

BIOREGIONAL BRIEFING ROOM

Atlantic Isles Bioregional Finance and Governance Community of Practice



Emerging Hope in a Fragmenting World: Insights from the Bioregional Briefing Room #2

In the second session of the *Bioregional Briefing Room* — a space convened by the **Atlantic Isles Bioregional Finance & Governance Community of Practice** — we spoke with **Thomas Homer-Dixon** and **Shandell Houlden** of the **Cascade Institute** about what their modelling of the *polycrisis* reveals for the future of bioregional work.

The Cascade Institute's [Polycrisis Core Model](#) maps interactions across eleven global systems — from governance and food to energy, technology and world order — to explore how different combinations could shape humanity's near-term future. Among four million possible scenarios, only a small cluster leads to a stable and livable pathway. The researchers call it the **"Hope Attractor"** — and bioregional reorganisation, they suggest, could be one of the forces that makes it attainable.

This conversation followed our [earlier exchange](#) with Taiwanese Ambassador at Large **Audrey Tang**, deepening the Briefing Room's purpose: to connect bioregional practice with the global systems dynamics and governance shifts that define the terrain we are working within.

Key Takeaways

1. The “Hope Attractor” is real, not rhetorical.

Out of millions of modelled futures, one distinct configuration emerged as both viable and self-reinforcing — a future marked by strong democratic institutions, social cohesion, and ecological balance. This was not a matter of aspiration or wishful thinking; it arose from hard, data-based causal reasoning across interlinked systems. Its existence suggests that even within turbulent conditions, there are still pathways to stability — but they require a reorientation of systems toward cooperation, equity, and distributed intelligence.

2. Bioregions as attractors of coherence.

Within the model, bioregional organisation appeared as a plausible route into the Hope Attractor — mostly because of its systemic nature. Bioregions can host the kind of recursive relationships between ecology, economy, and governance that generate feedback loops of stability. They are scales where trust can take material form: in watershed governance, regional finance, food systems, and land stewardship that reinforce one another rather than compete.

3. Complexity is not the enemy.

The conversation reminded us that attempts to simplify or centralise control in response to global turbulence are often counterproductive. The world we are entering is inherently complex, interdependent, and dynamic. Bioregional approaches work with this reality, nurturing adaptive governance, participatory processes, and ecological literacy as survival skills rather than optional virtues. Complexity, in this sense, becomes not a barrier to coordination but a deeper form of intelligence emerging from relationship.

4. Islands of coherence are strategic.

Periods of systemic instability are often seen as precluding progress. A perspective shift we were invited into was to see them fundamentally reconfiguring where progress can occur. Political and institutional stability will not be evenly distributed, so the task is to create “islands of coherence” — places where human, institutional, and ecological systems begin to stabilise one another. These are the seedbeds of continuity: regions that can prototype regenerative economies, shared stewardship, and new democratic norms, showing what remains possible amidst breakdown elsewhere.

5. Nested resilience, not isolation.

While bioregions can become strongholds of coherence, they cannot survive as sealed containers. Every bioregion depends on exchange — of resources, knowledge, and solidarity — with others. The future calls for nested forms of resilience: governance architectures that are polycentric, federated, and reciprocal. In other words, autonomy must be balanced by interdependence, and local self-sufficiency by global mutual care.

6. Energy and autonomy are linked.

A bioregional future depends on decentralised access to high-quality energy that doesn't reproduce extractive patterns. Thomas Homer-Dixon highlighted that deep geothermal energy, for example, could provide dense, localised power without displacing land for solar or wind infrastructure. Energy sovereignty is thus not just a technical question but a political and ecological one — shaping how regions sustain complexity without falling back into dependency or depletion.

7. Relearning democratic practice.

Many of the crises ahead are governance crises. Revitalising democracy at the bioregional level means creating forms of participation rooted in place — where people can see, feel, and co-govern the systems that shape their lives. This is about moving beyond voting as the limit of engagement toward democratic cultures that are relational, deliberative, and informed by the agency of the land itself. Bioregional practice offers the scaffolding for that re-democratisation of life.

The conversation left a clear impression: **bioregioning is more than a resilience strategy — it is a reorganisation strategy**. It offers a coherent response to systemic instability, combining realism with hope, place with politics, and complexity with care.

In a world defined by cascading risks, the practice of forming and stewarding bioregions may be one of the few acts that can increase our collective optionality — widening the space of viable futures rather than narrowing it. The Hope Attractor may still be small, but it is real. And through this distributed work of coherence, it may yet grow.

About

The Briefing Room runs every two months. We convene practitioners, policy-makers, technologists, researchers and community leaders to brief our community on emerging topics shaping bioregional practice, and to share the learning

Links shared during this session:

- <https://cascadeinstitute.org/polycrisis-core-model/>

Links to the CoP members:

- Bioregioning Tayside: <https://bioregioningtayside.scot/>
- FNLRT & Findhorn Watershed Initiative: <https://www.fnlrt.org.uk/> | <https://findhornwatershed.com/>
- Bioregioning South East Ireland: <https://bioregion.ie/>
- Wylderne Bioregioning: <https://www.wylderne.com/>
- Bioregional Learning Centre: <https://www.bioregion.org.uk/>
- Dark Matter Labs | Bioregions: <https://bioregions.darkmatterlabs.org/>