools put forth in transition management supported the opening up of the involved policy officers. For example, the actor selection methodology enabled them to identify actors in the city they had not previously thought of before as well as explicitly focus on frontrunners. Nevertheless, in Ghent and Aberdeen, at least initially the actor selection exhibited the (unconscious) intention to maintain control over the process. While in Ghent actors perceived as maintaining too radical ideas have not been invited, in Aberdeen there was a challenge to open up towards actors not involved in the energy sector, government or science. Consequently, there have been criticisms with regard to the extent the developed system change perspectives are sufficiently transformative to give directions for a sustainability transition. Still, all arena groups consisted of participants from diverse backgrounds and sectors (e.g. social,

Table 3
Strengths and challenges of empowerment process principles in the MUSIC-cities and relation to (dis)empowerment.

Process principle	Challenges and strengths	Relation to (dis)empowerment
System change perspective	Process reflexivity	A high level of reflexivity about the process and the role of the frontrunners in it supported intensive reflections upon the future of cities, options, roles and responsibilities especially in Montreuil and Aberdeen. Meta-reflections in Montreuil enhanced this.
	Exchange of different perspectives	In Ludwigsburg, the framing of the process as advice-seeking withheld participants and transition team from searching for new roles and responsibilities.
	Too little vs. too much time	In all cities, the deliberations aligned different perspectives and revealed surprising interrelations between different problem elements.
Knowledge provision and co-creation	Complexity and urgency vs. feasibility	The hurried process in Ghent hindered the questioning and identification of roles and responsibilities (process reflexivity) and reduced ownership over content and process. In Ludwigsburg, too much time spent on backcasting failed to move to the identification of concrete actions.
	Controlled process implementation vs. multi-actor co-creation	The system analyses and in Ghent additional expert presentations lifted the quality of the discussions, improved the feeling to have meaningful discussions and generated new insights beyond fields of expertise.
Process setting	Trust and open atmosphere	All cities showed the requirement to link the created sense of urgency for change to creating a sense of feasibility.
	Heterogeneity	The ‘controlled’ process setting in Ghent and the ‘input seeking’ framing in Ludwigsburg limited the participants’ ownership over process and content and the extent they sought to own responsibilities.
Group composition	Like-mindedness vs. legitimacy	Co-creation of the process aims and steps as well as the nature of the follow-up in Montreuil and Aberdeen increased ownership and responsibility of all actors involved.
		The actor analysis methodology opened up the identification of frontrunners; however, in Ghent and Aberdeen there was (initially) a tendency to exclude actors who were considered too radical. The process settings in all cities created cooperative mind-sets and trust, bringing the participants closer together and initiating intensive knowledge exchange.
		Heterogeneous group composition contributed in all cities to broadening of perspectives and usual framings.
		The dominance of reflexive participants in Montreuil stimulated meta-reflections on the process. Creation of like-mindedness stimulated joint commitment in all cities. Doubts about leverage and legitimacy of input from ‘coalition of the willing’.

academic, business), and represented mostly civil society actors.

The underlying process setting influenced the development of the system change perspective. In Ludwigsburg, as officers and participants found it difficult to let go of solely seeking or giving input for devising policy and action plans, the system perspective reflects responsibilities of the government rather than a questioning of existing and identification of new and common roles and responsibilities. In Ghent, the rushed process implementation did not leave sufficient time to fully develop the system change perspective. Additionally, the involved officers did considerable processing of the input generated in the transition arena. Although this has been verified by the frontrunners, there were some complaints about some modifications rendering the perspective less radical (e.g. from ‘car free city’ to ‘less cars’). On the other hand, in Aberdeen and especially in Montreuil the discussions involved in-depth reflections on who is responsible for taking up the developed system change perspectives and what this implies for (the relationships between) citizens and government. Generally, the discussions among the heterogeneous arena group in the course of developing a common direction knowledge exchange and revealed (surprising) interrelations between problem dimensions. In all cities the social dimensions of climate neutrality (e.g. energy poverty) contributed to a reframing of the energy problem.

5.6. (Dis)empowerment outcomes in MUSIC

The transition management processes in the MUSIC-cities resulted in diverse nuances of (dis)empowerment outcomes (Table 4). The analysis reveals the ambiguous nature of empowerment and how empowerment and disempowerment outcomes can go hand in hand. The analysis establishes links between the implementation of the empowerment process principles and (dis)empowerment outcomes, in which the dualism between ‘guiding’ policy officers and ‘experiencing’ frontrunners resurfaces as an important issue. The results are largely based on interviews with the frontrunners, and hence represent self-reported empowerment.

In all cities the participating frontrunners developed new ties with like-minded actors (fellow frontrunners, policy officers, newly engaged actors). These ties were considered one of the most important results from the process, and as providing new opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration. The depth of the ties and the extent that they generated synergies for pursuing joint actions towards a sustainability transition differed across cities, ranging from more loose ties in Ghent and Ludwigsburg to deeper and more institutionalised relationships in Aberdeen and Montreuil. These emerged from the reflections on roles and responsibilities in urban governance. The connections between government and participating frontrunners were pivotal in all cities; in the follow-up action the participating frontrunners drew on and were partially dependent on the governments’ provisions of resources (e.g. finance, knowledge). In Ghent and Ludwigsburg, where the governments did not take up strong roles in the follow-up, also the ties among the participating frontrunners thinned out.

The problem analysis and intense discussions in the heterogeneous arena groups facilitated a broadening of problem perspectives of the participating frontrunners and a feeling for the complexities of the problems faced by their cities. This aided a common alignment towards a sustainability transition and the search for solutions that the participants would take up themselves. It proved important that the participants were able to identify what their own roles and responsibilities in pursuing the sustainability transitions could be. This was achieved by the co-creative process settings in Montreuil and Aberdeen, which encouraged the participants to reflect on their behavioural options in relation to other actors and the city government. The experiences from Ludwigsburg and Ghent show that if the process does not induce such reflexivity while increasing a feeling of complexity there is a risk that the participating frontrunners feel unable to contribute to a sustainability transition and identify behavioural options primarily for other actors, for example the city government or higher levels of government and big business companies.

This closely links to the extent to which the participating frontrunners were intrinsically motivated to develop and implement actions for

Table 4
(Dis)empowerment outcomes in the MUSIC-cities.

Kinds of (dis) empowerment	Empowerment outcomes	Disempowerment outcomes
New and alternative social relations	In all cities many new ties and partnerships between participating frontrunners, between different departments and between frontrunners and city government were created for knowledge exchange and joint activities. In Montreuil and Aberdeen the participants and policy officers established formal commitments for follow-up.	Extensive focus on city governments as a central network node in Ghent and Ludwigsburg limited the extent to which frontrunners followed-up on the established ties.
(Re-)definition of roles and responsibilities	Exchange of different perspectives enhanced understanding of complexity of sustainability problems in cities. Reflections on roles and responsibilities in the process led to an increased understanding of individual behavioural options especially in Montreuil and Aberdeen. In Ghent, two frontrunners took up the transition management methodology as a tool to use for the pursuit of sustainability transition.	In Ghent and Ludwigsburg the limited questioning of current roles and responsibilities confirmed existing roles and responsibilities among frontrunners and policy officers.
Intrinsic motivation	In all cities the intrinsic motivation of the participating frontrunners to pursue a sustainability transition by investing time, energy and resources was (initially) increased. Aligned perspectives and feeling of being in a group of like-minded people supported individual motivations. Identification of future collaborations and shared responsibilities with the city governments increased a sense of being able to contribute to a sustainability transition in Montreuil and Aberdeen.	Participants in Ghent and Ludwigsburg felt to have limited resources (time, financial, knowledge) and leverage to achieve necessary changes at e.g. higher levels of governments. This led to a focus on the city government for follow-up.

a sustainability transition. On a general level, in all cities the development of a shared narrative about the past, present and future of their city generated a feeling of like-mindedness, joint commitment and increased leverage. Many participating frontrunners were motivated to pursue actions towards the jointly envisioned sustainability transition by engaging new actors or ones from their networks, developing and implementing projects and linking their activities to on-going projects. However, the longer-term commitment to actively pursue a sustainability transition was built on the extent to which the participating frontrunners and the city government defined a joint commitment and shared responsibilities. In Aberdeen and Montreuil, the formal agreements between frontrunners and government to continue collaboration spurred the willingness and feeling of leverage to jointly put efforts into achieving a sustainability transition. In Ghent and Ludwigsburg, neither frontrunners nor government took up the facilitation of a follow-up after the transition arena and the connections between the group eroded. Consequently, the participating frontrunners did not feel to have sufficient leverage to achieve the top-down decisions they deemed necessary without the government's support.

6. Discussion and conclusions

This article shows opportunities and intricacies of processes like transition management, which are meant to empower civil society actors to take up roles and responsibilities in addressing sustainability issues. As such, transition management can be positioned within the broader societal debate on withdrawing welfare states that result in the intentional and unintentional shifting of responsibilities from the state to citizens. Drawing on insights from empowerment literature and relating these to the transition management framework, this article further developed the concept of empowerment in transition management. This conceptual development was used to compare the transition management processes and outcomes in four cities and to draw empirically based conclusions about (dis)empowerment implications. Our analysis of how and to what extent transition management acts as a (dis)empowerment process in cities shows that such changes of roles and responsibilities need to be mediated through co-creation processes in which diverse actors jointly reflect on and discuss their roles in contributing to societal welfare.

We positioned transition management as a facilitated empowerment process to enhance actors' abilities to take up (new) roles in influencing sustainability transitions. The conceptual distinction between empow-

ering process principles and intended kinds of empowerment outcomes of transition management processes enables to connect process implementation criteria and how they get implemented to (dis)empowerment results. While transition management appears as a fruitful design intervention to boost the development of new social relations, (re-) definition of roles and intrinsic motivations of actors to influence sustainability transitions, the analysis also showed that the implementation of the empowering process principles is demanding. Transition management requires new skills and mind-sets of everyone involved — of both the participating frontrunners and the involved policy officers. This was exacerbated by the dualism between policy officers in the transition team initiating and guiding the process implementation and the participating frontrunners in the transition arena. In the analysed transition management interventions all actors found it challenging to move beyond their usual expectations and roles and enter into co-creative relationships. Remarkably, all cities considered the process a learning experience in this regard. In all cities, the involved policy officers needed time to open up towards giving up some responsibility and authority over the process. Likewise, it has been difficult to shift the mind-set of the arena participants from 'providing input' towards 'taking action'.

Experimental process methodologies like transition management seem to offer new ways forward for pro-actively engaging with the intentional and unintentional changes of actor roles in the context of restructuring welfare states. The analysis highlights the challenges of implementing processes that are meant to be empowering yet need to build on already changed conceptions of roles in the process participation and co-design. It particularly illustrates that processes that are meant to increase the responsibility of civil society actors for their own actions and future welfare require mutual explorations and (re-) definitions of relationships, roles and responsibilities between different types of actors. The strength of transition management, if utilised, is that it engages actors in a collective process, in which participants develop new contacts and identify a common perspective on change that includes a redefinition of their (individual, collective and relational) roles and responsibilities in its implementation. This resonates with studies on empowerment that show how individual empowerment as outcome is a function of the extent to which one's own action is understood as expressing social identity (Drury and Reicher, 2005). This identity is constructed by mutual deliberations of finding new relations with one another, and defining who is able to and would like to take up which roles and responsibilities in influencing a sustain-

ability transition.

The extent to which this co-creative and reflective setting is established reflects a main danger for disempowerment in transition management: on the one hand, the involvement of policy officers from the local government in the transition team may lead to an exercise of control over results (e.g. excluding ‘too radical’ actors or ideas). On the other hand, a lack of critical reflections and development of joint commitment between participating frontrunners and the city government conveys a transfer of responsibilities from the latter to the former while the former do not feel to have sufficient leverage to achieve critical changes. The cities showed different results in that regard, which might be related to their contexts, cultures and the motivations of engaging with transition management. For example, while in Ghent the process received a high level of political attention and scrutiny, in Montreuil transition management could be more implemented in ‘the shadows’ of on-going policy and planning processes, thus giving it more freedom for co-creation.

Crucially, empowerment cannot be ‘bestowed’ — also in the broader welfare state context responsibilities and more active roles cannot simply be assigned to citizens. Rather, it needs to build from a mutual and co-creative learning process, in which actors connect to one another and (re-)define their roles and responsibilities in relation to one another.

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