

The Book

‘From What is to What If’: Unleashing the power of imagination to create the future we want’.

[From [the publisher’s website](#)]:

The founder of the international Transition Towns movement asks why true creative, positive thinking is in decline, asserts that it’s more important now than ever, and suggests ways our communities can revive and reclaim it.

In these times of deep division and deeper despair, if there is a consensus about anything in the world, it is that the future is going to be awful.

There is an epidemic of loneliness, an epidemic of anxiety, a mental health crisis of vast proportions, especially among young people. There’s a rise in extremist movements and governments. Catastrophic climate change.

Biodiversity loss. Food insecurity. The fracturing of ecosystems and communities beyond, it seems, repair. The future—to say nothing of the present—looks grim.

But as Transition movement cofounder Rob Hopkins tells us, there is plenty of evidence that things can change, and cultures can change, rapidly, dramatically, and unexpectedly—for the better. He has seen it happen around the world and in his own town of Totnes, England, where the community is becoming its own housing developer, energy company, enterprise incubator, and local food network—with cascading benefits to the community that extend far beyond the projects themselves.

We **do** have the capability to effect dramatic change, Hopkins argues, but we’re failing because we’ve largely allowed our most critical tool to languish: human imagination. As defined by social reformer John Dewey, imagination is **the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise**. The ability, that is, to ask **What if?** And if there was ever a time when we needed that ability, it is now.

Imagination is central to empathy, to creating better lives, to envisioning and then enacting a positive future. Yet imagination is also demonstrably in decline at precisely the moment when we need it most. In this

passionate exploration, Hopkins asks why imagination is in decline, and what we must do to revive and reclaim it. Once we do, there is no end to what we might accomplish.

From What Is to What If is a call to action to reclaim and unleash our collective imagination, told through the stories of individuals and communities around the world who are doing it now, as we speak, and witnessing often rapid and dramatic change for the better.

Praise for ‘From What Is to What If’:

- “A serious book on an important subject. Without imagination, where are we?”—**Sir Quentin Blake**
- “Rob Hopkins has long been a leader in imagining how we could remake our societies for the benefit of nature and humankind. His new book is a powerful call to imagine a better world. It should be widely read and appreciated.”—**Christiana Figueres, former Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; lead negotiator, Paris Climate Agreement**
- “Few things distinguish human beings from the rest of life on earth. Among the most important are our unique powers of imagination. Ironically, our use—and abuse—of those powers has now wrought a complex crisis in our relationships with the planet and with each other. As Rob Hopkins eloquently shows in this powerful and passionate book, to survive and thrive we have to become more imaginative, not less, in how we live, work and connect. He demonstrates the transformative power of imagination in all areas of our lives and the dangers of its neglect, especially in the education of our children. **From What Is to What If?** takes us on an inspiring and urgent tour of the people and communities around the world that are reimagining the present to create more hopeful and sustainable futures for us all.”—**Sir Ken Robinson, educator; New York Times best-selling author**
- “Day after day, week after week, the climate is changing and biodiversity is fading away. For a long time we tended to look the

other way, but now, being on the edge of the cliff forces us to understand that we must act urgently. And because of this emergency it is our utmost duty to join forces. Not only among states, but among mayors, NGOs, associations, companies, and citizens. Among all those who are determined to act here and now. “Towns and cities have already begun transition. Together, mayors have chosen to press ahead toward a healthier and safer world. Whether in Paris or in Totnes, initiatives are being launched and are encouraging us to shift from ‘why not’ to ‘how’ and from ‘how’ to ‘when.’ The movement must gain momentum and expand. “We must act wherever we are with the resources we have at our disposal to fight global warming. It’s no longer about thinking global and acting local; it’s about acting local in order to act global in a better way.

“People like Rob Hopkins give us the courage to move forward. By setting an example, he shows us that we are right to place our hopes in a future in which men and women can act as stewards of their environment. The many stories in this book are evidence of the fact that for some people this future has already become a reality.” —**Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris**

- “If we could set our imaginations free to explore the possibilities of how to make this world a better place, it would be remarkable indeed. And as this brave and powerful book argues, our very survival may depend upon it. We have nothing to lose by following the ideas set out in these pages, and everything to gain.” —**Scott Barry Kaufman, psychologist, Columbia University; coauthor of Wired to Create**
- “I couldn’t stop reading this book, and ideas just wouldn’t stop popping into my head. Rob Hopkins puts imagination back at the heart of future-dreaming, offering us an irresistible invitation to dream bigger and then make those dreams a reality. For anyone seeking a renewed sense of possibility, this one’s for you.” —**Kate Raworth, author of Doughnut Economics**

- “What if we are looking for solutions to our myriad challenges in all the wrong places? Hopkins, cofounder of the global Transition movement, reminds us that an essential ingredient to navigating the various unravelings of the coming decades isn’t just our community resilience, reskilling, and activism—but our civic imagination.”—**Chuck Collins, Institute for Policy Studies; author of Born on Third Base**
- “I love this book. It is an extraordinary, reality-based report on people around the world applying the power of imagination to rebuild relationships and create a fulfilling, creative, and possible human future together. An essential read for all who care.”—**David C. Korten, author of Change the Story, Change the Future and When Corporations Rule the World**
- “When it comes to tackling climate change or the numerous other threats to our global environment, the greatest challenge we face today may be the belief that the damage is beyond the point of repair, that we lack agency in addressing the problem, for that leads us down the same path as outright denial—a path of inaction. In **From What Is to What If**, Rob Hopkins shows us a different path, one of action, hope, and engagement. Read this book and join the battle to preserve our planet.”—**Michael Mann, distinguished professor, Pennsylvania State University; coauthor of The Madhouse Effect**
- “Reading this book is like listening to the voice of Rob Hopkins. A voice full of kindness, optimism, brightness, humor, and imagination. And that spirit is precisely what we need to build a better future and to reconnect with each other and the better part of ourselves. With this book, Rob poses a crucial question: How could we create another world, one in which human beings live in harmony with each other and with nature, if we are not able to imagine it first? We can’t—and that’s why this book is so necessary.”—**Cyril Dion, writer, filmmaker, and producer of the film Tomorrow**

- “At last, a design for our dreams. I believe we have a debt of honour to take action. Please read this book and defy the herd. Are we golden or are we debris?”—**Mark Stewart, musician, The Pop Group and Mark Stewart & The Maffia**
- “**From What Is to What If** is a profound look at imagination’s potential to enact progress and a call for us to make space for the things we often overlook. Hopkins confronts the most pressing issues of our times and urges us to look closer, reconnect with our roots, adapt slower modes of production, and work collectively. Imagination is within reach; it can and it will continue to salvage and elevate communities while driving us towards more sustainable and resilient futures.”—**Theaster Gates, artist; founder and director, Rebuild Foundation**
- “Today our choice is simple: Change quickly or contribute to a catastrophic collapse. It’s a daunting challenge, and it will be impossible unless we can imagine what a low-carbon, high-cohesion society looks like—not on paper, but in our towns and neighborhoods day-to-day. Here Rob Hopkins helps us envision a dramatically different, ecologically sustainable social environment, and invites us to build it together. This is a powerful, inspiring book.”—**Eric Klinenberg, author of Palaces for the People**