

Global Dynamics at the Dawn of 2010

Lionel F. Stapley and Chrissie Rickman

Abstract

On or about 6th January 2010, under the guidance and co-ordination of OPUS, Listening Posts aimed at providing a snapshot of the societal dynamics of each country at the dawn of 2010 were held in twenty-six different countries around the world (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Estonia, Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, South Africa [two Reports], Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK). These were all reported in a similar format (see 'Britain and the World at the Dawn of 2003' in *Organisational & Social Dynamics*, 3(1): 165–169), researched and analysed by the authors, to produce this Global Report.

The authors self-defined their task as follows. To research and analyse the National Reports with a view to:

- (a) identifying common themes arising within the twenty eight Reports;
- (b) exploring relationships between themes and to reduce these down to major or dominant themes;
- (c) collating supporting information from the Reports for analysis of these themes;
- (d) formulating hypotheses arising therefrom.

For the sake of brevity this Report will only document the major interrelated themes identified, followed by an analysis and hypotheses regarding each.

Key words: Listening Posts, global dynamics, societal dynamics, social defences against anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

The incredible change that has occurred over the past two to three decades has affected nearly every facet of societies across the world. The breadth and depth of change has resulted in a degree of complexity that is, to a considerable degree, incomprehensible for members of societies and results in great confusion. Members of societies throughout the world are experiencing this period in history as one

*Address for correspondence: Lionel F. Stapley, email: director@opus.org.uk

of unprecedented and revolutionary social change that is still increasing in intensity. This includes technological change, such as the availability of social networking sites whereby members of societies can be in touch with a large number of people, but not in a meaningful way that will satisfy their human needs.

But it is not just about technology; it also encompasses the ideas, including political, social, philosophical, and religious ideas. Politically, we are experiencing the rise of China as a major world leader, and in the West we have to rethink our democratic way of governance as changes are more frequently occurring at a global level. More and more frequently are solutions to major problems sought at a global level at G7 or G20 meetings, which are largely outside the national democratic process. This is particularly so with regard to the resolution of economic problems. At the social level, massive migration and immigration has changed the shape of many communities, while at a religious level there is massive competition between Western and Muslim religions for dominance on a global scale. There is continuing evidence that the experience of members of societies throughout the world is that this period is one of formative changes in the structure of the world economy, the shape of societies, and the framework of world governance. It is leading to the development of a new way of life and a new culture.

It seems quite clear that something profound is happening and that the dynamic processes are of such intensity and frequency that the consistency, continuity, and confirmation that is normally part of our societal culture is fragmented and non-existent. Life as we knew it no longer exists; we are living in a period of history that is experiencing 'death of a way of life'. Last year, there was a fear that members of societies were moving away from dependency to responding with violent aggression. There is still considerable evidence to show that actual and latent violence is still very much a part of societies, and it would be an error to ignore this. However, it does seem that members of societies have fallen back into a deep trough of dependency, experiencing their worlds as so complex and making so little sense that members of societies experience impotence, vulnerability, and despair; they experience a lack of containment, social disintegration, uncertainty, and insecurity, and this even extends to fears for personal safety and annihilation, and threats to, and loss of, identity. In such circumstances, thoughts are primarily concerned with survival.

Members of societies are currently left feeling helpless and hopeless, and pessimistic about the possibility of gaining any meaning in their lives. They experience unmet dependency, particularly in

regard to politicians and other social institutions. All of this leading to a helpless state of passivity. Perhaps the least obvious, but by far the most significant, experience is the destruction or fragmentation over the past decade or more of societal cultures. This is an experience common to all members of a society, and one that affects them all. Never before has the phrase 'when our world begins to crumble we begin to crumble' been more meaningful. When cultures are no longer available to provide the consistency, continuity, and confirmation so necessary to our individual and group identities, we are but individuals and cannot realise our needs as a group animal. Where they used to be able to confirm their identity with any number of members of society, they now exist in a fragmented, complex world and are essentially on their own. This experience is further developed below in the first Analysis and Hypothesis – 'Dependency and survival'.

A further continuing theme that has been omnipresent in reports since 2004 has been the relationship of societies towards young people. Members of societies have sought to mobilise youth in every year since 2004, either in the capacity of scapegoats or as saviours. At this time, it is to be seen as more of an intergenerational issue, which is coupled with the affects of technological developments. The older generation is feeling hopeless, helpless, and impotent in making sense of their current environment. Their fears for the future are dealt with by projecting all hope into the younger generation, with the expectation that they will be the saviours that will rescue mankind from this doom-laden experience. A major concern is that young people act on these projections and lead violent rebellions. There are now several examples in societies across the world where this has been, or is, the case. This experience is further developed below in a second Analysis and Hypothesis – 'Impotence of older generation, youth as hope and saviours'.

Members of societies have regressed to an individualistic way of living. They have found comfort in primary groups to which they belong and those which still share their own thoughts and values, such as that of the family or a religious organisation. However, man is a social animal and, not surprisingly, is finding an individual existence hard to endure. A result is that there is a longing to return to a society that is evidenced by connectedness at a local community and national level. It is also appreciated that such connectedness is essential if the society is to develop a new way of life or to commence any form of activism. A problem is that such individualism makes it exceedingly difficult to agree issues that can be shared by members of society and can act as a catalyst for coming together.

There is a developing realisation that it is only through social action that meaning can be found. This experience is further developed below in the third Analysis and Hypothesis – ‘The search for the social and for shared meaning’.

ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS 1. DEPENDENCY AND SURVIVAL

Analysis

The current environment of members of society throughout the world is one of extreme complexity. A world where members of societies feel that they are cut off from politics and that their dependency on political and other societal leaders is largely unmet. The experience is one of a loss of control and a lack of any authenticity in responses to societal circumstances. There appears to be no opportunity for influence, an inability to face the truth, and little or no opportunity to express one’s feelings. A dependent reliance on experts to deal with complex problems only results in feelings of unmet dependency. Overall, members of societies experience disempowerment, a sense of not belonging, helplessness, pervasive impotence and uselessness, passivity, and, above all, pessimism. The world is experienced as a large, faceless system and there seems no way that others can be influenced or relied upon to relieve the fear and confusion. A result is that members of society go into a mass flight and a withdrawal from society. A consequence of this is that societies are massively fragmented as their members retreat into individualism and, in a bid to retain some form of identity, to primary groups such as family and religious organisations. There is a longing for affiliation which cannot be met, and this results in feelings of extermination or apocalypse, pessimism rules, and there are even fears for the end of the world. In such circumstances, the dominant concern is survival. This is reflected in the following extracts from the National Reports.

Australia: This year the mood of the group was notable for its pessimism about the future and a sense of feeling individually overwhelmed by the enormity of problems facing society in Australia and worldwide. The idealistic hopes at the beginning of 2009 that were projected into Rudd and Obama had been punctured by the reality of there being no ‘Messiah’ to ‘rescue us’ from ourselves. A strong sense of fear about the world and personal survival – the pace of change is too fast, the focus is all ‘short-termism’ and what if it IS just too late! There is an increasing fragmentation occurring to

people's experiences as citizens in a world that is thought of as 'a living system'.

Austria: There is no idea about society or a political movement to identify with. We in the group feel that we cannot influence society as much as we would like. We are afraid of a kind of psychological retreat (cynicism, "Biedermeier", alcoholism, political delusion). Because of the threats due to the inability of politicians to sublimate their aggression, members of society experience utter confusion. They regress to earlier stages in development and confine their relationships to a primary group (family, virtual groups, leisure groups) where they can confirm their identity, albeit in a limited manner. Manifest fear can be controlled. Unconscious struggles seem to be a longing to be noticed.

Belgium: Because citizens are afraid of difference, they will attempt to minimise, ignore or assimilate the differences, and this leads to an impoverishment in society. Because we are confronted with big and complex problems, citizens think they need experts and they will establish commissions, organisations and institutions which will solve our problems for us; by doing so, we do not take up our responsibility, cover up the problem and consequently do not feel involved any more. Because demonstrating courage entails the risk of being excluded, citizens keep their heads down and this leads to immobility and passivity.

Bulgaria: Travel and development are processes of encountering the 'other' and the otherness of the new social realities. Probably because we do not feel authors of most of these realities, such encounters challenge our feelings of authenticity and belonging. The crisis of belonging and authenticity mobilise our attitudes towards flight from and seldom towards fight with. These collective attitudes could organise and evolve into cultures of emigration.

Canada: There was the sense that there was little we could do to stop the bad behaviour of a government that most of us believe has little to do with what our country is all about. There were many explanations about the concerns expressed in the room. The talk was especially lively and somewhat disorderly. The discussions about the effects of aging and about our diminishing effectiveness may have been linked to a deeper sense of inability to reduce the existing and increasing socioeconomic inequalities in society.

Chile: People feel downhearted due to the lack of control of their lives, particularly regarding their incapacity to fulfil their hopes

towards an individual and family welfare. There are anxieties created due to the lack of hope when realising that the effort, perseverance, will and motivation to accomplish goals may be worthless when facing the fanciful powers of neoliberalism that undermines people's hopes and efforts. Neoliberalism is a huge force that traps people's mind and body in an inconsistent obedience that pressures values related to individualism, work, materialism and consumption.

Denmark: As the political public sphere is being professionalised and as it has separated power, knowledge, and involvement, people feel cut off from the political world. Frustration and disempowerment are lurking, and it is difficult to turn feelings and critical analysis into a fitting political expression. The ongoing reorganisation of the world economy and power distribution in combination with the many signs climate changes continually stimulate our fantasies of extermination and the end of the world.

Estonia: A human being/an individual has, inadvertently, created a large system of which he finds it hard to be a part. The individual feels that the demands set by the system feel overwhelming and create frustration, anxiety and a continuous feeling of discomfort. One has an unreasonable struggle to stay within the system; in addition to which staying within the system is solely the responsibility of the individual. It is difficult for the individual to communicate with the large, faceless system. People have become more passive. Facing the impossible, they continuously feel distressed, suffer from bad self-esteem, a feeling of guilt, inability, and even fear of not coping.

Faroe Islands: There is no confidence in the leadership and everybody is fed up with stories about 'The ghost is coming . . .'. There is no real co-operation within the parenthood nor between nations, those responsible are withdrawing into passivity and fumbling activities.

This leaves the members of the society in ambivalence, helplessness and overwhelming anxiety provoking a range of defence mechanisms such as denial and displacement. This leads to underlying irresponsibility, disengagement and dependency on a saviour (Denmark?).

Finland: Extreme feelings of having lost control over one's life were reported to appear in situations in which actions meant to support a client were outsourced to others or to technology, for example, mechanically operated robots such as answering machines and other information equipment that is too complex for its users. Because culture is an artefact, a product produced by humans, the alienation of people from nature also takes culture further and further from

natural life. And the further culture progresses, the more difficult it is for a person to establish a connection with an authentic natural life. People are left alone in the void they have created.

France: Contrary to what was said last year, 'the state of the world', especially the economic situation, did not lead most people to feelings of guilt, powerlessness, or rebellion . . . but to a true 'rupture'. Some participants don't understand, refuse to really engage, and refuse to use their intelligence, claiming instead that 'nothing can be done'. It is as though they have abandoned set of lands and believe it useless to try to set out for another. Present people are changing from feeling powerless to feeling useless on a global scale. Withdrawal from complexity

Germany: The main theme was the overwhelming complexity in the world we live in. From behavioural reactions such as omnipotence, trivialisation, struggle for feasibility, flight, refusal etc., we assume that behind these in many cases there lie shame and powerlessness that may not be admitted: shame since one feels so stupid – even 'teenyweeny' as one put it – in the face of scientific and technological products; powerless since countless dangerous problems – such as the crises of economy and finance, natural catastrophes, terror and war – cannot be efficiently sorted out and removed from the world.

Hungary: Members of society are either frustrated and feel betrayed, or feel their own responsibility because of the perceived failure of the transition. The result is guilt and an inability to face truth, and to forgive. Members of society (especially with different political preferences) do not believe in each other (that they will forgive) so it is easier not to forgive. A hugely regressive phenomena on a societal level.

India: The need for new paradigms of relating and a sense of experimenting and exploring new ways of relating and relatedness was expressed. Passivity, lack of celebration and overemphasis of negatives over positives, all were discussed.

Ireland: Because the male model of organising society has failed, citizens experience fear and confusion and are both rejecting the failed model and unable to articulate or agree on a different way of thinking and living. A result is a retreat to a primary identification, represented by female values: homemaking, withdrawal, quietness. There is a focus on family and community where identity can be confirmed without threat. There is a retreat from the battlefield of the 'marketplace' of society

Israel: There were also worries about the survival of Israel in the future. Most of the time left in Part One was dedicated to the expression of worries about the economic crisis and its implications concerning the gaps created among western populations by piggish capitalism. There were also some complaints about the bold language of the new generations, the highly influential position of the media in our life and the helplessness (especially of the elder and the weak members of society) in front of the rapidly changing demands of maintaining everyday life.

Italy: The mistrust/fear *continuum* was related to a pervasive and painful identity crisis, which was perceived in such a way that could refer to various hypotheses (which, however, remained implicit, individual or unexpressed). Fear can be explained by the loss of status. Fear is fear of ourselves: of what moves inside us. We are afraid of taking positions and of defining ourselves. Unconscious feelings of guilt (foreigners look after our houses and our parents, as we are no longer capable of looking after them ourselves), and a pervasive and disarming impression of impotence hinder the development of the elaboration processes and mental reorganisation.

Peru: The concept of paralysis is mentioned in several opportunities while describing the lack of citizen accountability around the next elections. There is a fear of the unknown, absence of hope of a new political figure that could really bring in a new style of leadership. The fragmentation of national identity is assumed as the most important subject and it is considered a risk in the edge of the upcoming presidential elections.

Poland: Participants discussed their family life and close relationships. They claimed that there is growing diversity and individualism which makes life feel more solitary and isolated. People are less interested or prepared to invest in the difficult process of building a stable relationship. It seems more convenient to live alone and buy a pet as something to love (not here, may be there; potential possibilities of new relationships makes people less careful of what they already have).

Portugal: The social and economic crises that have happened recently generates in the individuals worries and fear that the availability of basic goods for survival may be at risk, which leads to pessimism, scepticism and a deep-seated preoccupation. There is an increasing paradox in the society, which is represented by the fact that people are more dependent on others than ever (social and economic networks) and at the same time people are more individualistic

than ever. This paradox is very hard to conciliate, and is illusorily solved by alienation. This paradox generates tension, anxiety and pessimism.

Serbia: After so many continuous and repetitive social traumas, transitions, current world economic crises, there is a lot of turmoil and a mixture of a variety of processes, so it depends on the perspective which one would come to the foreground. Social isolation tendencies are still extensively present in many ways, whether as a social defences, as national characteristics rooted in old historical times, as a genetic code, or as a reaction to being isolated from the world in the Nineties, and further on, or as a social resistance to changes.

South Africa: The different voices are talking in different volumes and in silos, not listening to one another. The strong political voice is narcissistically driving its own power agenda, while most of the transformational work happens below the surface. The lack of listening to one another makes hope fragile.

Spain: The economic and social crisis confronts society with their problems, but below the schizoid–paranoid state of mind, depression is invading the whole social and individual live. As a consequence the pessimism and the depression impede realistic thinking and creative solutions to the problems and let people hopeless and passive. Blaming others reflects a generalised pessimism and a lack of confidence in the social institutions, the different groups, and even the different generations. There is the need to change the system, to be critic with former generations and to kill the father but it is impossible because everybody is dependent in one way or another.

Sweden: The conflict between trusting one's own capacity or leaving it to others to take a stand and act. Conflicts between resignation and withdrawing to intimate relationships; retreating to private projects and resignation on the one hand and a vague and unspecific longing for affiliation and responsibility on the other.

Switzerland: Swiss society rejects visible and large scale signs of difference such as the Minarets in order to preserve a known way of life. It may well be fear of the unknown and fear of change itself that is being rejected on a systemic level, as on an individual level the Swiss are reasonably welcoming to foreigners in part evidenced by the large numbers of multicultural marriages that exist here. It seems that what might lie beneath the surface is a desire for containment and control in the threat of unknown, large-scale, unpredictable forces.

UK: Because there is so much complexity and rapid change, members of society are struggling to come to terms with and find ways of controlling this new emerging world. It is difficult to anticipate what the next ten years may bring, and so imagination is defeated in trying to prepare for what needs to be done. Some small-scale initiatives are taken, but often seem inadequate to the scale of the problems faced. The result is that people can feel overwhelmed by hopelessness and apocalyptic feelings.

Hypothesis

Because of the pervasive and profound changes that have occurred and are still occurring, societies throughout the world, and globally, are experienced as a complex and faceless system. Members of societies feel a loss of control, being cut off from the political process, and a lack of authenticity in regard to political and other societal leaders. A result is hopelessness, a pervasive impotence, passivity, and pessimism. This leads to a withdrawal from societies, a retreat to primary identity groups, and individualism. The resulting fragmentation only serves to make matters worse, as the notion of community or society seems impossible to locate. Living in a collective of individuals without a shared culture becomes painful and threatens individual and group identities. This is experienced as apocalyptic and raises fears for the end of the world. In such circumstances thoughts turn to survival.

ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS 2. 'IMPOTENCE OF OLDER GENERATION, YOUTH AS HOPE AND SAVIOURS'

Analysis

Faced with the experience of members of society as described at Analysis and Hypothesis 1 above, one where the helplessness, passivity, and pessimism lead to fears for survival, it is perhaps not surprising that generational issues come into being. The older generation is struggling with child-like emotions, regressed states that they do not want to see acted out by young people. There is a polarisation of what we might call the old way of life and the new way of life, the old being associated with the older generation and the new associated with the younger generation. Nowhere is this more clearly evidenced than when we consider technological change. The older generation is more fearful for the future, seen as volatile and uncertain, and nostalgic for the old ways of life. Members of society

experience failed dependency in politicians and other social leaders. They no longer have faith in leaders. The authority of parents has also changed and, in regard to technology, young people become the teachers and recipients of knowledge for their parents and elders. Feelings of pervasive impotence lead the older generation to locate their feelings of hope in the younger generation, who they expect to sort everything out and look after them in their old age. They abdicate their own authority to the younger generation. Thus, enormous responsibility is placed on young people, who are placed in the position of saviours. At the same time, the older generation suffer guilt at having left the younger generation to find their own way, or because they have done too much for them. The older generation also experience guilt for the legacy of the world that they are leaving to young people, which has been destroyed by the narcissistic greed of the older generation. Perhaps not surprisingly, the young act out their new found authority by aggression and violence, which is feared by the older generation.

Australia: Fantasising that 'our children' and a 'proper education' for them is the only hope; even the conceiving of children (the future) is becoming difficult, the process thwarted by affluent lifestyle perhaps, or maybe environmental pollutions, or bodies shutting down core functions? Hope is placed on 'our children', but 'what are they being taught at our schools?' A question was raised of 'So, who is bringing up the children?' As if the responsibility for teaching children is in schools alone.

Austria: Aggression in adolescents is an important issue. Teachers today are increasingly concerned with helping students become aware of their latent aggression. Teaching facts is thus of less importance. Student demonstrations. Participants feel that they have left the students to themselves. Yet they too are left to themselves. At this point in time, members of society seem to be more preoccupied with adolescents than with their own morale and political actions. Issues of lifelessness vs. vitality, confusion vs. orientation seem to be projected on adolescents. Problems having to do with life are delegated to students. They are supposed to be unconventional. What they do tends to be disappointing. They are also isolated because the older generation cannot provide support because they are mostly concerned with their own private issues.

Belgium: We talk about the young generation, our children, and the way they seem to respond to our society today. Some observe a greater sense of connection among young people, supported by

social networks (e.g. Facebook). Some stress the cultural belief or illusion of 'manipulability' and the enormous responsibility this places on the shoulders of young people. They are made responsible for their own life and for making the right (or wrong) choices! At the same time young people seem to have much more options today, making it even harder to make the 'right' choice. Young people move from one country to another, but they don't really 'travel'.

Bulgaria: From the social role of a student: 'When communicating with my fellow students I feel pressured to accept some norms and rules, which I don't understand. I feel this too mannered, snobbish and false and it makes me avoiding the university community because of this. I feel this as a role I am forced to perform. I feel many people around me inauthentic and pretending to be what they are not. I feel as if receiving messages from my environment such as 'You are a student, behave seriously!'

Canada: The dichotomy between old and young was an especially loaded underlying issue. The fear of becoming impotent victims of external forces lends itself easily to the fear of old age, increased dependency on others and the inevitable increasing inequality between the very old and the young. It may be that our unconscious hope was that through technology there might be a rapid and effective response to the deepening economic inequalities that were presented at the beginning of the discussion. Perhaps there was an even deeper hope that technology would find a way to ease the sense of decline of the elderly. But also there was a sense that it was time for a new generation to take a stab at making things better.

Chile: This addiction is clear in adults since they feel responsible of training the new generations so they can take materialism as their leitmotiv. People's responsibility regarding dehumanisation and the lack of efforts to stop it is clear. This facts raises the question of what is inhuman and what is the limit between good and bad, being pointed out that the lack of values generates violent actions which finally dehumanise. Particularly, it is observed how young people are unemployed or have very precarious jobs.

Denmark: Children are unsure of their parents' authority in relation to themselves. The young ones struggle with themselves doing exercises, following diets and taking slimming drugs – self discipline takes over the role as the person's governing authority, rebellion has become an inner process. There is a general feeling of guilt and shame in relation to future generations: our generation has ruined the environment and gorged on resources in a greedy decade, but

still we cannot take the responsibility upon us, and establish powerful political leadership, clear things up and make reparations. We transfer the disasters to our children.

Estonia: In the beginning, the participants said it was difficult to express their personal experiences. People are not used to share experiences and worries in public. One has usually kept quiet about one's true feelings and experiences or they have been processed in small, familiar circles, not in public.

Faroe Islands: It is like an underground, a rise of a new order, a new generation getting prepared to fill in the vacuum after the absent and invisible, but still powerful generation. Still hesitating though, and some emigrates meanwhile. This results in a no-man's land where forces are not strong enough to bridge the gap, and without bridging there will be no building. It is as if everybody is in a waiting-mode, waiting for someone to legitimate the hope, the babies and the visions. But who is it?? Who will rise from equality, among siblings, and fertilise 'the new way'?

Finland: A dependence on technology that has gone too far and technical systems whose 'collapse' would create a wholly new type of catastrophe were mentioned as new threats. Our culture seems to have advanced so far that people have lost their connection with nature. It has detached itself from reality and created a simulated reality. Instead of having natural relationships, people form unnatural relationships that estrange them from their natural basic needs. Life is filled with emptiness, which then must be filled somehow artificially

France: A quarter of the people present think (assert, or hope) that young people are the ones who are going to get us out of this 'mess' because they can still dream of a different world. Loss of the illusion that 'better days will come'. No one seemed to have illusions about the answer to the question of what was in store for their children: the future could only be worse than the present.

Germany: The group turned to the sheer mass and speed of radical changing of perpetually new medial technology of such complexity that has lost transparency or even overtaken mankind. Worries and distress are expressed that priority is given to higher speed and efficiency, for example in University requirements to the cult of so-called excellence over longterm concepts in Natural Science.

Hungary: It would be OK, to see it as different, but it often leads to aggression and hate. In boxing the fighters are hugging each other at

the end and they are waiting for the judges to count. May be it is our task to learn our own aggression and increase our love. It is also hard to teach our children, how to handle their own feelings towards their siblings and control their own emotions without repressing them.

Ireland: A member who is a mother of young adults expressed confidence that they will be fine – they will make it. We share responsibility for the abuses – of power, of children, of resources, of position – and we all benefited from the years of the celtic tiger. We experience guilt and shame because of this and we deny our guilt and involvement. Ireland has behaved like a teenager who had a very hard childhood: experiencing the overpowering impact of authority, becoming anarchical and anti-establishment but without developed personal power to speak or act. We are unfamiliar with our own voice and are not sure how to use it.

Israel: There were also some complaints about the bold language of the new generations, the highly influential position of the media in our life and the helplessness (especially of the elder and the weak members of society) in front of the rapidly changing demands of maintaining everyday life. Other themes raised were violence in the streets and in schools, violence between different religions and cultures, violent takeovers by religious extremists.

Italy: In the emotional background of the group, there was also the problem of the weakness and vulnerability that aging inevitably brings with it. Faced with the changes that the world proposes/imposes, the old people conjured up in the story of one of the participants close their shutters at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Does this mean we are a country of oldies?

Peru: We have set no example for future generations on the importance of caring for the public sector. We see our children getting married, having their own children repeating the same mistakes, we missed really getting to know them; they don't even think it is important. The concern of an emergent cult named 'EMO's' attracting young people practising self harm, putting themselves into extreme life situations to connect with emotions is expressed in a strong way.

Poland: The ties between generations are also weakening. Young people care less about parents, grandparents, parents-in-law. At the same time they feel guilty for not sustaining contacts with their elders. It was observed that it is more and more difficult to try to co-operate with somebody who lives by different values and attitudes. Young people feel that they are alone in their searching for answers about

life's important questions. While in part welcoming that solitude, at the same time, they crave guidance and support. Participants noted the great control over children, who are constantly subject to parental or institutional supervision. The growing number of psychological interventions in schools is observed. On their own, children have difficulty to build relations with each other, or resolve their conflicts.

Serbia: Then again a voice of a student arose, that there are more than a few people who are making efforts for improvement in our country, and that many of the subculture phenomena just mentioned, are present in most countries around the world. 'It's no good to only trash ourselves, as Serbs are very much prone to do!' Again the pedagogic need to educate young people, and criticise trash culture found more voices. Societies which value themselves don't let such things.

South Africa: Citizens are becoming aware of the emerging identity of a country moving out of adolescence into young adulthood. The new democracy is approaching its 16th birthday – the time when the (male) voice breaks. This differentiation between child and adult voice manifests as follows. The loud adult voice is represented by the politicians and economists talking about power, control and violence, as if that is the only reality. The softer child voice is represented by those who care for and work towards social collaboration in communities and transformation in organisations.

Spain: The parents are happier when their children pass an exam for civil servant so they have a job for life, than if their children want to undertake a business; or if they say they want to move their job, parents show resistance. There are great examples of the Spanish system of people who began as bellboys in a company and arrived very high in that same company. For the adolescents the models that they have are people of the magazines, uncultivated, suburban people whom haven't had to study . . .

Sweden: On yet another level the streak of nostalgia might be about aging: Has the group, in spite of an infusion of youth, already passed its best-before date? Are the experiences of people in their upper middle-ages relevant and valuable? It should be mentioned that this theme quite well corresponds with Erik H. Erikson's model for developmental psychology, where the central conflict of aging is: 'Resignation and bitterness or atonement and wisdom'.

Switzerland: Several members recalled that before the Second World War Switzerland was ostensibly a nation of farmers and cheese-makers who lived off the land. Indeed until this time more

people emigrated from Switzerland than immigrated to Switzerland. A museum that shows Switzerland as it used to be over one hundred years ago preserves and displays the beauty of days gone by in buildings, farms and artefacts. And yet it was noted that whilst the past was beautiful in many ways (especially when seen objectively in a museum), but that it also reeked of poverty and hardship.

UK: The younger generation were brainwashed into the normality of borrowing and debt. They never questioned it. Our children were seduced by the money culture. There is the willingness of banks to go on offering credit even though people have a bad track record in paying. Evil is in the manipulation of the vulnerable. My mother loves her grandchildren. So I gave her a computer so she could keep in touch by email as we are miles away. She is phobic about it and does not try to use it.

Hypothesis

Faced with the experience of helplessness, passivity, and pessimism leading to fears for survival, it is perhaps not surprising that generational issues come into being. The older generation is more fearful for the future, which is seen as volatile and uncertain, and nostalgic for the old ways of life. Members of society experience failed dependency in politicians and other social leaders; they no longer have faith in leaders. The authority of parents has also changed and, in regard to technology, young people become the teachers and recipients of knowledge for their parents and elders. Pervasive impotence and fears for the future are largely unbearable thoughts and feelings. The resulting passivity and pessimism are dealt with by locating all hope in the younger generation, who they expect to sort everything out and look after them in their old age. This abdication of authority results in a reversal of authority and the young are expected to take their authority for matters they have no experience of. A result may be extreme pressure on the young generation that they are not capable of controlling.

ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS 3. 'THE SEARCH FOR THE SOCIAL AND FOR SHARED MEANING'

Analysis

As was described at Hypothesis 1, at this time the experience of members of societies is that of a fragmented society and world.

Members of societies have retreated into individualism and to primary groups for their own safety and comfort. All are part of a faceless system and all are alienated from that system. Dependence on societal leaders has resulted in unmet dependency. Any search for synthesis is doomed, as something makes it very difficult. There is a fear of contact with others, which prevents individuals taking their own authority; a fear of retribution. There is a fear of contact, and others are experienced as a threat; a result is a withdrawal, and the risk of engaging with others is denied by closing up and avoiding social involvement. Feelings of vulnerability appear to immobilise all efforts for co-operative action. However, there appears to be an increasing awareness that if there is to be progress, a way forward, there has to be the creation of a common meaning. For this to occur, relationships between people are necessary if we are to find a solution to our current problems. As a species, man is a group animal, and the need for groupishness is a strong desire. The experience of members of societies in being isolated and alienated from basic humanity is an uncomfortable position. The issue remains how to have the courage to be together: how to surmount the 'something' that makes it difficult.

Australia: Because of feeling caught in an unstoppable and uncontrollable fragmentation – the world as we knew it is in chaos – members of society seek refuge in personal retreats from their societal responsibilities and collective action, resulting in a loss of citizenship as mobilising social force. Participants expressed views about the lack of any known process through which to work on community concerns and interests. And where there may be some sense of process there was no trust in it and its capacity to work well enough. Knowledge and trust of others inside or outside a community, knowledge and trust of social processes and tools, and knowledge and trust of self, are seen to be essential ingredients for the convergence of the individual's aspirations towards harmonised community action.

Austria: There is fear of contact which encourages splitting and projective tendencies. An integrative figure is missing, a figure that can ease the disappointment due to the failure of the great narratives and the confusion arising therefrom. Mass aggression management is changing. Scapegoating was forbidden yesterday and yet today it is part of the political discourse. Because of this people feel increasingly pressured to repair society.

Belgium: Because citizens feel powerless, they will take joint action focusing on a concrete goal, and thus will feel better and useful. The

risk is that if all citizens take the action they think is useful and relevant; this will lead to polarisation because there is no *joint* action. The question then is: who determines what the common goal should be? This requires a tolerance for differences in action and focus from different people/groups.

Bulgaria: The challenge of integrating oneself within particular social environment. The processes of leaving some particular social spaces and entering new ones. The change process. Social norms and regulations. One's place in the world and the problems of everyone's identity. For others this process of expansion of the spaces we are living in provokes feelings of being thrown and lost as in an anonymous megapolis

Canada: Canadians, however, appear to be too moderate to raise much of a fuss about the shenanigans of this minority government that allows them to govern as if they had a majority. The mixed feeling in the room about our effectiveness extended to the discussion about how opposition to Harper might be mustered. Some felt that there was no effective opposition to his high-handedness, and that Canadians were sitting idly by as Harper eroded the democratic parliamentary process. Others saw a growing protest appearing in Internet blogs and messages and felt that this was the beginning of a growing protest.

Chile: Considering alternatives to neoliberalism, individually and in groups, generates anxieties difficult to overcome and turn into constructive actions. When facing neoliberalism with innovative proposals, all the values, thoughts and behaviours are violently resisted. Life project failures surprise people in their human vulnerability and this immobilises the supportive capacity among people to collaborate in order to solve their afflictions.

Denmark: The political sphere seems to be cut off from ordinary peoples' world and political acts seem to be a matter for the individual in relation to a psychiatrist. Along with the threat of climate changes one has to face the fact that not much is left of our ordinary, good welfare society. As it is hard to make waste, pollution and global warming respect national boundaries, the climate threat demonstrates very clearly the inhabitants and countries of the world as connected. The shared crisis is also – as the Chinese character for crisis shows by being put together by 'danger' and 'possibility' – a possibility for global co-operation and an invitation to creativity and innovation.

Estonia: One feels one is very alone with one's own worries. One feels solely responsible for facing and meeting the high demands of

the faceless system. One is increasingly concerned that one may not know when and how to seek help. This creates a fear that one is not able to cope. The system has become alienated from individuals.

Faroe Islands: There is no real co-operation within the parenthood nor between nations, those responsible are withdrawing into passivity and fumbling activities. This leaves the members of the society in ambivalence, helplessness and overwhelming anxiety provoking a range of defence mechanisms such as denial and displacement. This results in an apathetic and depressed parenthood leaving a large part of the citizens in a bogged state of mind escaping into an unrealistic perception of society and global connectedness. This leads to underlying irresponsibility, disengagement and dependency on a saviour (Denmark?).

Finland: In place of instincts, people have developed brains with which they can think. They can use their power to reason. In contrast to animals, people need the help of other people. This need provides a possibility for people to use their ability to use language. People are not only natural corporal products, but are also cultural beings for whom sociality is a requirement for life. The ability to create a culture is, at the same time, both possible and risky, since the activity has both planned and unplanned results. When trust in people's ability to solve all problems is extended too far, the ecological balance is threatened, and we are alienated from our basic humanity, our natural state.

France: While 'macro-economic and political' events inspired feelings of abandonment and isolation towards habitual frames of reference, some people also sparked a search to find new bonds of solidarity and have old ones reinforced. Should man have to live as a kind of emotional amputee once he crosses the threshold of private life? Emotions and relationship have become dangerous in the social world; they are the unknown. They are the expression of drives and unconscious they also represent the eternal combat between Eros and Thanatos . . . and more than either thought or rationality, they help us stay alive.

Germany: In order to endure complexity and be able to confront the menacing there needs to be a development of emotional competence. This can only be achieved in relationships and in contact with others. It enables the acknowledgement and acceptance that many problems may not be solvable but may be lived with on the basis of taking meaningful steps and rejecting anything that is pointless. The important aspect is to retain the seeker and questioner attitude

and not claim to know all the answers. The development of this quality was seen as the essential pedagogical task – even for the political realm – without which considerable anger and aggression potential might be unleashed in many sections of the population.

Hungary: Members of a divided society see each other's actions as threatening to their existence. If we see all facts through our own fears, it is the first step in letting in for emotional politics and manipulation. But if we repress our fears too much, we will not be able to see facts, which are really threatening. Even our relation to the media (television, newspapers etc.) is controversial, we try to limit it to the necessary minimum, in order 'not to get confused and overly anxious'. 2010 is year of parliamentary elections. Are we expecting something positive from the new government or a local focus (immediate community, family, children, workplace) will replace our needs for community.

India: The need for new paradigms of relating and a sense of experimenting and exploring new ways of relating and relatedness was expressed.

Ireland: Because the structures of authority have failed, we are thrown back on our own resources as citizens. We have little experience of taking mature, responsible authority as individuals or citizens. When we were well-off, we behaved like adolescents. Now we are learning that we are the adults, we are struggling to behave as mature adults. We seek leadership in others, but are disappointed and apprehensive, reluctant to recognise or invest authority in another structure or person. We move between a wish to withdraw and be isolated and a wish to take the risk of engaging with others, taking and giving mature power and authority. The only things we are certain about is what is not/has not worked: we are uncertain about all else.

Israel: Global and local crises together with the rapid transmission of information by the media massively confront people with the aggressive and destructive potential in everyone – it is part of our nature. This unbearable knowledge is denied by closing up and avoidance, by projecting and accusing others of being aggressive, and by compensation – by trying to balance or disguise it by positive acts and social involvement.

Italy: The search for synthesis is recognised as an understandable need for new certainties. However there is no leader able to act as guarantor in this process, and the search is not able to produce widely

shared beliefs. Something makes it difficult to accept the very thing that is seen as necessary. Democratically and politically open ideas don't stand up when they are compared with immediate experiences. Politically opposed ideas are, however, ideological clichés established by ideologies that are in no way new: they are spread with disturbing effectiveness by the one-way propaganda of the media.

Peru: The main reflection is around what is the nature of success. The different mindsets that are imported as a result of globalisations and the different resources that are available to search for a collective accountability of the social drivers that are leading citizen's behaviour.

Poland: The participants were preoccupied with trying to understand new trends in relationships. The huge popularity of Facebook was widely discussed. On the other hand people recognise and resent the superficiality of contacts, and are also concerned about the safety of their personal data. Building relationships, and understanding others is complex both between generations and within peer-groups. People seem more diverse, less similar and it is more difficult to find common ground. Distrusting each other's intentions complicates relationships.

Portugal: Another aspect concerned with dependency and illusions. It was mentioned how people are more and more connected than ever before through internet networks and very sort, but at the same time the feeling of loneliness is greater. There is an increasing paradox in the society, which is represented by the fact that people are more dependent on others than ever (social and economic networks) and at the same time people are more individualistic than ever. This paradox is very hard to conciliate, and is illusorily solved by alienation. This paradox generates tension, anxiety and pessimism.

Serbia: Social isolation tendencies are still extensively present in many ways, whether as a social defences, as national characteristics rooted in old historical times, as a genetic code, or as a reaction to being isolated from the world in the Nineties, and further on, or as a social resistance to changes.

South Africa: Citizens are acutely aware of the practical day-to-day threat to their economic and social survival. Relying on macro level leadership does not seem to work, leading to a hopeless situation and creating fantasies. The fear of retribution makes it very difficult to own one's own leadership or trust another to lead well enough. Commitment entails risk in a world where there are no guarantees, hence the existential angst. When one cannot trust oneself to take

responsibility and stay with what that means how can others then be trusted to do it. We are all accountable to keep systems thinking alive and prevent only seeing a one sided view.

Spain: Because of crisis and the fragmentation of the social structure, the members of the society are depressed and pessimistic, and as a result they have two possibilities: they can stay paralysed or can be aware of the necessity of change, so it is necessary that certain aspects of the society die, so they can grow and put creative solutions to the problems.

Sweden: The group noticed and described the following themes: experiences of going astray – the lack of meaning, commonly or individually. The absence in the seeming presence.

Adaptation and resignation – How to find courage to think, explore and try?

How to take responsibility – how to show courage as citizen

Switzerland: It may well be fear of the unknown and fear of change itself that is being rejected on a systemic level, as on an individual level the Swiss are reasonably welcoming to foreigners in part evidenced by the large numbers of multicultural marriages that exist here. It seems that what might lie beneath the surface is a desire for containment and control in the threat of unknown, large-scale, unpredictable forces.

UK: Because the post-war generation grew up in a welfare state, members of society behaved in an increasingly unquestioning hedonistic way in which anything seemed to be possible; but the result has been a loss of community with which to deal with the difficulties and global changes we now face.

Hypothesis

Because of the complexity of life, members of societies have retreated into individualism and to primary groups for their own safety and comfort. All are part of a faceless system and all are alienated from that system. Feelings of vulnerability and lack of trust appear to immobilise all efforts for co-operative action. However, there appears to be an increasing awareness that if there is to be progress, a way forward, there has to be the creation of a common meaning. For this to occur, relationships between people are necessary if we are to find a solution to our current problems. As a species, man is a group animal and the need for groupishness is a strong desire. The experience of members of societies in being isolated and alienated from basic

humanity is an uncomfortable position. However, the very reasons that they retreat into individualism appear to be those that prevent the development of common meaning. It would appear that societies are stuck in a system of relatedness whereby they experience strong emotions of impotence that are given meaning through a phantasy that others are only concerned for themselves and would reject attempts at co-operative action. This phantasy is then treated as real and prevents the development of co-operative action.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

The background against which we view the world remains the same, a world where globalisation has destroyed all major elements of culture in societies throughout the world. Members of societies have

the experience that their traditional way of doing things that resulted in social cohesion (morality, values, religion, language, and institutions) are now so diverse and meaningless that there is no sense of connectedness, no sense of belonging, and no community or society. There is no culture to provide them with the sought for continuity, consistency, and confirmation. The death of the old way of life continues, and we seem a long way from developing a new way of life.

Last year, the analysis showed that violent feelings were being acted upon and the fear of further violence was a frightening prospect. This year, there is still evidence of both overt and latent violence in many societies, and in the long run this remains a considerable fear. However, the affect of the massive threats and changes brought about by the totality of events, including the economic crisis, appears to have been so overwhelming that members of societies experience helplessness and pessimism to such a degree that there is a sort of pervasive impotence and passivity that creates such vulnerability that members of societies are fearful for their survival.

In most instances, because of the collapse of society and culture and the loss of societal and individual identity, this means individual survival. The experience seems to be that of individuals giving up on the political, religious, and social leaders and institutions that previously met their dependency needs, and accepting their fate in a passive and helpless manner. The older generation appears to have abdicated their authority and sought to rely on the younger generation to take the responsibility for getting societies out of the current mess and to provide for the future of the older generation. However, there does appear to be a significant change in the awareness of members of societies this year. There appears to be an increasing awareness that if there is to be progress, a way forward, there has to be the creation of a common meaning. For this to occur, relationships between people are necessary if we are to find a solution to our current problems. As a species, man is a group animal, and the need for groupishness is a strong desire. The experience of members of societies in being isolated and alienated from basic humanity is an uncomfortable position. However, the very reasons that they retreat into individualism appear to be those that prevent the development of common meaning.

It would appear that societies are stuck in a system of relatedness whereby they experience strong emotions of impotence that are given meaning through a phantasy that others are only concerned for themselves and would reject attempts at co-operative action. This phantasy is then treated as real and prevents the development of co-operative action. When members of society are able to test the reality of the situation they will realise that the 'something' that stops them is but a phantasy.