

# LOCALIZATION: ADAPTING TO THE COMING DOWNSHIFT

**PREMISE** – This seminar takes as given that high-consuming, growth-dependent, debt-driven societies will:

- soon be operating on drastically less energy and material;
- need to make a rapid transition;
- be less affluent, but possibly function with higher levels of well-being.

The drop in energy and material use may be 80% or more by mid-century, a shift without precedent. While energy is a key driver, the seminar is not about energy policy, nor does it develop doom-and-gloom scenarios. The seminar provides evidence for this premise but does not dwell on it. Rather, its focus is on one possible response to this emerging biophysical reality.

**FOCUS** – The seminar focuses on:

- 1) **What localization is** (it is already happening, often hidden in plain sight)
- 2) **What it can be** (a welcome challenge or a dire and dark struggle)
- 3) **What it should be** (e.g., peaceful, democratic, just, joyful, fulfilling, resilient)

It presumes that now is the time to envision adaptations, debate alternatives, and plan for and pre-familiarize ourselves with the needed transition.

The seminar explores the implications of a new biophysical circumstance, envisions accommodation to this emerging new normal, and discusses adaptations for the transition. The seminar focuses on crafting a wholesome, just, equitable, peaceful, and resilient transition. Throughout, members consider the local, regional, national, and even international dimensions of localization. They try to imagine a process of social change toward a positive future.

## **TEXT**

**De Young, R. & T. Princen (2012) *The Localization Reader: Adapting to the Coming Downshift*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.**

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All royalties from the sale of this book have been allocated, by contract with the MIT Press, to two community organizations that exemplify localization. *Growing Hope* is an organization dedicated to helping people improve their lives and communities through gardening and local food security ([www.growinghope.net](http://www.growinghope.net)) and *People's Food Co-op* has long sought to feed a community with wholesome food and good work ([www.peoplesfood.coop](http://www.peoplesfood.coop)).

## USEFUL LINKS

**The Localization Papers:** <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~rdeyoung>  
**Definition of localization:** <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~rdeyoung/definition.html>  
**Seminar documents:** <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~rdeyoung/syllabus.html>

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Developing principles, guidelines, and rules-of-thumb for effective localizing including the just, equitable, and peaceful transition from a fossil fuel-based, resource-intensive, growth-oriented economy to a resilient localized economy
2. Applying insights gained to a specific instance of localization
3. Develop the competence and confidence to publicly present principles and practices of localization and collaborate with community officials and citizens

**EVALUATIONS** – Include weekly preparation, group leadership, weekly written principles, discussion and group research project.

## ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Preparation and participation** – Thorough preparation of readings and diligent weekly and term writings are essential to the success of the seminar. In-class activities are the core of the course, where active listening is as important as speaking.

Because the readings are extensive, members are expected to develop strategies to cover the material efficiently. Collaboration is one such strategy and is encouraged.

Attendance at all class sessions is required. There is no substitute for in-class discussions. Since the seminar is an integrative exercise, presenting one's views is essential to its success.

2. **Session facilitation** -- All seminar members are responsible for helping to manage discussions. Small groups will occasionally meet outside of class to prepare materials or mini-presentations.
3. **Individual weekly principles** – The readings are selected to stimulate thought about localization. No one reading or combination of readings says definitively what localization is, yet each may offer a different frame for understanding localization. Rather, it is a major task of the seminar to determine what localization is, however provisionally. Thus, for each week's readings, each member of the seminar (students and faculty) will write at least two principles (e.g., criteria, guidelines, rules of thumb, propositions) for localization, based on that week's readings.

One principle should derive from a case, the other from the conceptual reading(s).

These principles should take the form of general causal statements, not descriptive summaries. The objective is not to be right, but to be exploratory, logical, and synthetic, even, at times, creative and stimulating. The broader, long-term goal is to build a conceptual framework for localization and offer guidelines for action. The collection of principles from all members thus serves as a publicly accessible (initially only to the seminar members) database from which anyone can build a conceptual framework of localization.

The readings contain innumerable possibilities for such principles. Sometimes the authors make them explicitly, but more often, only implicitly. Often, the reader must infer them.

A few carefully crafted sentences will generally suffice for each principle. It is useful to indicate where in the reading the principle originated (e.g., page number, a short quote). If feedback is desired, it is the responsibility of the member to ask. Otherwise, in each class session a few volunteers will share their principles. This will be one basis for class discussion.

- 4. Group research project** – Beginning at the start of the term, groups of students will develop a small research project. Optimal team size is 2 to 4 students. Smaller groups, even one-person, and larger groups are possible. After a discussion with classmates and instructors of various topics in the early part of the term, students must make a commitment to a single topic early in second month. Projects by individuals are permitted yet gently discouraged.

A number of place-based *Energy Descent Action Plans* have emerged in the last few years. Most of these can be found on the web. An evaluation of these, or similar, community plans would make a reasonable research project.

Each research group delivers a short draft paper for peer review. For the final presentation, the group can choose how (e.g., formal presentation to class, a poster in the commons), where (the class, the school, a conference, a board meeting) and when (no later than early in the final month), and in what format to present its findings.

The schedule of research project tasks includes:

<b>Weekly</b>	Brief updates from groups on research progress
<b>First month</b>	Discussion of topics by entire seminar
<b>Midterm</b>	Commitment to a single topic
<b>Third month</b>	Draft reports distributed for peer-review
<b>Late Third month</b>	Peer-review evaluation returned to teams
<b>Final month</b>	Final report due

## **PROCEDURES**

1. **Readings** – Most readings are in the text. The purpose of the readings is not to accumulate lots of facts. It is not to memorize everything. Rather, it is to identify and grasp key ideas, concepts, norms, analytic perspectives, biophysical and social contexts, and principles as they relate to localization. Thus, consider the following as an overall reading strategy.
    - a) Approach the readings as an exploration, an active process of making sense of the piece, of finding nuggets of insight into the reasons for and processes of localization.
    - b) The authors of the readings were not part of a localization seminar. They might have framed their piece differently had they been in such a seminar. It will often be useful to reinterpret their work through the premises of this seminar.
    - c) As you read, note your own reactions, especially surprises or “aha’s” or passages that contradict your previous understanding (or another reading). Share such reactions with seminar members, or others, however common or popular you think they might be.
  2. **Written work** – Type or computer print all assignments; single spacing is acceptable for final papers (in fact, for source reduction purposes, preferred) but drafts to be read and marked by others should be double spaced with ample margins for comments. Printing on the back side of used paper and other creative uses and re-uses of paper are also encouraged provided the material is highly readable.
  3. **Session agenda** – Each session will follow a simple order:
    - a) **Principles**
      - i. **At the start** – Everyone will post their two principles on the board in the meeting room.
      - ii. **First ten minutes** – Everyone will read and take notes on the posted principles.
      - iii. **At fifteen minutes after starting** – Discussion of selected principles.
    - b) **Mini-lecture**
    - c) **Discussion of readings**
    - d) **Group-based research project discussion**
    - e) **Seminar administration**
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## **SCHEDULE**

### **1. CASE STUDIES**

Human societies have long been organized locally, but cheap energy, new technologies and communications have shifted that organization to the national and international levels. Examples of localization, as opposed to “the local,” are hard to come by. A reasonable example must demonstrate how to provide for basic needs in a durable and resilient manner. Within the readings listed below, there are a number of case studies to help us imagine what the transition could be like. Most of these case studies are found in the text; some are on the web, others may emerge in the mainstream media during the term.

### **2. READINGS**

#### **PRIOR READING**

Holmgren, David (2009). *Future scenarios: How communities can adapt to peak oil and climate change*. Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, VT.

#### **WEEK 1 – INTRODUCTION and DRIVERS OF LOCALIZATION**

Meadows, Donella H. (1994). Envisioning a sustainable world. Presented at the *Third Biennial Meeting of the International Society for Ecological Economics*. October 24-28, 1994, San Jose, Costa Rica. ( [http://www-personal.umich.edu/~rdeyoung/syllabus/Meadows,\\_D.\\_\(1994\)\\_Envisioning\\_a\\_Sustainable\\_World,\\_ISEE\\_Third\\_Biennial\\_Meeting.pdf](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~rdeyoung/syllabus/Meadows,_D._(1994)_Envisioning_a_Sustainable_World,_ISEE_Third_Biennial_Meeting.pdf) )

Preface and Introduction, *De Young & Princen* on Seminar webpage ]

Part 1 – Drivers of Localization – An understanding of biophysical limits leads to one unmistakable conclusion: society will be making a fundamental transition away from fossil fuels and toward lowered consumption of material and energy. Social complexity may decline but equity and quality of life may actually increase.

Introduction

- 1 The End of Fossil Fuels *M. King Hubbert*

Case study: Read only “2000 watt” story in “The island in the wind.” *The New Yorker*, 2008, pp. 68-77.

#### **WEEK 2 – DRIVERS OF LOCALIZATION (continued)**

- 2 Energy Cost of Energy Gained *Adam Dadeby*
- 3 The Inevitability of Transition *Joseph A. Tainter*
- 4 Less Energy, More Equity, More Time *Ivan Illich*

Case study: Box (Planful Shrinkage) [read file by this name on Seminar webpage]  
Case study: "Shipping costs and globalization." New York Times. (3 August 2008).

### **WEEK 3 – LOCALIZATION IN PRACTICE**

Part 2 – Localization in Practice – Accepting the inevitability of transition is separate from adapting to the likely consequences. Imagining the range of ways we might respond allows us to plan more self-reliant communities. Existing practices demonstrate their feasibility. Together, scenarios and practices help prefigure the needed institutions, economies, physical structures, norms and behaviors necessitated by ecological constraint.

Introduction

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|---|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 5 | An Arc of Scenarios    | <i>Rob Hopkins</i>      |
| 6 | Inhabiting Place       | <i>Robert L. Thayer</i> |
| 7 | Locally Owned Business | <i>Michael Shuman</i>   |

Case study: Box (Localizing Finance)

Case study: "In a City in Italy, the Schoolchildren Walk Where Once They Rode," NYT, 27 March 2009.

### **WEEK 4 – LOCALIZATION IN PRACTICE (continued)**

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|----|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 8  | Daring to Experiment         | <i>Warren Johnson</i>  |
| 9  | Civic Agriculture            | <i>Thomas A. Lyson</i> |
| 10 | Ecovillages: A Whole New Way | <i>Karen Litfin</i>    |

Case study: Box (Erie Canal)

Case study: Box (Belo Horizonte)

### **WEEK 5 – PHILOSOPHIES OF LOCALIZATION**

Part 3 – Philosophies of Localization – Philosophies of localization affirm the possibility of flourishing while staying within natural limits. The arguments are clear and have been around a long time, just overshadowed by a consumerist culture, a focus on growth and a presumption that bigger and faster is better.

Introduction

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|----|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 11 | The Decentralist Tradition  | <i>Kirkpatrick Sale</i>    |
| 12 | Technology at a Human Scale | <i>Ernst F. Schumacher</i> |

Case study: Box (The Potato)

Case study: "Revived paper Mill Brings a Town Back With It." New York Times. (2008).

## **WEEK 6 – PHILOSOPHIES OF LOCALIZATION (continued)**

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|----|------------------------|----------------------|
| 13 | Provincialism          | <i>Josiah Royce</i>  |
| 14 | Local Enterprise       | <i>Wendell Berry</i> |
| 15 | Conserving Communities | <i>Wendell Berry</i> |

Case study: Box (Hawaii)

Case study: “Workers’ Paradise Found Off Japan’s Coast,” New York Times, April 22, 2009.

## **WEEK 7 – BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN PEOPLE**

Part 4 – Bringing Out the Best in People – A challenge of localization, like sustainability generally, is to provide a positive framing of a materialistically simpler existence. Fortunately, knowing what deeply motivates people this possible: localization can indeed be meaningful and fulfilling at the same time it is ecologically compatible.

Introduction

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|----|-----------------------------|---|
| 16 | Abundance and Fulfillment   | <i>Sharon Astyk</i>                       |
| 17 | Motives for Living Lightly  | <i>Raymond De Young</i>                   |
| 18 | Enabling the Best in People | <i>Rachel Kaplan &amp; Stephen Kaplan</i> |

Case study: Box (Work less)

Case study: “Good health as economy declines?” New York Times. (7 October 2008).

## **WEEK 8 – APPROPRIATE GOVERNANCE**

Part 5 – Appropriate Governance – While localization entails transforming society, it is not about rejecting all modern institutions. It seeks to reorient, re-task and right-size those institutions. To ensure a gentler transition, planning and decision-making must be participatory, collaborative, equitable and mutually accountable.

Introduction

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|----|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 20 | Towards the Regional                | <i>Gar Alperovitz</i> |
| 21 | Global Problems, Localist Solutions | <i>David J. Hess</i>  |

Case study: Box (Energy islands)

Case study: “Demand for Wind Spurs Ranchers to Join Forces,” New York Times. (Nov 28, 2008).

## WEEK 9 – TOOLS FOR TRANSITION

Part 6 – Tools for Transition – Understanding the positive dimensions of the transition, and having the motivation to start, does not provide the procedural knowledge needed to act effectively. Fortunately, there already are tools for making fundamental change. More tools will certainly be needed.

Introduction

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|----|---------------------------------|--|
| 22 | Adaptive Muddling               | <i>Raymond De Young &amp; Stephen Kaplan</i>         |
| 23 | Promoting a Partnership Society | <i>Lester W. Milbrath</i>                            |
| 24 | Tools for the Transition        | <i>Donella Meadows, Randers &amp; Dennis Meadows</i> |

Case study: Box (Corn to Veggies)

## WEEK 10 – PRINCIPLES FOR A RESILIENT TRANSITION

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|----|-------------------------------|--|
| 19 | Ecological Democracy          | <i>John S. Dryzek</i>                                |
| 24 | Tools for the Transition      | <i>Donella Meadows, Randers &amp; Dennis Meadows</i> |
| 25 | Downshift/Upshift: Our Choice | <i>Raymond De Young &amp; Thomas Princen</i>         |

## WEEK 11 & 12 – RESEARCH PROJECT PRESENTATIONS