Flatpack democracy: power and politics at the boundaries of transition

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Published Version

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Flatpack democracy: Power and politics at the boundaries of transition

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Abstract

This paper seeks to critically assess how "radical" sustainability approaches that challenge "mainstream" development trajectories—and politics—are crafted and contested within local government. We explore the extent to which these approaches account for a consolidation, break down or transformation of role boundaries and political identities and their implications for the politics of niche–regime dynamics. In our in-depth study of Independents for Frome (Somerset, UK), an "independent" group who took control of the town council in 2011 and consolidated a non-partisan approach within its administrative functions, referred to as its "Flatpack Democracy" model, we take a closer look at adversarialism and the intersection of power dynamics within local government. The findings reveal the capture of local mainstream political institutions by niche "protagonists" through an orchestration and consolidation of transition governance, woven in strategically and opportunistically into new forms of localized political identities at the niche–regime interface, which helped to create a community-level regime of transition governance. We suggest that informal institutional capital, such as the role of personal ties can impact on legitimacy, accountability, or the validation of sustainability agendas. Our findings also advance debates on transition thresholds within "liminal transition spaces", interstitial spaces between a previous way of knowing and doing, and a new way. Here ground rules dictating socio-political norms are unclear, collaborative actions are potentially working at cross-purposes and/or multiple forms of (transformative) power are exercised simultaneously at distinct moments, or instantiations of transition. That is, there remains a much-needed theoretical debate around the fragile and imperfect processes of democratization within the everyday politics of transition management.

KEYWORDS
frome, independent politics, liminal space, power, sustainability transitions, transition management

1 | INTRODUCTION: TRANSITIONING TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE POLITICS?

Sustainability transitions research explores why cracks and instabilities in socio-technical systems are seized and the form they take,

exploring mechanisms, strategies, and potential for replication toward more sustainable outcomes (see Geels & Schot, 2007; Grin, Rotmans, & Schot, 2011; Markard, Raven, & Truffer, 2012). Sustainability transitions themselves are considered to be a gradual "reordering" of systems toward such outcomes (Zolfagharian, Walrave, Raven, & Romme, 2019).

This paper takes a socio-institutional account of sustainability transitions (Loorbach, Frantzeskaki, & Avelino, 2017), assessing the interplay between local administrative political structures and radical political agendas to instigate socio-political change. Many prominent political systems are based on party-political models which may encourage ideological adversarialism or "pointing the finger." Whether these systems can make room for more measured, reflexive debates and a kinder "progressive" politics, and at what scales of the political system, is pertinent to the aims of this paper. However, adversarialism within political systems is currently underexplored in this sustainability transitions literature, despite recent research on the state and its administrative arrangements (Ehnert et al., 2018; Johnstone & Newell, 2018), arrangements between stakeholders (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2015; Grin et al., 2011), and the politics these types of interactions invoke (Avelino, 2017; Patterson et al., 2017).

The extent to which political structures can themselves (positively) "transition" toward a more representative and democratically engaged polity is particularly timely in the UK. In a referendum in June 2016, 52% of UK voters elected to leave the European Union (also referred to as "Brexit"). For many, a desire to "take back control" of political institutions was a key discursive and ideological driver of peoples' decision to "Vote Leave." Brexit represents a double-edged sword in terms of being a "window of opportunity" (Geels, 2002; Kingdon, 1995) to reconstruct the fabric of the UK's political and economic architecture to steer and support more "sustainable" lifestyles and democratic sustainability transitions. At the same time, Brexit potentially opens up destabilizing pathways relating to stronger components of EU environmental legislation or negative impacts in terms of international trade. With a dominant two-party model still in play, from where political innovations might emanate and their likely degrees of success remains an underresearched area—particularly at a local level. For those engaged in socio-political change, it is essential to understand the relationships, contributions, strategies, and experiences of these actors and the bearing these have on the form and politics of transitions.

We focus on one notable example of a potential political "transition" where local voters rejected adversarial party-politics in the town council of Frome in Somerset, UK. Frome's case is important as the key protagonists for sustainable transitions were a group of "independent" councillors who claimed to encourage inclusion and diversity (some with ties to the Transition [town] movement, hereafter referred to as Transition). Transition has typically chastised government as being "part of the problem" for inaction on climate change (Hopkins, 2008) and called for community-level Transition Initiatives (part of the wider Transition movement) to rise to the challenge of (re)-crafting new (parallel) infrastructure: to operate outside of existing systems (i.e., a "niche" experiment) and demonstrate alternative

practices to neo-liberalism that increase self-reliance and local resilience, or "relocalized" approaches (see Bunce, 2016; Hopkins, 2008; McGreevy & Wilson, 2016).

As a movement, Transition has typically shied away from being (party-) "political" with an emphasis on nonconfrontational approaches. However, more recently, there have been several cases of Transitioners (i.e., those who consider themselves as part of the movement) responding to Rowell's (2010) call to put themselves forward for election; some Transitioners now occupy roles in local government, from municipal through to higher tiers, in an attempt to transmute the systems of government from within (Macedo et al., 2020). More importantly, elections evidence a level of maturity in the Transition movement, where niche experimentation can break into the seams of more "mainstream" institutional domains, such as local government.

If "progressive" actors take power in formal, institutional roles, whether their original intentions are carried with them or renegotiated by institutional actors is indicative of the reach of alterity in formal, institutionalized processes of governance. Can these actors retain a "niche" identity when they occupy formal spaces of power or do they cultivate their own "regime"? Additionally, do Transition-inspired socio-political innovations yield more inclusive, accountable, and legitimate governance transitions?

We recognize that much attention has been paid to the study of policy institutions and political processes (Smith & Stirling, 2008) and actor-centered accounts of transitions (Pesch, 2015), which are often central to transition studies (Zolfagharian et al., 2019). We go beyond these approaches to address the political nature of why do actors come together in transition arenas: what shared motivations or identities create the conditions for resisting dominant development narratives or shaping transition outcomes (see Shove and Walker, 2007)? Below, we set out a theoretical framework for our research based upon a review of extant literature on the politics of sustainability transitions and consider adversarialism in political transitions more broadly. We then summarize representative democracy in the United Kingdom and the significance of "Flatpack Democracy" in Frome before outlining our methodological framework. The findings detailing Independents for Frome's (IfF's) rise to and consolidation of power are presented and then discussed.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE POLITICS OF TRANSITION GOVERNANCE

Political theorist Chantel Mouffe's (1999) distinction between antagonist and agonistic politics is particularly pertinent to understand the niche–regime interface. She suggests that antagonism is "between enemies," the "other" to be "destroyed," whereas agonism is between "adversaries"—"a legitimate energy, an enemy with whom we have in common a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of democracy" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 755; see Benhabib, 1996; Valderrama & Jørgensen, 2008). Mouffe argues that "to come to accept the position of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity… a

quality of a conversion than of rational persuasion" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 755).

Viewing the discursive struggle to gain legitimacy between socio-technical configurations as political enables politics, mechanisms, and forms of interaction to be carefully explored (Hodson & Marvin, 2013; Newig & Fritsch, 2009; Raven, Kern, Smith, Jacobsson, & Verhees, 2016). These empirical observations are centered within the branch of sustainability transitions known as *transition governance* (Avelino & Grin, 2017; Loorbach et al., 2017). Focusing on governance reflects the symbiotic nature between individual and collective structure-agency dynamics (Nykvist & Turnheim, 2015). Negotiations of different actors' subjective value orientations affect claims for what is to made resilient and for whom (Loorbach et al., 2017) and can address the previous lack of attention to actors in transition roles and arenas (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2015; Pesch, 2015), including how roles become appropriated or assigned.

Regimes are commonly understood as highly institutionalized arrangements with reinforcing practices, cultures, and logics that can lead to unsustainable institutional lock-in. Pressures for regime shift may arise from many angles—social movements, changing resource and consumption patterns, government policy, business, or policy drivers (see Geels & Schot, 2007). These pressures are typically assumed to arise from "niche" (grassroots or protected spaces) or "landscape" (perceived as exogenous pressures) levels. Depending on the configuration and pressures, an innovation may cause a regime to reinforce/stabilize (if unsuccessful due to lock-in) or to innovate/deconstruct the status quo, leading to degrees of reconfiguration (or even collapse) toward a new stabilization pattern (Avelino & Rotmans, 2009; Loorbach et al., 2017). In the words of Davies and Featherstone (2013, p. 244), the theoretical task at hand is thus: "how different trajectories of activity are combined and reworked" in transition arenas that bring together—or exclude—"niche" and "regime" actors.

Power, politics, and agency have been explored by several transition scholars (Meadowcroft, 2009; Shove and Walker, 2007, 2008; Smith & Stirling, 2008). Understandings of power in transitions have shifted from an emphasis on conflict (Geels & Schot, 2007) and resistance (Geels, 2014) to different types of power that can be exercised by actors (Avelino, 2011, 2017). Avelino et al. (2016, p. 559) point out that a pervasive dichotomy between niche and regime in earlier sustainability transitions literature indicates a "Cartesian bias in its political ontology." As such, co-evolutionary approaches to sustainability transitions increasingly recognize that change occurs within "multi-domain" processes of interactive change across sectors (Bergek et al., 2015; Hoffman & Loeber, 2015; Loorbach et al., 2017; Raven et al., 2016), rather than resulting in a distinct "shift" between different levels (see Garud & Gehman, 2012; Loorbach & Rotmans, 2010).

Avelino and Wittmayer (2015, p. 637) suggest that "[a focus on] transition politics acknowledges that there is a continuous negotiation of roles as a site of power, struggle and contestation." Transitions are thus more than just socio-technical transformation "but also about socio-*political* change" (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2015, p. 637, p. 638, emphasis in the original). Similarly, Kenis et al. (2015) suggest that a

recognition of the political fault lines within and outside transition arenas can highlight fundamental tensions and opportunities: the politics of representation can exacerbate unequal power relations and undermine the legitimacy of transition processes.

The interaction of actors within and between different "sectors" also affects the politics of transitions. Jørgenson (2012, p. 997) suggests "the stability of ... institutions may be interpreted very differently by actors, depending on their relationship to the configurations" (see Hoffman & Loeber, 2015). Similarly, Avelino and Wittmayer recognize that roles can be "sites of struggle and cooperation" between different actors, and these are "contested, blurring, shifting, and permeable," which often "oscillate" between formal, informal, market, community, and state dimensions to varying degrees, depending on the nature of their role/s (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2015, p. 634). Indeed, individuals are positioned by multiple sets of relations or spatialities—through personal values, identities and related artefacts, professional experience, and habits (Chilvers & Longhurst, 2016; Leitner et al., 2008). Some may even have transformative ambitions within their role, such as Santoro and McGuire's (1997) institutional activists. In the words of Michael (1996, p. 11): "a spectrum of selves emerges, from the local to the institutional to the cultural to the global," or what Nunes (2017) refers to as *pluriversal* notions of emergent, hybrid forms of co-constituted alternatives.

Yet how actors become empowered or disempowered tends to be overlooked or generalized (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2015); empowerment is often tied to the extent to which actors "have a sense of impact, competence, meaning and choice regarding that activity" (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2015, p. 643; Avelino, 2017). Similarly, Rauschmayer et al. (2013) have highlighted the role of an individual's sense of purpose and goal-directed behaviors to enact change, emphasizing *functionings*—resources that endow individuals with the ability to act with degrees of freedom, such as job security and associated responsibilities. There is thus potential to explore within transition management studies how governance can affect forms of power and the micropolitical conditions of actor ties.

Meanwhile, sustainability transitions research can tend to emphasize sectoral-based regimes rather than how political systems themselves are influenced by radical protagonists. Swilling et al. (2015) suggest that socio-*political* conditions need to be changed *before* socio-technical shifts can be expected: any state-directed transition will not be achieved unless the wider strategic (political) coalition shares the paradigm commitments and interests. In response, Swilling et al. propose a *socio-political*—as opposed to socio-technical regime—where a constellation of actors subscribe to beliefs about the legitimacy of a political system and organize themselves to manage its overall stability (Swilling et al., 2015, p. 656).

This arguably extends the notion of a regime to allow in new niche actors thus not precluding them from engaging in regime-like activities. It also reflects Grin (2010, pp. 282–3) who suggests that "dispositional powers" set the "rules, resources, actor configurations, and dominant images of the issues involved," which in turn affects the positionality of actors in relation to a desired transition. Indeed, the capacity to direct policymaking in and around formal institutions

TABLE 1 Typology of power relations and dynamics (Avelino, 2017, p. 507)

Type of power relations	Types of power dynamics		
Power over	A depends on B but B also depends on A ≥ A and B have power over each other. Mutual dependence	A depends on B but B does not depend on A ≥ B has power over A. One-sided dependence	A and B do not depend on each other ≥ A and B have not power over each other. Independence
More/less power to	A exercises more power than B, but A and B have similar, collective goals. **Cooperation**	A exercises more power than B, while A and B have mutually exclusive goals = > **Competition**	A exercises more power than B, A and B have independent co-existing goals. **Co existence**
Different power to	A's and B's different power exercises enable and support one another. **Synergy**	A's and B's different power exercises restrict, resist or disrupt one another. **Antagonism**	A's and B's different power exercises do not (significantly) affect one another. **Neutrality**

TABLE 2 Typology of powers in transition (adapted from Avelino, 2017)

Type of power	Summary	Characteristic of
Reinforcive	Reproduces institutional structures, cultures, and practices	Regimes
Innovative	Freedom to cultivate new resources, only become powerful if they are visible and able to be used by others	Niches
Transformative	New structures and institutions, drawing on extant elements of existing structures or reinventing aspects of them	Niche–regime
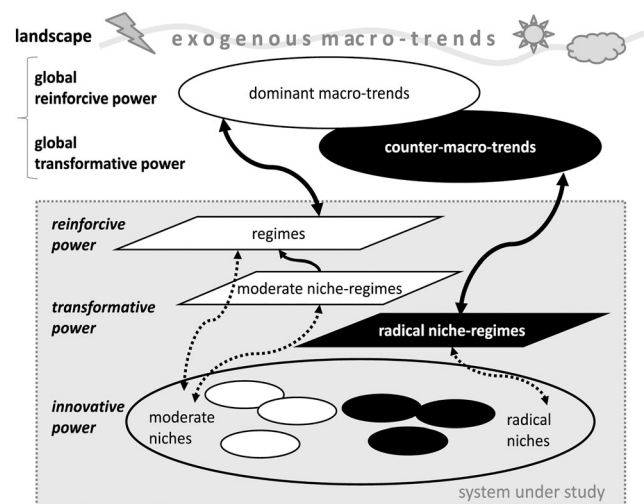
FIGURE 1 Power-in-transition (POINT) framework. Arrows indicate synergetic power dynamics (Avelino, 2017)

opens up the study of the niche–regime interface and competing factions and alliances within transition arenas. Drawing on debates from political and sociological theory (Avelino, 2011, 2017; Lukes, 1974), Avelino's POwer-IN-Transition framework (POINT) presents a

typology of the exercise of power—reflecting degrees of dependence, competition, complementarity, or antagonism (Table 1).

Avelino further argues that actors can exercise *different types* of power, which are "qualitatively different" from each other, depicted in a typology of "analytically distinguishable" aspects of the exercise of power within transition dynamics (Avelino, 2017, p. 510; see Table 2). Thus distinguishing between the (de)stabilization processes of regimes whereby different spaces used by actors may have degrees of niche or regime characteristics. This approach ultimately questions the extent to which regimes have "power over" niches, since different niche actors can resist and reconfigure.

Avelino distinguishes between *dominant macro-trends* and (disruptive) *counter-macro trends*, while recognizing there is some overlap of these. Figure 1 demonstrates Avelino's conceptualization of radical niche–regimes that tie into the (*transformative*) strengthening of counter macrotrends and maintain an antagonistic relationship with *reinforcive* trends. These are in contrast to moderate niche–regimes which *innovate* but tend to replicate the dominant institutions, cultures, and practices of regimes.

We later return to this conceptualization of the interstitial spaces of the "niche–regime" to question its suggested power dynamic as *transformative*. Suffice it to say that there is the need to scrutinize the synergetic power dynamics *between* different transition dynamics (niches, niche–regimes, regime, and trends) or what we term and later discuss as the *liminal spaces* of power in transition. Farís and Blok (2016, p. 546) suggest that politics oscillates around shared uncertainties that lead to "moments of democratization, as a set of movements and displacements that are by definition incomplete." These focus on "specific disruptive events" through a process of experimental learning that leads to "subtle yet consequential subversions" (Farís & Blok, 2016) in what we term *instantiations of transition*. As such, radical and moderate protagonists of transition stand at a threshold between a previous way of knowing and doing and a new way. Indeed, Avelino has implied there are *social* as well as ecological thresholds (Avelino, 2017), or what Husted (2020, p. 11) terms "limits to difference," which merits closer attention.

Below, we introduce the case study of Frome before presenting the methods used to trace instantiations of transition at the niche/regime interface and explore how the coming together of these actors

may be reflective of a non–partisan (i.e. not party-political) reordering of political identities.

3 | BACKGROUND: "FLATPACK DEMOCRACY" IN FROME

The UK has an adversarial two-party political system which crowds out representation by "independent" representatives or minor parties (BBC, 2019). Additionally, the UK's first-past-the-post electoral system has been claimed to unfairly allocate actual seats compared to vote share (Nandy, Lucas, & Bowers, 2016). While momentum is gaining for "progressive", fairer political change (Lawson, 2016) to date, there have been few concrete examples where minority parties have transcended the two-party-political system at the national level with representation in government, such as the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition (2010–2015).

At a local level, in England, there are 10,000 "local councils": a universal term for the statutory bodies of parish and town councils—the first tier of local government elected by residents within their respective geographical remit.[1] At this level, most councils are not party-political, and councillors typically sit as independent members of the council (NALC, 2018). However, there are some cases where these councillors are party-political representatives.

Some local political representatives at different political tiers are now turning to *independent* politics (which eschews any affiliation with party-politics) as a vehicle to cultivate a shift in local politics. The May 2019 local elections saw an unprecedented rise in the number of independent political councillors elected at town and district level (Read, 2019; The Alternative, 2019). This may be in response to the growing interest in *Flatpack Democracy*, a relatively new social movement based on political innovations in the market town of Frome (Somerset, South West England; see Macfadyen, 2014, 2019). Here, in 2011 a group of independent town councillors won 10 out of 17 seats, elected with a 45% vote share under the nonpartisan banner of IfF.[2] IfF won all 17 seats in Frome Town Council (FTC) in 2015 and 2019.

Some IfF councillors also had (significant) experience of working within different tiers of (local) government, while other town councillors who took power in 2011 from the incumbent town council were members of the local Transition Initiative. This included Peter Macfadyen who established a local environmental group *Sustainable Frome* in 2006 (in tandem with Transition Town Totnes, the first official Transition Initiative), which later became part of the *Transition* movement.

IfF's politics are claimed to be inclusive, emergent, and seek to stimulate an active citizenship,[3] where the town council plays a *facilitating* role as opposed to following the "party line" and has a distinctly green tinge, which emphasizes social well-being. As a "non–party-political" group, IfF has a spectrum of party-political views, claimed to be "put aside" through the group's Ways of Working[4]—formalized rules and values to put "Frome's interests" (rather than party politics) first. There is evidence that IfF has contributed to and benefitted from

an increase in political engagement, with 75% more people casting their votes in the 2011 local elections than in 2007 (Macfadyen, 2014); in 2015, an unprecedented 50 candidates stood at the FTC elections.

Frome is now becoming increasingly renowned for its thriving *independent* identity, politically and economically. Under IfF, FTC has been inspired by the thinking of the *Transition* movement and the *New Economy*[5]—a paradigm some actors are employing to create alternatives to neo-liberalism[6]—pioneering many exciting environmental innovations. In 2016, in response to the Paris Agreement, IfF declared a move to become a fossil fuel–free town by 2046; this later became superseded to become carbon neutral by 2030 when FTC, like many other local governments, declared climate emergencies.[7] FTC also used its Neighbourhood Plan (a community planning tool under the localism policy agenda) to promote strongly relocalized ideas and practices (FTC, 2016). An article in The Guardian proclaimed Frome as the "People's Republic of Frome" (Harris, 2015), given the town's strongly independent stance. Frome is now perceived as one of the "coolest," "best," and "stylish" places to live (Somerset Live, 2018; The Sunday Times, 2018), and in 2016, Frome won the Great Town Award.[8] Frome boasts one of the largest independent markets in South West England and has seen a surge in the creative industries, such as marketing, design, and small-scale startups, that have replaced (in part) a fall in traditional manufacturing jobs.

Moreover, IfF mirrors broader movements of municipal political change in the United Kingdom, several European countries, and the United States (Gilbert, 2020) under a "do it yourself" independent political banner. Flinders and Wood (2018) refer to this as a "neo-tribal" or "nexus politics" of political participation at an "everyday" level. These trends suggest an interest in rethinking politics beyond its binary relation to traditional party-politics, in what we embrace more broadly as the underexplored adversarialism of political systems in sustainability transitions research. Exploring such dynamics in relation to power in transition can help assess whether and how the "grassroots" can reshape "regime" institutions using experimental and more inclusive forms of decision-making (see Burnett, 2019; Husted, 2020). The next section outlines the methodological approach to the research for this paper, which has aimed to provide an appreciative appraisal of power and politics in IfF's transition management.

4 | METHODOLOGY

As Stake (2003, p. 135) suggests, a case study is a "bounded system"; these are important units of analysis since they can provide insights into how specific circumstances generate certain outcomes over others (Davies & Featherstone, 2013; Tsang, 2013). As part of a preliminary review of Neighbourhood Plans for more radical content on sustainability, Frome was chosen on the basis of its innovative mix of alternative governance arrangements, an active local Transition Initiative, its radical non-partisan agenda, and FTC's determination to encourage low-carbon development. The methodological task in this

TABLE 3 Power and politics at the boundaries of transition: themes

Theme	Description
Role conflict and pushing at the boundaries	Agonist–antagonist relations between incumbents and protagonists when challengers seek to formalize power (*inception and consolidation phases*)
Breaking down boundaries	Democratizing engagement strategies, challenging incumbent party-political actors to cultivate more autonomous decision-making
Resourcing alterity	Mechanisms and strategies cultivated to formalize democratic alternatives within formal institutions

research became how to unpack the flow of green and (politically) radical identities as they moved through Frome's placemaking networks, the Neighbourhood Plan, and higher tiers of government.[9] Thus, Frome's case can help to illustrate how other English towns might replicate more radical forms of placemaking and to enable a comparison with the mechanisms and strategies of other market towns in the United Kingdom and beyond.

Interviews and secondary data identified 186 actors involved in planning for transitions in Frome as either agents of relocalized initiatives or individuals within roles that had an influence on these ambitions. A snowball methodology (Coenen, Benneworth, & Truffer, 2012) was used in the first instance to select interviewees to assess the structuring and fragmentation of political transitions through institutional roles, relational ties, belonging and identity, and experiences of participating in Frome's transition arenas. In total, 32 semistructured interviews with 27 respondents were carried out between November 2014 and June 2015 with respondents who were active during the time of IfF's first administration (2011–2015), including two interviews with IfF councillors in the second administration (2015–2019).

These data were coded using thematic analysis, a qualitative descriptive approach described as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2008, p. 79; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). These accounts were supplemented with a review of printed and social media, webpages, and videos which provided additional information on organizational purpose and initiatives; such data were collected on Frome on an ongoing basis to monitor outcomes or evidence sustainability transitions in the town (discussed in a subsequent paper by the authors). Codes, categories and entities were captured initially in Excel (Mayer & Avery, 2008; Ose, 2016) together with memos on their significance (Creswell, 2007) and were later assimilated into twelve themes that were grouped under four research questions. This paper relates to three themes (Table 3) under the following question: "Can transition actors retain a 'niche' identity when they occupy formal spaces of power or do they cultivate their own 'regime'?"

Our analysis has sought to depict the different institutional configurations that influenced events at particular moments in Frome's

transition journey but also how institutional arrangements have changed over time (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2015; Bygstad, Munkvold, & Volkoff, 2016). The depiction of an evolution of ties between the local Transition Initiative (Sustainable Frome), FTC, and other local and political entities (Figure 2) can visualize what Avelino terms "counter-niche trends": illustrating how ideas and practices have been diffused, ousted, or consolidated as they pursue new ways of knowing and doing and move through or beyond institutional boundaries. Additionally, we critiqued key events against the POINT framework and explore how they might be instantiations of transition.

Lastly, it is important to note that while a single case study can be more in-depth, not having other case studies did at times mean that interviewees were less likely to volunteer information due to a perception that their anonymity would be compromised. This was overcome by careful planning and timing of interviews, which included follow-up discussions. Nevertheless, party-political FTC councillors in the first administration are not represented (apart from one party-political respondent) because they did not accept the request for interview (possibly because of the timing of the local election campaign in May 2015). There was no triangulation of "othering" in this instance, only shadow data (third-party perspectives) were collected. Nevertheless, the findings reveal the strategies and tactics for how a group of protagonists consolidated power and reveal transformative power in action at distinct moments or instantiations of transition.

5 | FINDINGS: SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITIONS AND POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

In this section, we explore the extent to which "niche" and "regime" demonstrate different types of power that resists and reconfigures (see Avelino, 2011, 2017). Table 3 describes the themes identified, which are discussed below. We then assess how the findings reflect extant understandings of the politics of niche–regime relations and the implications on the politics of transitions more broadly.

5.1 | Role conflict and pushing at the boundaries (inception phase of IfF)

Around the time of the emergence of IfF (2010), Sustainable Frome had formally become part of Transition Network. Some groups had already begun to splinter off, including Frome Cohousing in 2009 (Figure 2). There were no links between *Transition* and FTC. The former Frome-based Mendip District Council (MDC) Regeneration Officer was actively involved in orchestrating sustainability initiatives in the town and maintained close ties to Sustainable Frome. This included initiating Frome's Community Plan (Vision for Frome, V4F—a nonstatutory local planning tool, carried out between 2006 and 2008). Sustainable Frome, under its founder, Peter Macfadyen, had a strong influence on the content of Frome's Community Plan which was "way greener" than what a more representative sample of local residents might have otherwise generated (IfF councillor).

FIGURE 2 Institutional arrangements and relationships between local government, community planning, and Transition actors in 2011, when Independents for Frome won 10 seats (dependency and directionality indicated) [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
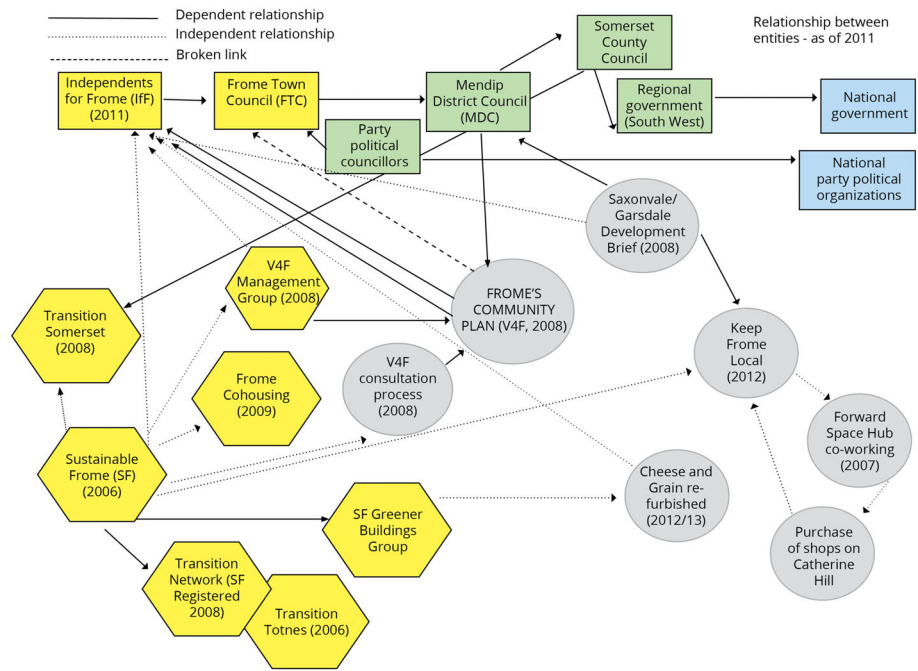
V4F was approved in 2008 by its Management Committee (including Macfadyen), but it had not been formally adopted by the incumbent FTC. There was "zero response" or interest (IfF councillor) from FTC, and a lack of thanks to those who developed it when the Chair of V4F presented the Plan to the incumbent council. This was partly due to a lack of (party-political) ownership, perceived as someone's "pet project" (IfF councillor). This lacuna suggests the boundaries of going from one state to another, leading to opportunities for other actors (IfF) to use it for their strategic advantage. Additionally, active disqualification of the public to voice their concerns at a public meeting descended into chaos as the FTC Chair of the meeting "told people to shut up and sit down" (IfF councillor). This provoked a challenge the town council's approach:

> "...a lot of people who had never been to a [town] council meeting or anything to do with it, suddenly thought shit, that's dysfunctional ... [and] were thinking whoa, what a mess... And so, you know, it was just that feeling of 'well, we could do better'" (IfF councillor).

Highlighting the role of (informal) governance and its effect on social ties, two of these attendees were Macfadyen and Mel Usher (as protagonists), who met informally at a pub after the event to explore what they could do (later, this meeting would become the initiating point for IfF). Usher had worked at a strategic level within a Local Authority as well as other national-level policy circles. He also had formal insights on the forthcoming English localism agenda which sought to devolve rights to the local level,[10] encouraging him and other protagonists to "think big" (IfF councillor). Macfadyen, who has been described as a "graduate of the South-West's hippie countercultural who brims with can-do enthusiasm" (Harris, 2015) and a "benevolent dictator" during his time as Chair of Sustainable Frome (IfF

councillor, Sustainable Frome member), brought these insights to IfF's overall approach.

This blend of countercultural and regime insights crafted a strategy of resistance, or subversion, as an activated power between states of transition: to "stir things up...to offer something that was different [politically]" (IfF councillor) and reimagine ("better") alternatives to local democracy, also drawing on a national (landscape) sentiment that party politics did not work (IfF councillor). In addition, IfF were able to portray administrative dysfunctionality within the incumbent town council, whose governance was also referred to by one IfF councillor as "murky," lacking checks and balances (e.g., requiring only two participants to be quorate) or where FTC councillors were witnessed to be (literally) asleep on the job. Macfadyen—who had experience advising the nonprofit sector—also challenged FTC on the absence of a meaningful sustainability strategy, indicative of how regime practices, cultures, and knowledge within one sector transposed into an emerging niche through antagonism and subversion.

IfF used the newly completed Community Plan as a fortuitous "de facto" manifesto expressing the will of the people for its own political ends. Without having been in power at a town council level before, IfF candidates lacked understanding of administrative power at a practical, day-to-day level. Rather than saying "we will do this," IfF approached things differently by pitching an offer of "change and activity"—perceived as based more on "luck" than on strategy (IfF councillor). This meant that the path dependence of the extant Community Plan (from the inherited planning "regime") enabled IfF to move from *innovative* to *transformative* aspects of power (Avelino, 2017) in relation to some local actors' desire to transition toward more sustainable futures. That is, the Community Plan instantiated a transposing of regime practices, cultures, and knowledges that were subverted between states of transition, blurring the lines of *reinforcive* and *transformative* powers in transition.

5.2 | Breaking down boundaries

IfF were perceived by some respondents to reflect and cultivate Frome's "independent" identity—stemming back to when Frome was "bigger" than neighboring city Bath and had a largely self-sufficient market economy pre-economic modernization—and the "type" of person associated with Frome's cultural identity. This was not previously reflected by political actors and FTC, and IfF politically crafted "independence" to its advantage, reflecting the role of spatial and historic ties to frame the boundaries of transformation, or a *spatial-agential* mutual dependence. Party-political affiliations were shaken up when IfF offered a highly localized political approach—as indicated in the slogan *I'm For Frome* in the 2015 election. As an independent group, IfF aimed to encourage representation across the political spectrum; united by a commitment "to make Frome the very best place it can be," emphasizing diversity and respect and breaking down the antagonistic framework of party politics (IfF councillor).

One consultant suggested that the personalities of those involved in IfF "are really progressive and listening and interested people," and as such, believed IfF as a political experiment would work. IfF councillors were considered unusual—people who did not conform with a "typical" town councillor role in a party-political sense; one IfF councillor said, "we've all got a little bit of the contrarian about us [smiles]." Indeed, one national-level independent political actor corroborated this by noting there is a certain "type" of person who is attracted to independent politics. IfF also awoke a sense of civic duty among people who did not consider themselves as "political" people—notably some women—which one IfF councillor felt, for them, could only have been activated *in* Frome with their particular cohort of fellow councillors.

IfF transferred open and reflexive qualities into its own procedures when it took office, influenced in part by *Transition* governance. With the lack of any formal political ideology, IfF used its Ways of Working to cultivate less adversarial governance within FTC to encourage respect for one another's difference. The adoption of these rules was described by one IfF councillor as a moment where they could have "pricked their finger"—a coming together akin to a brethren with deep connective roots, introducing "ways of behaving... kind of a way a well-functioning family would" (IfF councillor).

Such governance was felt to encourage informality, comradeship, "staying together," and openness within IfF—where individuals could easily switch between formal and informal roles without breeding animosity; perceived by IfF interviewees as "healthy," "enlightened," "liberating," and leading to "respectful debate" and innovative ideas. Again highlighting the transformative (*personal* and *structural*) dimensions that cultivated mutual dependence and identity synergies to reproduce IfF's nonpartisan stance (see also Husted, 2020). The WoW were later formalized further in 2015 in the FTC Standing Orders—permanent written rules under which the town council regulates its proceedings. However, it is noted that a previous IfF councillor, speaking in 2019, challenged a perception that the WoW were significant, implying these were created and then "not referred to again."

One IfF councillor within FTC suggested, upon taking office, that FTC roles were pigeon-holed based on people's previous experience, bestowed without a knowledge of what they entailed. Under IfF, FTC staff were considered to have a degree of freedom to create roles (such as the Resilience Officer or the Planning Administrator) because the powers of the town council were often not matched to formal statutory (regime) responsibilities, such as being the Local Planning Authority. IfF also actively sought to break down perceived negative cycles within FTC administrative roles, encouraging people to respond positively and spontaneously (although, one IfF councillor argued this was a challenge to achieve in practice; see also Husted, 2020). Role transitions within IfF were presented as more fluid and adaptive, which was seen as helping to ensure a "freshness" in the transition between incumbents and incomers to subsequent administrations (IfF councillor).

Indeed, IfF's institutional culture was deemed to be able to "seep into" FTC role holders. However, while some respondents actively projected a community-orientated identity that resonated with IfF's reflexive approach, some FTC staff took a more guarded approach, indicating the role of personality in establishing boundaries between formal and informal ties, such as cultivating friendships outside of professional relationships. As such, some role identities and personalities are hard to penetrate through transition management, suggesting that *reinforcive* powers in transition are not just at level of regime but equally within the niche and individual actor levels as well. "Independence" and autonomy emerge as distinct forms of power. The abovementioned subversion and transposition of powers cultivated conditions for comradeship among councillors: use of "Independence" by local political and economic actors evoked a cultural liberation of personalized forms of political autonomy, encouraging diverse representation of both "non-" political and regime protagonists. This awakened a latent agency among these actors, encouraging them to draw upon spatial and historic ties in their efforts to reproduce IfF's institutional practices. Meanwhile, *reinforcive* governance was used to stimulate *transformation* to formalize a new breed of actors and ideas into subsequent FTC administrations to sustain political innovation.

5.3 | Resourcing alterity

In Frome, there were several instances of reinforcing transition pursuits and high degrees of synchronism within its placemaking networks, social movement trajectories, and policy agendas which were carried *into* local government. Some IfF and FTC respondents saw their role as a facilitator in the community, to bring forth latent skills of actors often excluded by politics, planning or the state, and to create space for others to deliver (i.e., a conscious withdrawal vs. an interventionist approach to community placemaking). At the same time, FTC was proactive at cultivating this strategy as it sought to link actors with new ideas to government and secured materials and resources on behalf of local actors; including its more surreptitious alternative consultation channel to engage everyday citizens (including younger people), *Participate Frome* (an FTC sub-entity). Although,

one FTC staff member indicated that the decision to step up FTC's participation agenda was taken by senior staff or councillors, and one local group representative noted that IfF's politics sometimes included a "gloss" or a positive "spin" (i.e., to market themselves as highly participatory and inclusive).

Nevertheless, FTC's new distinct working culture was also seen as a reason to attract several high-caliber staff at a lower level of government than they might otherwise worked. There are several cases of FTC staff and councillors with previous experience of senior roles working in local government or the private sector. This also meant that commercially "independent"-minded individuals could approach FTC as an "equal"; momentum for innovative action was generated by working in a complementary way to achieve mutual goals (local group representative). Different modes of accountability enabled differential roles to achieve placemaking goals: FTC used formal roles to purchase strategic assets to "have a seat at the table" with the Local Planning Authority on development and planning, such as a section of Saxonvale (4.76 ha), a derelict site in the middle of Frome—a battleground over what constitutes the "right" kind of development in the town. Some FTC initiatives were actively enabled by central government policy: the purchase of solar panels through the Feed-in-Tariff scheme (which paid landowners for electricity generated) or the ability for the council to purchase land (enabled by rights under the Localism Act). Simultaneously, the "doers" outside of FTC could circumvent formal government "regime" rules, to cut corners and expedite change (local group representative).

Frome has a number of well-established groups with strong environmental and social objectives. FTC was also able to latch onto extant agendas in Frome's placemaking networks, where, in some cases, the principles of action already had been debated and agreed (local group representative). The longevity of ideas and the presence of Sustainable Frome over time were deemed to help fuse "Frome's" green, independent alterity with *Transition*'s identity and practices. Additionally, the "coming together" of those with similar values and ambitions for relocalized development—inside FTC or Frome's placemaking networks—was referred to as a "meeting of minds," a "coincidence" or as "lucky" by several respondents. Meanwhile, the independent foundations for Frome's political identity were felt by one IfF councillor to have helped to (re)direct actor networks' economic and social identities, attracting a new cohort of "young and zappy" residents to Frome.

The decision to scale-up the participatory agenda brought new actors into town council governance and enabled other materials and resources to be secured. However, the employment of different roles within FTC to support relocalization and participation helped to formalize ties between Sustainable Frome and FTC, folding in informal dynamics into formal political transition arenas. There were also several occasions in Frome where partners (spouses) were co-animators of transition. However, in some cases, pre-existing ties (including friendship) led to preferential access to the town council, where some actors were invited to present ideas knowing that these would be welcomed. Indeed, a nucleus of personal ties was perceived as either unconscious or active mechanisms of exclusion in the Neighbourhood

Plan process, where governance arrangements led to the sometimes perceived (over-) representation of the "usual suspects," felt by one local group representative to lack legitimacy and a bottom-up (i.e., citizen) influence over the content of the Plan.

Thus, while extant localized niche dynamics were reinforced, it also poses questions over the accountability and legitimacy of these hybrid participatory initiatives, exhibiting an intersection of mutually subversive niche–regime power dynamics.

5.4 | Role conflict and pushing at the boundaries (consolidation of power)

Party-political orientations were felt to be "corrosive" by IfF councillors, obfuscating a more collaborative approach to local politics. One IfF councillor described how they were "euphoric" about working with party-political councillors when they won power in 2011 but relayed how IfF struggled to overcome the "big hump of loyalties to major parties," creating a confrontational atmosphere among (volunteer) town councillors. The divisiveness of party-political identities and values was felt by two IfF councillors to hamper the potential for a shared, fun working environment that utilized peoples' skills to maximum effect, whatever their party-political persuasions. Party-political actors were considered to view the act of challenging IfF's actions as their duty, even if IfF fundamentally appealed to some facet of their party-political ideology, causing internal and interorganizational conflict. One IfF councillor described the party-political regime "like a virus, so once you're infected with it you can't get rid of it" which created an "inward energy" and hampered more conciliatory relationships: "the point is we're not *them*" (also mirrored in antagonistic local media articles by some IfF councillors which challenged the district council).

Indeed, role boundaries within MDC and national government were perceived as negative and obstructive, "politically restricted" and "risk averse," indicating high degrees of institutionalization that conflicted with IfF's own governance practices. The (purposeful) allocation of roles by party-political orientation at the district level was perceived by an IfF councillor to foster closed, secretive governance. Political differences among town councillors meant that party-political actors disengaged from IfF initiatives within FTC. One IfF councillor recounted that despite a meaningful attempt to engage with party-political councillors, their resistance to these invitations meant "we got bored of asking them. And so, [engagement] just hasn't happened." Some political actors did not attend Neighbourhood Plan steering meetings (although this was also the case for some IfF councillors), affecting the inclusiveness of its governance. Some incumbent staff who sought to "protect" Frome from IfF upon taking power left FTC, prompted partly through IfF's strategic governance decisions.

However, IfF's actions also helped to appease more critical voters to transcend party-political loyalties (depicted in the 2015 election results), facilitating a personal identity transition as well as a structural one. Yet while making claims to political neutrality, a strongly green

tinge to IfF's politics led to tacit alliances being forged with the Green Party to discourage them standing at the town council level to avoid IfF councillors losing a majority in some wards, suggesting that the politics of transformation is based on tribal values. One IfF councillor spoke of how they could detect the flavor of some more senior (male) councillors' thinking and values in IfF strategy, suggesting power had become concentrated within the town council and, possibly, wider placemaking networks. Moreover, two male councillors switched the role of Leader of the Council between them, indicating reinforcive personal identities affected the levers of transformation.

6 | DISCUSSION: REFLECTIONS ON POWER, POLITICS, AND THE INTERFACE OF NICHE AND REGIME

"Can transition actors retain a 'niche' identity when they occupy formal spaces of power or do they cultivate their own 'regime'?" IfF's consolidation of power illuminates the conditions—and complexities—in which these protagonists ousted incumbents or shifted the political landscape in the town at the interface, or the boundaries, between "niche" and "regime." We found clear similarities with existing scholarship on the framing of stages for niche challenge and regime influence as to how different actors resisted, reconfigured, or were constrained by their context. Using Avelino's terminology, we identified both innovative (dreaming) and transformative (new structures) processes as forms of power invoked to destabilize the predominant political regime (see Avelino, 2017). Below, we discuss the implications for deepening our understanding of power and politics in transition processes, considering the political nature of why actors come together in transition arenas and shaping transition outcomes. Additionally, we have considered adversarialism in sustainability transitions to explore whether *Transition*-inspired socio-political innovations yield more inclusive, accountable, and legitimate governance transitions.

The alignment of governance toward a particular discourse network, whereby actors subscribe to particular beliefs and alliances, echoes existing transition scholarship (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2015; Swilling et al., 2015). In the particular case of Frome, autonomy and independence were crucial frames used to justify *an orchestration and consolidation of transition governance* at the niche–regime interface, where multifaceted relocalized placemaking networks operated on a personal and (semi-) organizational level, reproducing a cultural product of Frome's alterity through placemaking initiatives formalized in IfF's transition management. Key artefacts and cultural identity were woven in, strategically and opportunistically, into new forms of localized political identities to craft an historical and future-orientated autonomous identity. This highlights an important role for market towns (in contrast to the prioritization of the "city" scale) in stimulating sustainability transitions, echoing Johnston and Hielscher's (2017) attention to spatial setting where place identity affects coalitions of values and preferences for change.

Like Avelino, this paper also has uncovered the antagonistic dynamic between radical niches and regimes; expressed here in the divisive interactions between party-political and "independent" town councillors, whereby the "Westminster political model" underpinning UK party politics is partially replicated and filtered down at a local level (Fortis, 2014). For instance, party-political identities were deemed to "infect" personal autonomy with divisive positionalities—suggestive of what we term a *political and personal identity immune system*. While IfF sought to avoid identifying with adversarial (identity) politics, there were nonetheless several instances where this was demonstrated through *identity profiling*, indicating a strong presence of "othering" to establish protagonist action and reflecting Geels' framing of power as resistance (Geels, 2014).

IfF, if understood as a "radical niche," had strong correlations—or synergies—with Sustainable Frome as a local Transition Initiative, as well as the radical niche–regime of the *Transition* movement and associated countercultural macrotrends toward a *New Economy*. In other words, IfF's route to power was laid in part by the *Transition* Movement's own rules to seek formal engagement with local councils and its broader (early) rejection of party politics and formal institutions. This indirectly led to IfF's route to power, evident in its break into political representation and attempts to influence political actors (i.e., counter movement trend, see Avelino, 2017). IfF's newness gave an entry point into role boundaries in transition; a crucial part of which was breaking down (political and administrative) role assumptions, securing the financial resources to affect the parameters of engagement, and bringing these actors *into* FTC's relocalized placemaking agenda.

These findings highlight the role of informal ties and homophily in governing for sustainability transitions in (local) government institutions. Frome's experiences indicate the role of personal ties and friendships as a form of *informal institutional capital*: actor identities and practices blended with new formal and informal arrangements, germinating the transfer of radical new ideas between organizations. Yet rarely are the cognitive and affective commitments of group ties recognized by sustainability transitions research in the politics of niche–regime dynamics (Seyfang and Hexaltine, 2012) nor are the unconscious dynamics of agency (Akram, 2011). This questions the explicit powers attributed to agents by Avelino (Table 1), since identity and the unconscious are forms of psychological structuration. Avelino's notion of social thresholds, or "sustainable power constellations" (Avelino, 2017, p. 515), is reflective of *thresholds of resistance* (a term used in the natural sciences to indicate resilience within ecosystems; Gunderson and Holling, 2002; Holling, 1973), herein understood as the break down or transformation of role boundaries across different identities and affective ties. The relationship between the length of time actors spend within a given "regime" and the affect one's personality has on degrees of, or potential capacities, for innovation in different sectors (e.g., planning, policy, public sector, and corporations) points to an area of further research.

Avelino's "radical niche–regime" term is helpful in conceiving such thresholds of resistance, contextualizing IfF's placement within the town council in conjunction with wider social movement countertrends. However, we find that the POINT model insufficiently

explains the relationship between radical niche–regimes and the reinforcive aspects of moderate niche–regimes and pre-existing ones (see Figure 1). We attribute these relational processes to the departure from one set of institutionalized practices to another and its inherent power dynamics as *"liminal transition spaces"* at distinct moments, or instantiations of transition. Future considerations of this liminality in transition would highlight *transition thresholds* as interstitial spaces between a previous way of knowing and doing, and a new way—where ground rules dictating socio-political norms are unclear, and collaborative actions are potentially working at cross-purposes and/or multiple forms of power are exercised simultaneously.

By taking a closer look at the intersection of power dynamics between local entities, we have found that the "niche" and "regime" do not necessarily have rigid boundaries but reflect an *intersection of transition regimes* with both emergent and strategic foundations. The findings show that knowledge of the regime was fundamental to breaking down the boundaries as well as combining it with niche alterity, echoing a mixed positionality within networks (e.g., Bryson et al., 2006; Lovell, 2009) where one's relative proximity to issues influences degrees of alignment.

Therefore, the strategic actions taken by IfF were *enabled* by localist agendas where IfF and FTC orchestrated and consolidated a *community-level regime of transition governance*. That is, there was a fusion between the transformative powers of the social movement of IfF and the government-directed transformative powers of FTC, where countercultural ideas were ignited through regime-directed ideas and structures on both sides; here, both "radical niche–regimes" mutually appropriated macro-trends for their own subversive ends. Indeed, Avelino acknowledges that transformative powers may entail reinforcive processes (Avelino, 2017). However, we argue this outcome merits further theoretical consideration regarding *liminal transition spaces*. That is, while a high number of staff within FTC reflected the priority given to resourcing key functions to support placemaking initiatives in Frome, this consolidation also reflected the burgeoning of a regime-like institutionalized community apparatus. This placed political trajectories at a *transition threshold* or interstitial space between mutually recognized previous ways of doing/knowing and new, yet-to-be validated ways of working collaboratively.

Where it concerns the role of personal ties, Frome's case also indicates that there were aspects of reinforcive power at play within the radical niche–regimes of its informal actor-networks, for example, the gender dynamics of male actors possessing more influence than women (see also Husted, 2020). While IfF's and FTC's ability to create new institutional structures was innovative and transformative (and led to a wider movement of "indy" political groups), there were interpersonal reinforcive dynamics that cannot be massaged out of transition management. Moreover, the synergistic aspects of some actor networks' ability to accelerate niche-directed regime change and agenda-setting toward transition calls into question the legitimacy of some processes, exposing a degree of favoritism or in-group ties behind the advance of a relocalized politics, reflecting debates on "just transitions" (McCauley & Heffron, 2018).

7 | CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the politics of transition at the interface between grassroots spaces and regime institutions, exploring the mediation of micro-level power relations within a specific case study (Frome). We set out to assess: how innovative, potentially transformative ideas are carried within and between multilevel governance arrangements of local government; whether protagonists retain a "niche" identity when they occupy formal spaces of power or cultivate their own "regime", and if *Transition*-inspired socio-political innovations yield more inclusive, accountable, and legitimate governance transitions.

We have extended debates on the politics of expertise in transition management studies through a deep investigation of adversarialism within political systems which has, to date, been underexplored in the sustainability transitions literature. To address this gap, we reviewed key literature on the politics of sustainability transitions, using Avelino's POINT framework as a heuristic to guide the analysis of the findings and what this might suggest in terms of understanding "liminal transition spaces" of potentially transformative power at distinct moments, or instantiations of transition.

We have found that the POINT framework can account for different elements of power, and in Frome's case, IfF showed primarily synergistic aspects of power. However, we also found that different forms of power can be exercised at the same time and that "qualitatively different" types of power to describe niche–regime interactions are more blurred than suggested by Avelino, indicating a multidomain transition interface where regimes in other sectors are drawn into the appropriation of niche powers (or vice versa). Indeed, the POINT framework insufficiently accounts for the relationship between regimes across different sectors in transition processes and the reinforcive aspects of personal role identities inherent within actor relations.

By exploring the political fault lines in party-political identities, we have illustrated how the politics of representation exacerbated unequal power relations and that some aspects of Frome's transition trajectory have some questionable claims to accountability and legitimacy (see also Husted's discussion of normalized agreements of "being positive" as a reinforcive process of "policing what it means to be authentic and independent", Husted, 2020, p. 13). Indeed, our findings have addressed an identified gap in how governance affects the adoption and enactment of role boundaries, and how and why actors come together as instantiations of transition.

This paper focuses on the politics of IfF taking control of the structures of the state by winning the election in 2011 and consolidating alterity within the town council. Further research on IfF's ability to influence other domains is core to understanding how such instantiations of transition stabilize, mutate, or dissipate. As such, the planning system as a transition arena can shed light on how differential powers have played out into other sectors, governance arrangements, institutional logics, and the broader political–institutional effects on municipalism and *Transition*. A longitudinal comparison with the subsequent IfF administrations (see Husted, 2020) and the relational ties

with other progressive political actors across multilevel governance arrangements is needed to determine whether IfF's consolidation of power in 2011 has resulted in longstanding political and sustainability transitions.

Also, socio-political movements like IfF can be co-opted. Since the completion of this research, we have found that some actors appear to be using nonpartisan political groups as vehicles to (discursively) retreat from party politics.[11] Frome is becoming a mentor for other places that are seeking to replicate conditions for independent, post-party politics in the UK and beyond. Indeed, there has been a surge in "indy" entities—politically, culturally and economically. Some of those seeking to replicate IfF have borrowed key discursive frames from Frome, of being "bolshie" (see Macfadyen, 2014) and using similar practices (such as meeting in a pub), and even using the governance technologies and organizational identities of IfF and Transition. So, what does Frome's experience of how local-level political transitions emerge reveal about the potential for upscaling alternative forms of governance within the political system at a more-than local scale, and what are the implications for power and politics in transition?

We argue that IfF's success at cultivating diversity and welcoming different perspectives toward an affective local identity, for example, "I'm for Frome," could be challenging to scale-up at a national level (but not necessarily at meso levels such as district, unitary, and borough authorities). Meanwhile, the potential for IfF's consensual governance style and cross-party affiliations indicates there is a need for further research on value alignment at local and national levels within polycentric governance (see Mewhirter, Lubell, & Berardo, 2018; Tormos-Aponte & García-López, 2018), and how they are contained and mediated for different issues. In response to Avelino's reflection on the application of the POINT framework to-date (Avelino, 2017, p. 517), an appreciation of liminal transition spaces is required to fully comprehend the interstitial stages of intra- and inter-organizational relationships: thresholds between previous ways of knowing and doing, new practices, and reinforcive aspects of identities bordering on different transition stages through informal institutional capital.

ENDNOTES

[1] https://www.nalc.gov.uk/

[2] IfF is registered as a "minor political party" by the UK electoral commission, enabling it to be included on the ballot paper. See FTC, 2015 for a breakdown of the 2015 election results.

[3] See FTC's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXUizztGFe9zjenOqxe_ABg

[4] See https://iffrome.org.uk/ways-of-working/ (2015 amended Ways or Working).

[5] See Burnett (2019, p. 124) for a comparison between localism, relocalization and IfF's approach.

[6] See examples of the New Economy: https://www.stiractoin.com/

[7] See https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/your-community/resilience/clean-future/ and https://www.climateemergency.uk/

[8] See https://www.frometowncouncil.gov.uk/frome-wins-national-great-town-award/

[9] The Neighbourhood Plan itself will be discussed in a subsequent paper by the authors.

[10] See https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/other/community-rights

[11] For instance, in Dorset Conservative councillors were masquerading behind an "independent" political group "Proud of Shaftesbury" in the May 2019 local elections.

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