KEYNOTE · WED, OCT 14 · 11:15-11:55 AM

Islands of Coherence: Building the Bones of What Comes Next

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Physicist Rob Davies argued that global civilization is deep in ecological overshoot and that the task is building what comes next, not saving the current system. Mountain towns can become "islands of coherence": small, connected pockets of order that help a larger system reorganize.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Overshoot is temporary by definition.** Seven of nine planetary boundaries are now past the danger line, and climate is only one of them. The question is whether we right-size by design or by disaster.
2. **Expect disruption on a scale of decades.** Limits to Growth updates track a business-as-usual path pointing to unraveling in the 2040s. Davies stressed it is a trend, not a prediction. Plan on a window of one to four decades.
3. **Supply chains will get less reliable.** COVID showed failures in odd places, like the US being unable to make its own paper masks. Davies also expects financial wealth to erode, so reserves may not stay reliable buffers.
4. **Low carbon is not the same as regenerative.** Heat pumps and solar still matter, but swapping high carbon for low shifts damage rather than avoiding it. Communities also need to use much less energy, and build systems that regenerate.
5. **Run on flows, not stocks.** Bunkers and stockpiles draw down and run out. Coherent towns harvest what they need mostly locally, partly regionally, and stay connected to each other to share knowledge.

WHAT LOCAL OFFICIALS CAN DO

- ☐ **Ask five questions about your town.** What can we take with us (like water systems), what will we mourn, what can we compost, what dropped threads can we pick up, and what should we use before we lose it?
- ☐ **Sort services by maintenance cost and value.** Map services on a grid of upkeep vs. community value. Favor low upkeep, high value "vibrant thrift"; question high cost, low value "lonely branch" uses.
- ☐ **Build a team, not a lone champion.** A mayor running the city day to day can't also plan for what's coming. Build a group with a good map, a good compass and a shared goal.
- ☐ **Assess supply chain weak points now.** Ask what happens if far-away goods stop arriving. Weak points hide in unexpected places: about 80% of US transformer steel comes from abroad.
- ☐ **Act on what you control, like land and water.** Start where state and federal rules don't restrict you, put plans and institutions in place now, and work to change the laws that do restrict you.
- ☐ **Use today's tools to build what's next.** Davies uses AI to explore local scenarios, such as losing six-continent supply chains within 10 years. Use tools for lift while the tow plane still flies.

BY THE NUMBERS

20 TW
Continuous energy use of global civilization

7 of 9
Planetary boundaries past the danger line

~100 Gt
Material mined and moved each year

$100T+
Yearly economic flow, about $100 to $110 trillion

~30%
Modeled loss of financial wealth in 1 to 2 decades

80%
US transformer steel (GOES) from abroad

WATCH OUT FOR

- ! Davies expects large-scale destination ski tourism to decline, a major shift for mountain economies, and not only because of snow.
- ! Relational trust matters most: as things get tight, communities without trust and a shared goal struggle.

RESOURCES

Planetary boundaries framework
stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html

The Limits to Growth
clubofrome.org/publication/the-limits-to-growth/

Hospicing Modernity
Book by Vanessa Machado de Oliveira (Andreotti), cited by Davies

Rob Davies on Substack
Davies's new Substack on these ideas; link shown at the session. He offered help building understanding in communities.

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CONTACTS

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