

Global Dynamics at the Dawn of 2012

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Abstract

On or about 11th January 2012, under the guidance and coordination of OPUS, Listening Posts aimed at providing a snapshot of the societal dynamics of each country at the dawn of 2012, were held in twenty six different countries around the world (Argentina, Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Denmark (2 reports), Estonia, Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy (2 Reports), Latvia, Norway, Peru, Poland, Serbia, South Africa (2 Reports), Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK & USA (2 reports)). These were all reported in a similar format (see 'Britain and the World at the Dawn of 2003' in *Organizational & 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) identify common themes arising within the twenty eight Reports;
- (b) explore relationships between themes and to reduce these down to major or dominant themes;
- (c) collate supporting information from the Reports for analysis of these themes; and
- (d) formulate hypotheses arising there from.

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

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

INTRODUCTION

In 2004 when the International Listening Post Project was commenced, a major theme introduced was that of 'Death of a way of life'; this continued through 2005 as 'Monumental social change'; and in 2006 'Coping with continuous social change'. In 2007 it became clear that death of a way of life was far more all-encompassing and that

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it was not just about a change in technology, but the fact that the new technology was bringing into being a new way of living. It was led by and powered not only by new developments in computerisation and telecommunications, the multi-national companies, and the military might of the West, but equally importantly by ideas; including political, philosophic, and religious ideas. The experience was and 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.

This years' experience is a continuation and deepening of that situation. Such are the changes that societies throughout the world are struggling to make sense of their world; are fragmented and fleeing to the comparative safety of individualism; avoidance or inability to think creatively; unable to form any collective response; a tendency to regressing to the paranoid-schizoid position with splitting, aggressive, and violent responses; and fearing death and survival. Faced with these dire circumstances there are signs that members of societies are beginning to realise that they need to stay in the depressive position if a way forward is to be found. They see the elements of a way forward in the activities of the Tea Party and the Occupy Movement, but appreciate that both while seemingly operating in the depressive position, are in fact based on a notion of splitting, and blaming politicians and bankers respectively. There is thus disappointment around this lack of true leadership. However, it does appear to have inspired depressive position thinking and may be the beginning of a thoughtful and creative process that will lead to understanding.

That having been said, the world continues to be a highly disturbing experience for members of societies across the world. Information technology, whilst experienced positively in enabling rebellion as in the Arab Spring, is also experienced as a harmful superficial means of engagement and one which prevents true emotional attachment and community involvement. Politically the experience is one of formalised technocratic government officially sanctioned or of economic rather than political control occurring informally and behind the scenes. This is coupled with a fear that the economists who brought us globalisation and the credit crunch are not the people to be trusted with the task of getting us out of the mess they created. China and other new economies unrestricted by welfare states and restrictive regulations that were introduced in Western countries during the good times, are able to continue to gain world dominance. Immigration is still an issue as the West is still seen

as a relatively prosperous place to be in comparison with other countries.

These changes are having a huge effect upon members of societies throughout the world. How this is experienced by members of societies is perhaps best portrayed at an emotional level where the National Reports show just how desperate the experience of living in these times really is. The following summary is taken at random from the National reports: helplessness, unhappiness, annihilation, powerlessness, hopelessness, no control, lack of influence, loneliness, isolation, disconnectedness, vulnerability, mistrust, withdrawal, confusion, bewilderment, anxiety, a lack of trust, a lack of knowledge, alienation, and impotence. As can be seen this is a highly negative and depressing experience which leads to an overall experience of hopelessness, individualism, and a resulting loss of society. A consequence is that members of societies are left with the experience of being almost totally disconnected from their fellow members of society and lacking most if not all notions of a social identity. Confirming what are very individual realities with others seems to be an exceedingly risky process. This experience is further developed below in the first Analysis and Hypothesis – ‘Fragmentation, disconnectedness, and loss of society’.

Faced with this depressing experience and having adopted a highly dependent approach against such deeply felt anxieties, members of societies only experience a temporary relief as they continue to blame and scapegoat others who are experienced as failing to respond to societal needs for dependency. The frequent objects of societal splitting are those of politicians and economists. Members of societies experienced a lack of trust in politicians, a resistance to establishment structures, corruption and incompetence, politicians being separated from the electorate and being seen as obsolete, members experienced shame for having elected politicians, members showing their disapproval and shame about ‘the system’ and taking themselves ‘out of the system’, ‘jungle law’ has become not only a common concept, but also a common *modus operandi*, and there is a feeling that citizens are misused by politicians, as if they were puppets-on-the-string. There is no interest in political topics because people feel disenchanting, due to the lack of information about what politicians can do for citizens. Power is out of the hands of politicians and in the hands of economists. Members ask, is it possible to transform the capitalist system? Politics has disappeared in favour of economics, efficiency and economic growth have become re-enforced slogans that obligate us, distrust and unease about political leaders, and institutions have thrown caution to the

wind in a world of illusions contributing to our financial economic collapse and this has resulted in powerlessness and fear of trust of ethical leadership. The domination of economic models effectively cancels out alternatives which appear to be few in number. Government policies are in the interest of special interests groups and not the common good of the people. This experience is further developed below in the second Analysis and Hypothesis – ‘Failure of Political and Economic Leadership’.

A result is that all are still left with a considerable problem of trying to make sense of their environment: an environment that is evidenced by multiple realities, a world where the internal does not match the external, thus preventing sense making. As with dependency, the defence of retreating into the self only provides an opportunity to control the anxiety and summon the resources to move on. The experience of members of society not meeting their basic needs for attachment is anxiety provoking, and they therefore struggle to find ways of coming together and connecting with other human beings. This leads to a renewed attachment to primary groups such as the family and religion, where they know that internal objects will, even in a limited manner, still match external reality. It also leads to a fascination with the past and a longing for a ‘golden age’ that although perhaps not so golden is now idealised. But it goes beyond this, the culture ‘the glue that holds them together’, has been destroyed and nothing is left to hold them together. It would seem that many have reached a position of extreme depression and the experience is one of impending death, and a struggle for survival. Expressions of death refer to: death of a way of life, the end of capitalism, the end of the American empire, an extinct opposition, the system being a vampire that results in death of citizens, a preoccupation with the notion of sustainability, a global sense of ‘fragility’ suggested by ‘bird flu’ – the whole world felt like it could just go ‘bing’, the globe in crisis and the Mayans have forecast 12.21.12 as the end of the world, death, feelings of weariness and sense of foreboding, about the world coming to an end, in language is the desire for unity, for death, personal death and euthanasia, apathy hides the hopelessness, the death drive and its ravages, and the mourning process presumably for a death that may already have occurred – a way of life.

The current experiences also resulted in associations to the way that an economic situation like the current one led to Second World War: there were several references to war including at the international level with on-going wars, the memories of the past (Second World War), the abyss, an association that in the past the way to sort

out crisis has been to generate a world war, and an association about the survival of an Italian Jewish family in the Second World War. There was also a reference to the Norwegian terror event.

Fears about survival were associated to Bion's saying 'the primary task of any group is what it must do to survive'; the competition is about survival of the fittest, sacrifice, purification, and being chosen by the ultimate authority. Because of their lack of resources, members of society get disillusioned and then focus on basic survival needs vs existential (being) needs.

This experience is further developed below in the third Analysis and Hypothesis – 'Death, Survival, and War'.

These three interlinked and progressive Hypotheses follow:

ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS 1: FRAGMENTATION, DISCONNECTEDNESS, AND LOSS OF SOCIETY

Analysis 1

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. These changes are having a huge effect upon members of societies throughout the world. Members of society are unable to make sense of their fragmented and unfamiliar world, and respond by retreating into and adopting individualistic behaviour. It is as if they are not able to confirm their identity with other people who also adopt the same individualistic behaviour. This in turn results in a lack of community and a lack of solidarity to the extent that society is no longer a power for good. The loss of attachment is severely felt and results in feelings of helplessness, unhappiness, annihilation, powerlessness, hopelessness, no control, lack of influence, loneliness, isolation, disconnectedness, vulnerability, mistrust, withdrawal, confusion, bewilderment, anxiety, a lack of trust, a lack of knowledge, alienation, and impotence. This is a highly negative and depressing experience that leads to an overall experience of hopelessness, individualism, and a resulting loss of society. This is reflected in the following extracts from the National Reports.

Argentina: Moreover, members of the society tolerate everything doing what they consider better for their individual safety, looking after personal preservation, and causing social disconnection with reality. Living in the internal world shows the fragility and

vulnerability of a system which functions better when fragmented and divided than as an integrated whole.

Australia: Participants noted power and powerlessness, and helplessness as major causes for concern. This was alluded to in the 2011 Listening Post in Australia and was again identified as a major theme. Participants named power and powerlessness as polar opposites, along with several other themes including judging and being judged, and violence and apathy.

Bulgaria: Some basic aspects of human relations have not changed since the epoch of the totalitarian regime, the central planning economy, and the ubiquitous lack of authentic social engagement. This difference was interpreted as an expression of a possible difficulty during the transition between the private known and the social and foreign unknown. Probably this transition is being experienced as dangerous for the individual. Probably people live with a hidden assumption that the large group as a metaphor of the society cannot support the individual and her/his unique subjective story.

Canada: Because of the erosion of privacy, members of society suspect, watch, supervise, and incorporate one another resulting in an incapacity to think, link, create, research, or form hypothesis. This results in mindless activities such as the reporting of everyday events on Facebook and endless imagined efforts at emancipation. Alternatively, because of the incapacity to think, link, imagine, research, or write poetry, members of society keep an eye on one another resulting in suspicious relatedness and an urge to hide.

Chile: In society there is the dormant challenge to find the way to generate more democracy, to allow a respectful and constructive encounter between very different social sectors, between the rich and the poor, between the marginalised and the integrated sectors, and between Chileans and immigrants. This requires that people overcome the inclination to remain apathetic, centered on self-interest, and being indifferent to others, and instead, to take others into consideration, understand them, and to establish a community. Apathy and lack of interest for others are very marked in Chile at present; underlying the lack of human sensitivity there is a great fear of conflict – if one acknowledges the other individuals, there is the risk of becoming aware of the conflict, of the differences, and this may force one to take a stance and decisive actions.

Denmark: (1) Ethnical foreigners represent something we have lost like a close family, stability, and belonging physically to a place (the

ghetto); things which might reduce the fear of exclusion. By projecting the feeling of exclusion on to 'the strangers', we try to avoid the feeling of loneliness and being lost ourselves.

(2) Opposition against the bubble economy and its leading agents lack of accepting responsibility for it, has led to violent street fights as well as more sophisticated oppositional forms as the OCUPY movement.

Estonia: This situation results in a feeling of dissatisfaction and creates the desire to judge and criticise everything. The fact that no one wants to listen to, or welcome, comments is irritating. Honest feedback does not function. Critical opinions create conflicts and various types of tension between people, differences of opinion are experienced as personal insults, and interaction at work is hindered.

Faroe Islands: Solidarity has come under pressure. The ideal is the roots in the immediate and extended family, but now there is a tendency that everyone looks out for themselves first. The pension is your own responsibility, the sick and weak are exported to other countries, the rich should be rewarded, and the people are divided over cutting taxes and reducing benefits.

Finland: The deficit of identity, or a lack of true human identity and trust, can be considered counterparts that feed each other. When people have lost contact with themselves, they do not know how to approach or trust others. When people cannot establish contact with others, they cannot let others close to them. Interaction remains superficial.

France: On the other side there is a rampart to protect people (the citizens); their indifference, their individualism and their depoliticisation, their blind confidence in the future (things will work out in time), and their cynicism (this does not have to do with us) expose them to the destructivity of the dominants.

Germany: Further experiences were recounted of both aggressive, even destructive tendency but also totally contrasting behaviour. There was in fact a perception of a need of genuine contacts, yet a trend to divert one's glance, to avoid undertaking any revision of presuppositions, and to opt for right/wrong solutions.

India: Because of the fear of the end, the members of the society turn to religion to seek a sense of belonging, affiliation, identity, and relief, thus resulting in critically analysing the religion for better understanding.

Ireland: We are startled and in shock and all we can see is the extreme. Because of the turmoil and disintegration, we believe that our worst fears might be realised. We adopt positions that either deny the complexity or we are overwhelmed. We withdraw to the dimensions that we feel we can control – the small, domestic, local – but we admire, even envy the activity and engagement of others, especially the young.

Israel: With the history of the Israeli Kibbutz, represented the Kibbutz with the nostalgia for its old values, in comparison with the new individualistic and nouveau-riche trends.

Italy: (North) This social change, and the idea of an inevitable transformation, produces a confusing and disorienting sense, and the activation of hope for the future, as if this could constitute an occasion for social renovation. Individuals have to face the need to redefine their sense of social belonging, and the relation among their own interests, bonds of belonging, and a new sense of citizenship.

(Centre) These new economic reforms being taken by the new government in Italy with an eye to saving the collective, felt dangerous and potentially destructive to the people sitting in the room. The experience was of a split, with projections of 'bad', mistrust, and danger connected to what was perceived as 'new', 'changed', and 'collective'. The members saw themselves as individual survivors, trying to save themselves from a treacherous enemy within their own society powerful enough to eliminate them.

Latvia: Due to the inability to hear, feel, and understand each other on an individual level, the collective human values have deteriorated (disappeared), leading to even greater alienation among the individuals and away from the commonly held reality.

Norway: People's concern with what is 'close' to them (as exemplified above) was talked about in terms of another emergent theme: the increasing individualisation – where everybody pays attention to his/her own interests and little else. It was felt that there is a corresponding lack of inquisitiveness and curiosity regarding the wider society.

Peru: The conversation went around on how 'others do not have any respect', how 'they try to take advantage of situations for their own benefit', hurt people, and damage and destroy private or public property.

Poland: The world seems unstable and unpredictable. It is very difficult to act effectively, therefore, many give up the possibility of becoming an influence. They are carried by the course of events,

pieces of information, short-lived news, and media operations. They exploit to the very end the existing patterns and possibilities, becoming immersed in consumerism. Others tame the fear by taking action that expresses their individuality and inner values. They accept the challenge creating enterprise enclaves and frequently forming groups sharing common views and objectives. Those people and those groups seem to act in isolation from 'the rest of the world', building their own reality and actively objecting to mass trends.

Serbia: People are self-absorbed and unwilling to participate in any kind of political activism other than elections because their microcosm is the only thing they can preserve untouched from negative influences; political activation is of no use either, because politicians can turn a deaf ear to people's voices or people just do not want to bother anymore.

South Africa: Even those with financial resources are becoming increasingly emotionally disconnected and isolated. It is as if people have lost their competence to make connections and build meaningful relationships. There is an emphasis on the individual (me-ness) and the drive to be part of the in-group which often leads to conflict, demonstrations, and clashes.

Spain: In this point, society is dominated by three elements: a cynical position of the politicians and the media; selfishness (we are not longer a happy, nice, and supportive country); and a lack of confidence on the future (that is not the same for everyone. It depends on the age). The result is that each person begins to make his own life regardless from the lives of others.

Sweden: In a society where there is splitting, complexity, and fragmentation there can arise the wish for, and seeking after, a comprehensive power and capacity. This can lead to the formation of new roles, where the emphasis is put specifically on the collecting/keeping together function. The group wanted this force to be endowed with wisdom.

Switzerland: Splits between the individual and the organisation in the mind, fear of disintegration and death, sit alongside a search for meaning and connection and a reaching out to others. Yet just beneath the surface of these expressions of relief is enormous fragility and anxiety. This seems to be based on the desire to maintain a particular way of life and the fear that it might disappear, but more fundamentally the fear seems to threaten individual or even national identity.

UK: Where are the current centres of community really? Institutions have failed abysmally – where are the moral guardians now? One member suggested that there was a sense of the whole world being in transition and London was increasingly feeling like ‘one enormous air port’ where people were always just passing through. It was felt by one member that we were shifting to a new way of grouping together but there still seemed to be a longing for attachment.

USA Boston: The idea of needing other people, that we are connected, and that our survival may require that we acknowledge our interdependence and inter-connection with others, is an inherently difficult one for Americans, who have notion of independence and individualism. We retreat into our personal worlds through the use of technology, such as Facebook. At work, our focus on individual tasks keeps us in a silo.

USA Chicago: We pay more attention to our own, short-term individualistic needs (and the needs of our own group) than the needs of other groups and the community as a whole. We have become complacent and rarely stop to ponder about the greater good and seeking out others. Needs. We have become a Me-society where our own self-indulgence takes priority. The second main thread revolved around the frustrations we experience in trying to connect with each other in our communities. The deep need for meaningful connectedness was acknowledged, but at the same time we are aware of how difficult it is, in a time of unprecedented change and uncertainty, to maintain roles and boundaries that are necessary to foster and develop meaningful relationships and work together collaboratively.

Hypothesis 1

Frequent and far reaching change in societies throughout the world results in members of societies feeling hopeless, helpless, and without the resources to understand or in any way act to relieve them of this unbearable experience. A result is that they withdraw into individualistic behaviour which in turn results in a loss of community at all levels. They are then in a position where their attachment needs are not being met which increases their experience of hopelessness. They deal with this experience by regressing to the paranoid-schizoid position and the use of splitting as a means of defence against their unbearable thoughts and feelings.

ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS 2: FAILURE OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LEADERSHIP

Analysis 2

As was referred to, in Hypothesis 1, members of societies faced with such an unbearable experience resort to individualistic behaviour which in turn results in the loss of community at all levels. This in turn makes the experience even more unbearable as they are no longer able to satisfy their attachment needs and to confirm their identities. Feeling a deep lack of trust in the institutions that regulate, contain, and should sustain life in society they experience failed dependency and are left holding their emotions and not being able to cope. A result is a regression to the paranoid–schizoid position and the use of splitting as a defence against the experienced discomfort. The frequent objects of societal splitting are those of politicians and economists. In regard to politicians these are experienced as bad objects that are corrupt, inefficient, uncaring, incompetent, and totally out of touch with members of society. Not surprisingly, given the global rebellion against the perceived greed of those employed in the field of economics, these are demonised and experienced as bad objects that are controlling the political process. The experience is one of formalised technocratic government officially sanctioned or of economic rather than political control occurring informally and behind the scenes. This is reflected in the following extracts from the National Reports.

Argentina: The participants of the ILP communicated a deep lack of trust in the institutions that regulate, contain, and should sustain life in society, in the face of the corruption and inefficiency shown by them as a way to have a greater control over society. Some of the members' sense leadership emptiness and others disagree saying that the strongest leadership, may be, is not coming from government institutions, but from other private institutions that really care about offering containment to some situations, that we – us citizens – could have the possibility to actively participate as NGO's.

Australia: What it brought to mind for the convenors is of an expression of resistance to 'establishment structures', much like the 'Occupy' movement that has swept the developed world in 2011. It seems to represent a wish to be engaged on different terms, to create space for more reflective thinking, and perhaps signals an emerging resistance to a society that values speed of communication so very much, exemplified by 'twitter' technologies.

Bulgaria: The level of dependence from the superiors and the level of self-limitation, according to this particular member is so high that for her some basic aspects of human relations have not changed since the epoch of the totalitarian regime, the central planning economy, and the ubiquitous lack of authentic social engagement. Public authorities are thus objects of constant critique and through them – we are also victims of this criticism which leads to the feelings of guilt and loss.

Canada: Because of the erosion of privacy, members of society suspect, watch, supervise, and incorporate one another resulting in an incapacity to think, link, create, research, or form hypothesis. This results in mindless activities such as the reporting of everyday events on Face book and endless imagined efforts at emancipation. Alternatively, because of the incapacity to think, link, imagine, research, or write poetry, members of society keep an eye on one another resulting in suspicious relatedness and an urge to hide.

Chile: All these protests, strikes, and discomfort were an expression of the weariness felt by the majority of society with the perversions of neo-liberalism which, without any limit, views everything under the business prism, searching for profitability to fill the pockets of local and foreign entrepreneurs. In this scenario, the citizens deemed that political institutionalism, the Government, political parties, and parliamentarians have become obsolete, due to the schism that separates them from the real needs and aspirations of the great majority of citizens.

Denmark: (1) Is the capitalist system on the verge of breaking down? Can we see the crisis as a sign of this and a crackled social order? Greed caused the crisis and is now threatening the European stability and coherence. The power is out of the hands of the politicians; the financial markets have taken over.

(2) Transformation of the capitalist system – a new economic world order – economic democracy – is it possible?

Estonia: Quick changes demand authoritarian leadership. Carrying through changes in a way that is person-friendly (using a rhythm that is suitable to people) would demand more time. There is no desire to give more time, and therefore people do not understand what is going on or how they must act.

Faroe Islands: The people feel like they are being screwed over by irresponsible politicians, who are making drastic decisions concerning fees, taxation of pension funds, cutting taxes for the rich,

increasing the cost of health insurance, and generally not practising what they preached before they were elected. Panic is spreading under the surface, mixed with a feeling of shame for electing the politicians in the first place: '*Who voted for these people??*'! In private the people expresses their doubts about the politicians, and their fear and anxiety for the future.

Finland: There is not enough time or space for our own needs, rest, relaxation, or working through our own experiences. In the need to continually hurry, our functioning and rationality seize all of our attention, while our feelings are pushed aside. Efficiency and economic growth have become re-enforced slogans that obligate us.

France: Politics has disappeared in favour of economics. Politics has become the politician (disappearance of the common good in favour of the profit an extremely small number of individuals).

Germany: Hectic and cheap sensationalism in the political field. Gimmicky showmanship replaces rational research. Certain political celebrities pursue their own image status, show outlandish recklessness in the face of imminent 'deluge', and embody a trend towards distracting from genuine problems. On the one hand it is difficult to admit and endure the fact that simple solutions for major crises do not exist. On the other hand politicians have surrendered all power, for example, of influencing the Economy

India: View of politics as a changing entity. Patriarchal society: the dominance of it.

Ireland: The economic news is so out of control, it feels like no-one understands it; it is not fathomable. The scale seems impossible to grasp – like China. In the face of the disintegration of systems of authority, we are asking 'who will be the adult?' We are both fearful and hopeful that we can adopt and maintain an adult, responsible position. We are feeling ill-equipped to take on adult responsibilities and we are concerned that younger generations have not been equipped and are not prepared, to behave like adults.

Israel: The selfish fat pig is repulsive, almost unregulatable, but isn't it the golden calf of modern capitalistic consumer society?

Italy: (North) The members expressed concerns, distrust, and unease about political leaders. 'Are they really our representatives and our representation?' Using expressions like 'partial lies', participants noted that political leaders avoiding the fundamental, structural problems and just acting superficially. Doubting the current

leadership, members again used the cruise ship metaphor where the Italian captain was seen as unskilled, unprofessional, superficial, and cowardly.

(Centre) The first topic is that of the change. The perception is that of an inevitable changing, after a period of political chaos/immobility. The idea of a new phase, now that the government has changed (we are out of the dump, we got rid of the dwarf/midget) brings hopes and anguish at the same time. Other than the fears regarding the European and planetary trend of the economy (it is also reminded [sic] how an economic situation like the actual one has led to the Second World War).

Latvia: This introduction became a strong impetus for the following discussions (intellectual and exploring) revealing the separation and apparent incomparability between the cause of the cruelty (system) and the victim (individual). In the following discussions, members showed their disapproval and shame about 'the system' and illustrated some methods for taking themselves 'out of the system' for the sake of saving personal values, principles, and lifestyle.

Norway: It is interesting that this hypothesis, if adequate, may imply an even stronger tendency towards individualism and perhaps also a split in society between individualism and 'State-ism'. And political polarisation does seem to be happening in Norwegian society (and possibly in Europe) at this point in time. It might also be suggested that the emergent pattern of individualism may function as a social defence against the burdens, stresses, and anxieties of living in a highly complex and seemingly highly volatile contemporary society.

Peru: 'We see how our own congress is a circus, and this so-called "parliamentary immunity" is the best way for corrupt people to become politicians and get away with whatever they want, there is no real desire of exercising politics for a greater good'. The use of violence was another topic explored in relation to corruption, because both seem to be 'normal' nowadays, and the concern of how others might see us. The 'jungle law' has become not only a common concept, but also a common modus operandi within Peruvian society, where anyone can do anything without taking any responsibility.

Poland: During last year people were accompanied by the uncertainty concerning the spectrum of economic crisis. There were fears concerning the publicised financial crisis, the mechanisms of which are not only difficult to understand, but also it is hard to evaluate the genuineness of the dangers they carry.

Serbia: Although the new bridge is important and at the same time the most basic need of a big city as Belgrade, politics is too much present/involved, and there is a feeling that citizens are misused by politicians, as they were puppets-on-the-string. Where are the young people and their voices – in the 1990s it was clearer against whom the people – mostly young – were protesting, today the political manipulation is more sophisticated and more difficult to raise a voice against. Nowadays, the young generations and their voice could not be heard in our society, the students protest only about very narrow issues connected to their student's life and budgets at the university – not about any of the important social issues.

South Africa: Injustice and the powerful exploiting subordinates as evidenced in insurance companies repudiating many claims and big corporations taking advantage of employees who are forced to subscribe to, for example, 'the Vodacom' way. Citizens are torn between being real and being seduced by power. Realness represents the need to be authentic, to live with integrity, to have a safe, meaningful, honest and good-enough life. This life seems to be a fantasy in today's turbulent society. In reality people are seduced into a strong political, economical, and social competition for power, affluence, status, and the need to always appear important and busy.

Spain: There is no interest on political topics because people feel disenchantment, due to the lack of information of what politics can do for citizens. In this point, society is dominated by three elements: a cynical position of the politicians and the media; selfishness (we are no longer a happy, nice and supportive country); and a lack of confidence on the future (that is not the same for everyone. It depends on the age). The result is that each person begins to make his own life regardless from the life of others.

We are in a very paternalistic situation, waiting for a father who will sort out everything. But the politician parties do not want civil society to speak. They want to control everything and there are no new ideas. There is a very big separation between society and politician parties. Society does not want them because of the corruption. Too much importance is given to the politician. There is a lot of superficial information but there are not authentic political criteria.

Sweden: Even if there are examples of 'local irresponsibility' there is more of the opposite. The feeling that 'society at large is too large' and that 'I cannot get the better of the macro society' seems to engender the wish to participate in 'a bite size' area. This can also be regarded as an expression of the wish, the demand, to regain an active citizenship in general.

Switzerland: Because Switzerland is seen to provide a refuge from the craziness of the world with its economic problems and issues of intolerance based on differences in race, religion, education, and economic means, many living in Switzerland expressed feelings of gratitude and relief for the relatively good situation here. Yet just beneath the surface of these expressions of relief is enormous fragility and anxiety. This seems to be based on the desire to maintain a particular way of life and the fear that it might disappear, but more fundamentally the fear seems to threaten individual or even national identity.

UK: The domination of economic models effectively cancels out alternatives which appear to be few in number. And yet we are deeply troubled and disillusioned with these current and historical structures and find ourselves in a state of flux – pushed to the edge of one paradigm and staring at a void we cannot fill. We hope for rebirth but we do not perceive in what way birth may come nor what form it will take.

USA Boston: It was noted that the Tea Party Movement and the Occupy Movement are not so different. Both stem from a sense of anger that something is clearly wrong in our country, but disagree as to the cause. We manage our anxiety about the state of our country by finding an enemy (defined by our particular ideology). The Tea Party blames government for society's ills, and the Occupy Movement blames Wall Street.

USA Chicago: Government policies are in the interest of special interests groups and not the common good of the people. Chaos (political, healthcare, etc.) or organised, deliberate system – the realisation that institutions had thrown caution to the wind in a world of illusions contributing to our financial economic collapse had resulted in powerlessness and fear of trust of ethical leadership 'we seem to have lost sight of our economic collapse and the important need for health and education in this country'.

Hypothesis 2

Because of the experience of extreme fragmentation disconnectedness and loss of society (as described in Hypothesis 1) members of societies are left in a highly depressed and hopeless situation. Attempts to relieve themselves from this unbearable experience has left them dependent and looking to institutional leadership for relief from their pain. However, doubtless because political and

other leaders are sharing the same experiences as others in society, dependency needs are not met. A result is that members of society deal with this by splitting whereby they blame and scapegoat those they feel have failed them: the politicians and economists. They accuse politicians of corruption and they lose trust in them. They regard politicians as being obsolete and self-interested. They have the experience that true power is out of the hands of politicians and that economists are now the true power on the throne or behind the throne. The experience is one of formalised technocratic government officially sanctioned or of economic rather than political control informally and behind the scenes. This is coupled with a fear that the economists who brought us globalisation and the credit crunch are not the people to be trusted with the task of getting us out of the mess they created.

ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS 3: DEATH, SURVIVAL, AND WAR

Analysis 3

As in Hypothesis two, having lost trust and belief in the competence of institutional leadership members of societies are left without hope. The experience of members of societies is that the very people that they turned to for relief from their unbearable experiences have been seen to fail them. Having 'killed them off' they are now left in a desperate position whereby they are left abandoned and hopeless. The experience of members of societies across the world is now more unbearable than previously. At this stage it would appear that the experience is much more primitive and is centred on death and survival. In regard to death there are various associations including personal, a way of life, and death of an empire. There are also associations to the Second World War that was seen to have its origins in similar issues around economics are currently being experienced. Perhaps unsurprisingly, death also brings to mind the mourning process, presumably for a death that may already have occurred – a way of life. This is reflected in the following extracts from the National Reports.

Argentina: The opposition is not only fragmented, but even worse, it is extinct. The system has become a vampire that is held alive only by feeding on the blood of others, being a strong manipulation of the masses through death. The division of boundaries in in/out remains in the mind of people as a way of expecting the 'messiah' coming from the outside to cure the inside, from the mourning of

the 'death of the father' living in a magic thinking and waiting to be saved by 'them' setting out a condition that is to be all the same as a way of avoiding the differences.

Australia: I am concerned about having control about when I die; a health system that supports the aged to make choices. Doctors and patients talk in euphemisms. Who will advocate for us? I have no children; I advocate for my mother, I hate to think what would happen if I had not. I want to have control about when I die; a health system that supports the aged to manage. What about euthanasia as a democratic right?

Canada: This beginning discussion led us to think about the influence and scaffolding of technology in everyday life, the needs and uses of information, the magnificent 'start-up' romance of new technologies, how experience is 'invested' and 'digested', and questions of desire to 'like', to 'see', to be 'seen', and 'not seen'. This preoccupation may also reflect the wish for a universal language – in language is the desire for unity, for death.

Chile: Apathy hides the hopelessness of being convinced that there are no possibilities for doing good, because, in the long run, the interests of the powerful always dominate – those of the crooks, of the deceptive, who manage to get the greatest benefits according to their interests.

Denmark: (1) At the beginning of 2012 the world is in a state of uncertainty and openness where stable patterns of conflict and alliances are not yet visible. Neither socialism nor capitalism is victorious, and from the middle of Muslim fundamentalism, freedom movements step forward.

(2) The world was left with a shock when it turned out that Breivik, the the right-wing nationalist whose bombs and shoot-outs killed almost 100 people, was not a Muslim with a turban. Instead he was a rather average-looking Norwegian with extreme right-wing beliefs.

Estonia: In relation to the difficulty of making choices, one of the participants drew the attached picture. He also explained that earlier there were fewer choices, but a feeling of greater freedom, while now there are more choices, but a feeling of less freedom.

Faroe Islands: In the beginning of 2012 solidarity and socialism is under mounting pressure from capitalism and self-interests – both in the family and in the larger society. Policies involving taxes and pensions have undergone dramatic changes in a shift that benefits

the wealthy, unions are no longer taken seriously, and the cohesive power of the family is diminishing. There is a fundamental sense of insecurity and distrust in the longevity of the welfare society that is reflected in the fragmentation of people and rifts between interest groups.

Finland: If one looks at the contradiction between biological evolution and its extension to future cultural evolution, there is an enormous difference in the pace of the change. Natural selection in biological development demands millions of years, while cultural change can happen in a matter of weeks or months. It seems that, too often, we forget that, even though cultures change, people's inherent needs remain the same.

France: More than half the participants surprised themselves by making statements in which we heard hope and optimism even while the events discussed were very dark. Like a relief to survive, to be alive despite everything. This does not make sense to them. It is an incomprehensible statement. We find the split, which characterises the border-line structures, built on opposition, contradictions, and paradoxes. In order to protect themselves from the death drive and its ravages, this is projected onto the hyper-profiteers, the mad scientists. This also brings to mind the mourning process. Passing through the consideration phase linked to the loss of the object (the neo-liberal society), and depression (which we covered many times in past years), people live as survivors with a certain guilt (towards those who did not make it).

Germany: The experiences recounted here are, on the one hand, symptoms of hectic handling of a complex situation; on the other hand, expression of a need for orientation in a world in perpetual flux without any clear destination (Stock markets, Euro currency, democracy, etc.).

India: Moving on to the year 2012, most of the participants spoke about the world coming to an end and what religion had to say about the world coming to an end. Because of the fear of the end, the members of the society turn to religion to seek a sense of belonging, affiliation, identity, and relief, thus resulting in critically analysing the religion for better understanding.

Ireland: Although not identified by the members, the convenor drew attention to the theme of death that had been present in Part 1, in reference to the death of two public campaigners, reports of the suicide of women, and deaths in other countries through violence.

The convenor observed that, in the context of the overall conversation, it seemed like there was a preoccupation with the death of a way of life.

Israel: It is elusive and annoying that any side of the conflict might seem as the terrorised victim as well as the terrorising aggressor.

Italy: (North) The liberation persists even despite the violence of the social conflict and the fact that they are afraid not to be able to bear the fast change and to keep up facing new complexities.

(Centre) This ship metaphor was repeated regarding Italy's leadership and the collective vs individual existence in society. 'It feels like it is now the end of an era' said another member. This feeling of a 'gap', and the concerns about 'the image' were the undercurrents pushing two principal topics: movement and adaptation, and the danger of elimination. The way to survive for an Italian Jewish family in the Second World War, the experience brought by a member, was to depend entirely on the internal resources and the strength of the family.

Latvia: Due to the inability to hear, feel, and understand each other on an individual level, the collective human values have deteriorated (disappeared), leading to even greater alienation among the individuals and away from the commonly held reality. Throughout the LP, a notion that 'we do not have a clear understanding of who we are and what is the world around us' had been reoccurring.

Norway: The Norwegian terror event of July 22nd last year was mentioned, and although the immediate surge of solidarity and shared focus/communality was acknowledged, participants seemed to feel that no convincing lasting effects of it were discernable at this point in time. There was also, however, an acknowledgement of the great complexity of the wider contemporary society and the degree to which this was felt to be overwhelming and threatening.

Peru: Within this context, we tend to blame government, authorities, and others of corrupt and violent acts that are repetitively presented by the media, which results in a collective compulsion of a sense of helplessness, resignation, and frustration towards the reality we face.

Poland: There is also fear and uncertainty, since the old patterns of reality functioning cease to exist. The model of a life path consisting of stages; studies – job – family, is no longer up-to-date.

Serbia: And in the analysis came to thinking that our national body is scattered – there is a need to integrate the Serbian national body.

There is a need to gather around one important issue, and again the question was echoing – what it was that connects us? What is the glue of the Serbian identity – the one thing that connects us unquestionably?

South Africa: This results in a physically and emotionally unsafe environment characterised by performance anxiety, primitive behaviours, lawlessness, corruption, brutality, raping, non-caring (for disease and disability), and killing. As in the movie 2012, the competition is about survival of the fittest, sacrifice, purification, and being chosen by the ultimate authority. Because of lack of resources members of society get disillusioned and then focus on basic survival needs vs existential (being) needs. (Maslow's hierarchy of needs.)

Spain: There is a sensation of not knowing where we are and how to manage this situation. Emotions about what is happening cannot be splitting. We have unbalanced the system with this excess of wild economy and now we need to change the system in order to balance it again, because we are in a stage of transition: the end of the American Empire. In the past, the way to sort out crisis has been to generate a world war. There is an enormous social fracture. It is true, there are more NGO, but they grow to give some entertainment to people who have no job. The fright takes us to the fracture between the possibility of war and the possibility to solve this situation, and both possibilities paralyse us. But the war is projected to the south of Europe, or other countries to avoid the confrontation.

Sweden: The sequence of hopelessness – polarisation – rebellion (or new initiatives) perhaps describes a process in which Swedish society and individual citizens find themselves. All sectors of society or individuals do not find themselves in the same phase simultaneously, but it is perhaps possible to describe a general situation with these three terms.

Switzerland: The theme of break down physically, emotionally, and socially was very present with fears of illness (specifically cancer) and death, concerns about the break up of couples leading to uncertain family structures. These difficult subjects, death, cancer, and divorce lead to feelings of weariness and sense of foreboding. In previous years many of the splits that were discussed were seen to exist in the outside world, but these themes of death, divorce, and cancer, touched on issues of disintegration inside people. For this reason it was experienced as particularly frightening not simply because of the fear of physical and emotional pain, but also because these issues affect deeply our sense of identity and well-being.

UK: Someone spoke of becoming interested in family history perhaps as a way of rediscovering something of 'home'. But alongside this search for stability or a root there was a global sense of 'fragility' suggested by 'bird flu' – the whole world the group summarised felt like it could just go 'bing'.

USA Boston: There was a preoccupation with the notion of sustainability, which had multiple levels and meanings: on the environmental level, with deterioration/threat of deterioration of our environment; on the economic level, with the recent financial collapse and ongoing recession; on the international level with ongoing wars; and finally there is a question as to whether our identity as Americans is sustainable. The Mayans have forecast 12.21.12 as the end of the world. There was a sense that our globe is in a crisis.

USA Chicago: As Bion stated, 'the primary task of any group is what it must do to survive'. The question is do we have a capacity within ourselves or is it located in something existing outside of ourselves (i.e., religion, spirituality, etc.) to begin this task?

Hypothesis 3

Having lost trust and belief in the competence of institutional leadership members of societies are left without hope. The experience of members of societies is that the very people that they turned to for relief from their unbearable experiences have been seen to fail them. Having 'killed them off' they are now left in a desperate position whereby they are left abandoned and hopeless. At this stage the thoughts of members of societies associate to death, dying, and survival: Some even associating the current economic situation to that of the Second World War. In a strange, and perhaps totally illogical, way some members of societies experience this as an opportunity for progression. In the sense of mourning it may be that this is the point when we can now face a new reality.

OTHER MATTER

Information technology

There is a growing realisation not only of the importance of information technology, but of the effects that it has on societies throughout the world. As a positive and for the social good technology is seen as providing the means to denunciate injustice, to provide more and faster information flows, and to raise rebellion as in the

Arab Spring; a belief in the possibilities it provides. Developments in the field of technology, not least communication technology, provide the opportunity for distributing information in a way, and with a speed, that has not been possible in mankind's history. Virtual reality is seen to offer many possibilities of establishing contact with other people. People can form societies, identify with a chosen group, highlight their individuality, and at the same time, find people similar to them.

However, there is also a deep distrust of social networks and the perception that they are sources of evasion and of disconnecting from contact with others. It is felt there is a threat of addiction to technology. For some the experience is that of creating social isolation and generally being harmful to social unity; technological advancements lead to a situation where instant communication takes precedence over deep, solid, and real communication. The following extract puts this argument well: 'Even though technology is developing and the exchange of information is becoming easier, the communication between people depends too much on superficial discourse because of the need to hurry, at the least, experiences for which it is difficult to find words remain unexpressed. In this manner, people remain alone with their experiences without finding the means to bring forth their needs and feelings, and they are in danger of remaining alone, losing themselves, as well as both their individual identity and their humanity in general'. Others feel that people use flight into social networks (such as the faceless Facebook) and other electronic connections (as non-human connections) so that technology now directs the rules of human engagement. For some the internet provides opportunities for aggressive comments that are destructive. The Internet is seen as a place, where thanks to user's anonymity, it is easy to give vent to negative emotions. The tensions and discontent with the real world is often expressed online. It can be noticed in aggressive comments, attacks on other people, and the creation of secret groups threatening to destroy the present order. Coming from a different angle, some people are disturbed by the fact, that their online activity is used for marketing purposes and they are being manipulated. For others, information technology was seen as the means to connect with other people and to protest. It is possible to use information technology to ruin the lives of individuals, but also to make rebellion for a better life.

There was also concern that twenty-four hour news and other facilities resulted in an overwhelming amount of information that can lead to a wish to retreat. The experience is that we are taking in the whole world via TV and the web. It is overwhelming. It is all too

much, everything happens too fast. It was also an experience that because we have got access to all information and the world enters your living room through the television and computers it challenges the perceived reality.

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PUBLICATION OF NATIONAL REPORTS

It is appreciated that readers may be interested in having access to the full National Reports. These have been published on the OPUS Web Site at www.opus.org.uk where they can be found under *Listening Posts*.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Continuing from the last hypothesis it seems that because of massive global change resulting in the loss of what is familiar at all levels of society, members of society experience processes of mourning, shock, grief, and anger. They are going through a process of loss and mourning, the result of which is a withdrawal from previous institutional relationships and commitments.

However, in a strange, and perhaps totally illogical way, some members of societies experience this as an opportunity for progression. In the sense of mourning it may be that this is the point when we can face a new reality. In this context, it seemed that there was an underlying theme in most, if not all, National Reports: that of superficial hope, a strong desire to progress, and a request to answer the questions: where do we go from here? What is the way to the future? It may not be possible to directly answer either of these questions but there may be at least partial answers in the National Reports.

Not least, is a strong sense that at this time the world can tolerate complexity from the depressive position. Violence and aggression from the paranoid-schizoid position is experienced as subversive and unhelpful. There is recognition that to progress means having the courage to stay with the pain. There were also a couple of mentions of emancipation, signalling a desire to be released from oppression and restraint, and a wish to come together in an attempt to develop a new way of life free of the current oppressors. As was stated, there is a big difference between internal and external society. Someone 'brings us' a society that is not one in which we want to live. There is an active wish, or demand, to regain an active citizenship. While it is appreciated that these aims are not without difficulty, members of societies are trying to find a new way through their experienced negativity and hopelessness while at the same time managing their vulnerability

There were several other indicators of societies beginning to come together to begin a process of having some control over their lives. The church is one such example, a few people referring to the church as a means of being in touch with reality and providing social morality. The experience of the Listening Post enabled members to relate to each other and to also see the creative potential in integration to regaining authority in their current lives. Several members referred to the hope that resided in youth and that they were able to organise movements. This was also the experience of the Occupy Movement and the Tea Party, although both of these were seen to fail because of splitting. Technology for all its faults was seen as a positive tool for bringing people together regarding activism. Perhaps the same technology will be seen as a positive tool for action in the depressive position.

This period of world history truly is one of formative changes in the structure of the world economy, the shape of societies, and the framework of world governance. Who could possibly predict what will happen next? However, we can continue to explore and try to understand current dynamics in societies throughout the world.