

# **GLOBAL DYNAMICS AT THE DAWN OF 2011.**

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## **Abstract**

On or about 5<sup>th</sup> January 2011, 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 2011, were held in twenty four different countries around the world (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Denmark (2 reports), Estonia, Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy (3 Reports), Peru, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, South Africa (two Reports), Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, & UK). 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 interrelated themes identified, followed by an analysis and hypotheses regarding each.

## **Key Words.**

Listening Posts, Global Dynamics, Societal Dynamics, Social Defences Against Anxiety.

## **Introduction.**

As was summarized last year, 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 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 such as will satisfy their human needs. But it is not just about technology it also includes 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 solutions to major problems are 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 at a global level. 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. 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: vexation, unhappiness, annihilation, powerlessness, hopelessness, no control, lack of influence, loneliness, isolation, disconnectedness, a demise of the human race, 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. In addition, and adding to this gloomiest of experience many members of societies have experienced severe natural disasters which only serve to increase the anxiety. For example; floods and fires in Australia, earthquakes in Chile, Peru, and Serbia, heavy snow in Finland, floods in South Africa. The resulting experience of members of societies is one of dependence and a loss of society. This experience is further developed below in the first Analysis and Hypothesis – *'Loss of Society'*.

Faced with this depressing experience and having adopted defences against the deep felt anxieties members of societies only experience a temporary relief as they continue to blame and scapegoat others who are unable to respond to the societal needs for dependency. 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. This raises many questions for members of societies, for example: Can we keep up with it? Will there be a time when we are not connected? How did it happen? Where does responsibility lie? What will new boundaries look like? What's right? What's wrong? Where is identity? There are no ready answers forthcoming. Confirming what are very individual realities with others seems to be an exceedingly risky process. 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. The culture 'the glue that holds them together' has been destroyed and nothing is left to hold them together. A result is that they retreat into a defense of individualism against the risk of exposing their own understanding to the multiplicity of realities that reside with and in all others. A consequence is withdrawal and a retreat into solitude and an ego driven experience where only 'me' is important. This experience is further developed below in the second Analysis and Hypothesis – *'Fragmentation and disconnectedness'*.

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 idealized. This experience is further developed below in the third Analysis and Hypothesis – ‘*Defending against isolation*’.

These three interlinked and progressive Hypotheses follow:

## ***Analysis and Hypothesis 1: Loss of society***

### ***Analysis 1.***

Members of societies throughout the world are experiencing this period in history as one of unprecedented and revolutionary social change that is still increasing in intensity. It is all embracing and affecting nearly every facet of societies throughout the world. This leads to a situation where the breadth and depth of change has resulted in such a degree of complexity that it is impossible to make sense of what is occurring and results in utter confusion. It is an experience of being flooded with knowledge but at the same time not knowing what is occurring. Social change resulting from the ‘death of a way of life’ has resulted in changes to the very way that we live our lives, including a loss of values, morality, ethics and beliefs at both an internal and external level. This in turn contributes to a loss of individual and social identity. Overall this is a highly negative and depressing experience which leads to a desperate experience of hopelessness and bewilderment. This in turn has led to a situation where there is massive dependency. This is sometimes in the nature of seeking a Messiah and at other times a more connected dependency on political and other societal leaders. In some instances there is a renewed desire for religious leadership. There is also a belief by some that technology can be a panacea for providing a new reality. Alongside this massive dependency there is a constant blame and scapegoating of political and societal leaders around the issue of failed dependency, a lack of trust and a feeling of being manipulated. This is reflected in the following extracts from the National Reports:

#### **Australia:**

Participants felt themselves largely powerless to effect any change at a societal level. References to the power elite in politics, industry and the world stage, were notable for their cynicism and pessimism. It suggests a relationship of ‘failed dependency’ between citizens and societal leaders, which leaves members of society feeling disengaged, intensely frustrated, and angry. They are disappointed with institutions, power elites and political machinery, and the failure of the heroes to live up to their expectations of good leadership. As a consequence, members of society have become angry and cynical of misuse of power for self-interest rather than social good. To relieve feelings of anxiety and insecurity, anger and blame is projected onto others.

#### **Austria:**

Because of rapid changes in society, members of society are forced to adjust their identities very quickly, which would need time and space to contemplate on themselves. At same time, though, they are willing to solve societal splitting right now and would love to contribute to the political process effectively and immediately. This double bind situation leads to an agitated atmosphere, where individuals engage to the process with their very heart, but seem not to get in contact with the other side, which leads to a sense of frustration.

#### **Belgium:**

Are we losing our identity? A group member observed that his children, who are adults now, barely have any values or a world-view to guide them. They just work and get through the day;

it seems like a ship adrift. Because social differences are exaggerated and blown out of proportion, values are eroded and therefore social connections cannot be made; this leads to isolation and poor social cohesion. Because we have so many options and opportunities, this increases the pressure which may, on the one hand, lead to stress and exhaustion, but on the other hand, it may also lead to a conscious search for the essence, our identity, and for making conscious choices.

**Bulgaria:**

This is a world without members where there is not membership. This challenges the very existence of society itself and the results of the listening to something which is doubtful in its existence. In this context the helplessness about the autonomy (the opportunity to be autonomous is being taken away, it is under pressure, is being attacked or is a privilege) reflects a possible dependency without a clear object of this dependency.

**Canada:**

This results in increased use of non-renewable environmental resources at a catastrophic rate. Some members of the group feared that as a result the world would not be inhabitable by humans within several lifetimes. The Internet and the rapid introduction of new technologies for virtual gaming and social networking have changed the nature of direct friendship and in person social interaction. Some felt that the computer generation is much more self-involved and narcissistic. They seek personal advantage, are obsessed with themselves and are not concerned about others feelings or needs.

**Chile:**

The participants communicate a deep lack of trust in the institutions that regulate and sustain life in society, in the face of the ineffectiveness and inefficiency shown by them during these traumatic events. Their complaints about distrusting the institutions allow a space for individuals to host the illusion of institutional improvements that will remove far away the risk of death, especially in such a catastrophic way as it recently happened in Chile.

**Denmark:**

(1) Confusion, bewilderment and group fragmentation abound, and for that reason the fight for attention is also part of individual citizens' interaction. Politicians are not generally seen as trustworthy, and on the part of the politicians themselves, they seem lost in opinion polls and dreams of being reelected, and it no longer seems convincing that they want to fight for anything or anyone. Time is spent on positioning themselves attractively and commercially on facebook and other social media.

(2) Citizens are frustrated over the absence of ethics and values in the actual political debate. Both medias and politicians simplifies the political debate so it becomes tactical and has a very short range in the fight for power. Are we naive and stupid to ask for morals when it comes to both politics and politicians?

**Estonia:**

People are helpless and afraid when confronted with natural phenomena and the vast system in place. To question or challenge society's membership and predominant family traditions, to rebel against how things are always done. Isolation feels good, there is a need to be by one's self, to be left in peace, alone or with one's own friends, to possibly protect one's self from the angst caused by external forces.

**Faroe Islands:**

The reason why our brother nation Greenland has survived as a nation, is their strong culture and roots. How do we maintain and develop our own rich culture? There seems to be a need to place blame and place responsibility for the recession, economic crisis and lack of overall direction in the society. We are looking for someone to be responsible. But the responsible political leaders, the structures in society and the hidden authority (the ground) is invisible and untouchable. The guilt is a too heavy burden 'in the mind'.

This creates a vacuum in society: Everybody seems to create extended blindness for dangerous facts obvious for everybody, living in a denial state of mind. Nobody acts and most is feeling paralyzed waiting for something to happen or someone to step up on the scene.

**Finland:**

The age of the Internet has meant a decrease in personal face-to-face interaction, which has been replaced by networking communication in which words are the only means of conveying anything since bodily language no longer counts. When genuine contact with others becomes difficult, people feel that they are alone. Interaction becomes ostensible, vapid, and superficial. Under our current conditions, people can no longer trust that they can draw trustworthy conclusions about the path the future will take directly on the basis of their earlier experiences. As a basis for choices, knowledge of the past simply does not have the same value that it did earlier, when there was a linear procession to the developments underway.

**France:**

The loss of meaning. The meaningless of certain events can push some people into a state of deep confusion, a state of anxiety in certain cases. Faced with incomprehension, surrounded with destruction and destructiveness, desperation and despair, some people "take refuge" in the familiar, in daily life, in order to survive. The absence of words is the result of a perceived powerlessness to act, the repeated impossibility of establishing dialogue, of being heard, in certain cases an inability to think clearly. It is the reflection of a form of depression. Today, the place and the role of everyone is intensely examined to the extent that the meaning of events is concealed and the powerlessness of action is perceived.

**Germany:**

tendency to blame others, e.g. specific ethnic groups, external enemies, politicians, even ourselves when resorting to do-it-yourself, when something isn't working ("but you paid to have that done") significance of the private sphere (desire to feel at home), job and neighbourhood. Genuine options materialise on home territory. "The private is political". The private is not per se a retreat, but can mean re-call to past values.

**Hungary:**

Based on the higher centralization and harsh practice of power by the government, fears of being totally dependent and being put (left) on the side has grown in the society. The possibility of losing our sovereignty led to a commonly shared fantasy of being destroyed (by the authority). The fantasy of being destroyed exists because of the former "clean-ups" happening in our history, and may mean nowadays losing one's place in society. The result of these primitive fears is that members of society regress to paranoid reactions as splitting (along the centrum-periphery, along parties and groups) and scapegoating and experience anger towards the perceived "others". A strong desire exists that a "perfect" entity (IMF or EU versus our majority government or a strong leader), without any personal investments, shall give advice what the whole society can fully trust and follow.

**Ireland:**

New ways of understanding age and generational positions. Influencing who is 'in' and who's 'out', who is 'us' and who is 'them'. Not clear now where power and authority lies – with the discredited older generation who got us into this? With the younger generation, who are told they are too spoiled and lacking the capacity to survive in this new world? Both generations being given both the blame and the responsibility for finding a solution.

The simultaneous pride and shame in being Irish. The economic crisis and the failure of government and institutions have led to profound fears for our security and well-being. We are being fed an analysis that holds us responsible. We reject the blame and readily blame politicians, bankers, bond-holders and those who borrowed and bought over-priced housing. Identity and attributes associated with particular generations and ages have been dismantled and we are not sure how to reconstruct these.

**Italy:**

(South) We are at the beginning of a new era, is it post ideology or post ethics? There is the strong need for religion and if there is religion there is no bad society. The fabric of society is experienced as tore apart with no ethical roots. No leading institution and figure can fill this void and religion is seen and perceived as the only social institution that can come to the rescue with its ethical dimension. The values embedded in religion, regardless of faith and creed, are described as the forces that can repair the tore society.

(North) The loss of identity and the loss of perception of the self, in a social sense, can be interpreted as a breaking point with bonds of identity and belonging. This determines a fragmentation of the social identity, together with a sense of impossibility in reciprocal recognition. Disclaiming each other's brings to a constant oppositional tension (talk-show style), where individual identity, frightened by the crisis, is maintained through exiting and chaotic personalization. A second analysis operated lead to the emerging topics and concerns, focused on the lack of social and political representation. The lack of thought frightens and comes together with a fear of transformations, seen as another possible breaking point with one's past and roots, and not as a new meaning for this crisis and this trouble, that could face the losses inevitably produced by globalization.

(Centre) There was a strong notion among the members that institutions today are losing their credibility and cannot be trusted. The group's perception of change also provoked an immense sensation of longing for home, a place for containment, warmth, familiarity, belonging, identity and connections. It seems that in the group's collective fantasy there was a split between the changing world and home. Change was externalized, feared and perceived as threatening to the overall well being of one's self and society, whereas home -- with its clear boundaries and familiarity – was an object of longing.

**Peru:**

The loss of trust in authority figures such as people from the government and police force makes us wonder if there's anyone we can truly rely on, and we even question the possibility of relying in ourselves in order to act. Having this panorama, members of society tend to take up extremely passive roles and find it very hard to speak up and take up our authority to make a difference, and this passive position instead of bringing us further from individualism makes us accountable for feeding it's fire. Members of society have the desire to change, and find ourselves "knocking on desires door" but are unable to open it and walk in because we feel we're not capable of doing it, instead of acting towards the transformation we rather admire and look up to foreign countries as agents of generosity and co-creation instead of recognizing this potential in ourselves.

**Poland:**

People waiting for someone else to take care of everything. Hospital 'does not want' a patient; procedural disorder; rules not clear; patient bears emotional costs. Lack of trust to various institutions that are supposed to support. Blur of responsibility 'from the top' - politics; having distinct opinions does not pay off. People have to 'break through' tons of information to get to the point; lots of extreme attitudes towards one event.

**Portugal:**

There is a problem of identity that appears as a reflection the way we see ourselves as Portuguese and European. There is a feeling that the power balance is rapidly changing and that before we can adjust to Europe as a reference we already have to adjust to other cultures. We constantly have to adjust which is contributing for a general feeling of being lost and always distant from the countries that seem to have impact and power over our country. But if we cannot relate and hold ourselves as a country, and we cannot relate to the notion of Europeans, how are we going to relate to China?

**Serbia:**

The phenomenon of whining has several dimensions: ranging from the non-responsible style of life (waiting from others to solve your problems, from state institutions to other people). After so many changes on all levels the problem of future identity is crucial. Issues arise like: what to take over from the West, what from the East, what from the past, what aspects of basic identity may be lost in the changes, what shall our further changed identity be like. . Feelings of impotence to better resolve those problems are circularly projected between persons and systems, avoiding facing them and taking responsibility, thus creating states of being stuck and often with fatal consequences.

**South Africa:**

Because of the constant fear the country is overly dependent on its political leadership to integrate the identity and care for everyone - which does not seem to happen. There is a very strong need for the messiah to come now and to end the struggle. Through their narcissism and self-enrichment, politicians detach themselves from the real discourse and reflection on deeper existential values such as a tolerance for difference and a search for truth and progress. This leads to the detachment from their electorate and the citizens of the country. Because of fragmentation in holding systems people are confronted with the individual choice to sink or swim.

**Spain**

We live in a society of mistrust. For example when interviewing for a job, you almost have to prove that you really want to work. The problem is that there is a real big mistrust in the economy, institutions and politicians which blocks and paralyzes the system. The fear of the violence that results from control in our society is internalized, repeating a behavioral pattern of passivity and dependence on our parents and institutions. The capacities of thinking, reacting, and resolving problems are projected on the politicians, who are overwhelmed by the expectations and repeat the paralysis because of the fear of conflicts that could arise any possible change. People are paralyzed, trapped between the desire for change and the worry that it will not result in anything better than what we had in the past.

**Sweden:**

Dependency creates a fear of one's own capacity to influence and change. The uncertainty of human co-operation means that it is essential to have new experiences even though they can also be dangerous. The image of the vampire can take on the function of a sort of frightening halt sign concerning contact and change between people. The notion of moving in darkness and ignorance leads to an all-embracing feeling of being imprisoned and without one's own voice in important situations. The feeling of loss also makes it natural to look back in time more frequently in order to retrieve what is lost. If one's actions are characterized by expectations of investigating the new, regardless of qualities, and abandoning parts of the old, the experience can be likened to that of betraying a dear friend.

**Switzerland:**

A current advertising campaign was discussed, which draws attention to Switzerland's values, with a rather provocative question which asks whether Switzerland's values should be discarded? This raised a debate about what are Swiss values? And the answer was hard to agree on. There seem to be concerns that people may get left behind in the "march of progress" ... Perhaps for this reason, "outsiders" of local communities are afforded even lower status by being seen to hold the negative, detrimental forces of society. This helps to maintain a split and a fantasy that if it were not for these external negative forces, that all would be well inside society at its various federal, cantonal and community levels.

**UK:**

Identity, collective identity, where is it? Challenges – who I am – who do I want to be. There was a considerable preoccupation arising from the profound changes that have and are occurring as a result of new technology. There is a realisation that deep change at both an individual and collective level has affected values, beliefs and morals that have been the constant influence for several generations. Scientific advances and a much better informed society have resulted in a rejection of these influences. Older generations struggle to know what controls to impose or how to impose controls on the younger generation. Seen in a different light, this in turn has resulted in a lack of super-ego functioning by parents.

***Hypothesis 1:***

Because members of societies are living through an unprecedented social change that has destroyed nearly every facet of their existence they are left without good and bad objects in their environment that they can use for their projections. Instead members of societies are left needing to make sense of a kaleidoscopic world which has little if any continuity or shared understanding: a world where their past internal objects have no relevance. A result is they are left with a continual stream of knowledge, largely available as a result of technological changes, but without the means of understanding and making sense of their experience. A result is emotional turmoil around experiences of hopelessness and bewilderment and this has led to a situation where there is massive dependency. This is sometimes in the nature of seeking a Messiah and at other times a more connected dependency on political and other societal leaders. Alongside this massive dependency there is a constant blame and scapegoating of political and societal leaders around the issue of failed dependency.



## ***Analysis and Hypothesis 2: Fragmentation and disconnectedness***

### ***Analysis 2.***

The defensive activities referred to in Hypothesis 1 above do not relieve members of society from their misery and they are left in a totally disconnected and fragmented world where people do not listen to each; do not share realities; have no shared values or meaning; can't share stories; there is a competition for individual needs; tolerance decreases; there is a risk of participation; an abdication of social responsibility; and fear and anxiety of difference. A result is that members of society develop a defence of individualism against the risk of exposing themselves to difference and their inability to connect in a world of a multiplicity of realities. It seems that they adopt an approach of holding on to what they've got; clinging on to their own beliefs which is all they've got to keep them alive. It is a world of withdrawal, closed-ness, solitude, and singletons. And this leads to an experience that is ego driven and all about 'me'. This is reflected in the following extracts from the National Reports:

#### **Australia:**

Feel impotent, frightened, despondent, powerless and cynical as never before in the face of political power 'the system seems full of contradictions'. Being more disconnected and being grounded, which the group struggled to hold together, finally separating them into two themes. This is datum about the split participants were grappling with when things which did not seem to fit nonetheless were coexisting before their eyes. There was a sense of disbelief about this, even as there was a felt experience of it.

#### **Austria:**

Because of the widening gap in society between different social strata, parts of society are drifting further and further apart. They tend to be less in contact with one another. Individuals feel therefore isolated. Action plans to step out of this isolation are yet to be built, which leads to a sense of powerlessness. The group mirrors this process in its discussion. There is fear of isolation which encourages creativity and eloquence in trying to solve problems, but the attempts of problem solving are not well orchestrated and therefore create conflicts and tension. An integrative function is missing, a 'social technique' that can ease the disappointment between the powerful and the powerless and the frustration arising there from.

#### **Belgium:**

A therapist is struck by the fact that people don't seem to have space to share their story anymore. They have to pay a professional to listen to them. People need to belong somewhere (e.g. neighbourhood, family, friends) and want to be (inter)dependent. Another group member is struck by how much we talk and how superficial it really is. People seem scared of the 'negative'. Because happiness ('the big happy feeling') is promoted as the highest good, citizens do what they can to hide, suppress or swallow their sadness and to carry the burden alone; this leads to loneliness, isolation from themselves and disconnection from others and it leads to an 'infantilization' of the media.

#### **Bulgaria:**

The typical type of participant is often a kind of singleton, often living in an un-hospitable environment made of anonymous majorities or face-less bureaucratic powers, referred to as the State or the Society. This is a world without members where there is not membership. This challenges the very existence of society itself and the results of the listening to something which is doubtful in its existence.

**Canada:**

The discussion began with a declaration of the disparity between the everyday interactions with people in the world, which are polite, friendly and even express concern for others, and the indifference to others that occurs at the broad social level that tolerates the increasing extremes of inequality of income that have grown even worse over the last years. The issue of increased abrasiveness and a reduced capacity for finding intermediate solutions to problems has created a win-lose environment.

**Chile:**

How to address the multiple requirements without being consumed by an overwhelming stress is a distressing dilemma. The second difficulty consists in the tremendous fear felt with respect to “the other or the others”, in relationships with individuals and groups. In social encounters, being ‘different’ is seen as having a destructive potential that paralyzes the approach to the other, and when it takes place, it is full of suspicion, mistrust and mutual hostilities. In the face of this endemic fear, people and groups are inclined to resort to withdrawal, thus avoiding direct and intimate encounters with their inevitable conflicts and frustrations.

**Denmark:**

(1) In these times of globalization and crisis it seems that there is a general anxiety that one can disappear from oneself, from one’s nearest and dearest and from society. Identity and positions are experienced as provisional and supplies of individual attention have to be delivered almost daily in order to secure employment and social positions.

(2) There is a loss of a feeling of social and collective values, where we witness the politicians’ corrupt power. On the one hand it creates responsibility and makes us want to do something, but on the other hand it leaves us paralyzed. We are in an ambivalent situation – part of us wants to split up in ‘them’ and ‘us’ and part of us is looking for integrating possibilities concerning values and ethics.

**Estonia:**

The overestimation of people’s own resources was discussed. Different types of events are planned and agreed upon with friends, but, when the time for them is close and effort is needed to see that they take place, there is a lack of desire, no strength or urge, to carry through with what seemed like a good idea a couple of weeks earlier. People want to be by themselves and do something other than what was agreed upon by the group.

**Faroe Islands:**

Therefore the members of society has to either suppress their individuality, their voice and obligation to react or has to immigrate to other societies unless they’re ready to be exposed negatively in public. This results in excessive cautiousness, inability to act properly and an abdication from social responsibility.

**Finland:**

Life today seems to show significant risks of people experiencing internal changes that affect their ability to make contact with others. At the same time, and in the same direction, external factors are also affecting them, for instance, when personal contacts with the service sector are substituted by technical equipment and holistic systems. When external and internal factors reinforce each other, people are not able to respond to others’ emergencies, even though they, in principle, want to. People are in danger of becoming alienated from each other and, at the

same time, from their own humanity. At the point when they feel that danger, they are overtaken by terror.

**France:**

This theme depicts the world as black and white, a world which cannot be black and white. It seems as if there is a rupture in our representations of self and world and there are difficulties to integrate these seemingly major changes. The loss of meaning. The meaningless of certain events can push some people into a state of deep confusion, a state of anxiety in some cases.

**Germany:**

We presumed that the satisfaction of basic needs of human beings plays a role as well as readiness to develop trust and take risks to attain effective cooperation, finding a meaning in one's own action, developing conditions for mental well-being, raising educational potential or linking up networks (a talent younger people obviously have developed better). It is apparent from various examples in the public eye in today's Germany that the pendulum of retrogressive retreat swings in equilibrium with progressive action and between destructive and constructive tendencies (that are innate in both). There can be no forecast as to which behaviour is correct.

**Hungary:**

Although there is a strong desire for having an autonomous opinion, the atmosphere of everyday life holds the society in suspense whether this desire can still exist in reality or not. The society is in suspense whether the independent (non-partisan) professional opinion still exists, or not. There is a strong mistrust against any knowledge and opinion, there is a general suspicions about on who's side he or she is, who's interests are served by and why he or she wants to convince anybody.

**Ireland:**

Feelings of rage are held in check by feelings of disconnection, impotence and confusion. We feel impotent to influence the larger picture, so we are engaged where we can see and feel our connection and impact, seeking out spaces where our voice can be heard. We struggle to recognize ourselves in the representation in the media and taken-for-granted parts of our identity and self-image have been damaged. Identity and attributes associated with particular generations and ages have been dismantled and we are not sure how to reconstruct these.

**Italy:**

(North). The loss of identity and the loss of perception of the self, in a social sense, can be interpreted as a breaking point with bonds of identity and belonging. This determines a fragmentation of the social identity, together with a sense of impossibility in reciprocal recognition. Disclaiming each other's brings to a constant oppositional tension (talk-show style), where individual identity, frightened by the crisis, is maintained through exiting and chaotic personalization.

(South) Loneliness is described as the result both of fears and anxieties and of complex human relation. However it seems that socially members have lost the ability to deal with both. Such loss is described as the result of the increased 'technicalisation' of our lives and the growth of so called social networks. Members describe the emotional result of this situation as feeling constantly angry. It is as if there is no safe place inside and outside members' experience where significant relations can take place.

(Centre) The group members seek to protect their clearly delineated mental maps of the world, but they are failing. The real map's geographic realities no longer conform to historical,

romantic memory. The confrontation between what is remembered imagined and desired crumples when confronted with fast uncontrollable change. This anxiety of estrangement of member's mental map with the real world elevated their anxiety, expressed as overlapping fears of terrorism, war and indifferent malignant institutions that no longer care for people's spiritual or physical wellbeing.

**Peru:**

Participants were concerned about how Individualism is seen every day in the many scenarios they're in, and it's seen as "daily bread". One of the participants mentioned: "We see individualism everywhere, we're constantly told to make and make money for ourselves and spend it in ourselves", this comment was backed up by another participant who added "People have it as it's supposed to be all about them, acting in a mode of me, me and me". The group recognized the lack of ability to "speak up" and to "see" the other, especially if this other is different than me. We rather not speak up for ourselves because we worry about what the other might think.

**Poland:**

People remaining silent even if they do not agree with particular matters solutions being made in isolation from the reality; changes that actually don't change anything as years go by, people are more and more disappointed with the world; trust to others decreases, distance increases people do not actually feel sorrow concerning tragedies if they don't relate to the ones they are close to reality is grey and unclear, it is not possible to reach the truth, we miss 'the only truth', we are not comfortable with ambiguous reality Egoism and necessity to resign from comfort makes me not want to fight for a change.

**Portugal:**

In a certain way the loss of external structures which used to support us, and simultaneously the loss of our internal structures leaves us far more alone in the face of uncertainty. This uncertainty increases the sensation of unknown and crisis.

**Serbia:**

Group talked further about the attitude to wait for someone else to deal with problems and that people often feel left alone with their problems, they talk to the TV set instead. Community crumbled. People lost the trust in their fellow men.

**South Africa:**

They act in a "me-ness" manner in their search for personal power, influence and affluence. They are experienced as inauthentic prima donnas on stage, acting as if they care, but actually serving their own narcissistic agendas which dissociate and alienate them from communities. People are tapping into individual resourcefulness because there is no space for them in the known structures. Because of fragmentation in holding systems people are confronted with the individual choice to sink or swim.

**Spain**

We have difficulties in exercising our authority as well as having too many conflicting behaviours throughout the country. There is a feeling that no one is telling the truth because everyone is defending their own interests. But this trend is self-destructive. There is a sense of abuse.

**Sweden:**

Dependency creates a fear of one's own capacity to influence and change. The uncertainty of human co-operation means that it is essential to have new experiences even though they can also be dangerous. The image of the vampire can take on the function of a sort of frightening halt sign concerning contact and change between people.

The feeling of solidarity, loyalty and own energy is affected when the individual's assets and limitations cannot be affirmed in a familiar way. An earlier experienced natural interaction between give and take, now when it is changed, instead leads to society being characterised by the individual's perceptions of gulfs that are not easy to influence and risks of explosive deficiencies.

**Switzerland:**

These close knit "clans" could shield their members from unknown others, providing a sense of security when cocooned with friends but which could also make the outsiders appear more menacing. On a very micro-level the individual concerns expressed could also be a representation of the larger concerns about security and insecurity on a more national or global level.

**UK:**

Generational issues create a situation of not knowing of being disconnected and of envy regarding teenagers who are able to go back and forth and their indecision. Positive choices are available to the young they can have both if they want. There are few communal experiences and human interaction is reducing. What do we mean by authenticity? The rate of change is so difficult to live with. There is a great deal of disproportionality. There is also a great deal of loneliness – being left out and not knowing. Parallel universes, we forget we are standing right next to people we don't know. Where is the desire to open one self to differences?

***Hypothesis 2:***

Because of the extreme anxiety of the emotional experiences of hopelessness and bewilderment members of societies try to defend against this by dependency writ large and blaming and scapegoating political and other institutional and societal leaders. But of course, any temporary relief this may bring is soon lost and they 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. The culture 'the glue that holds them together' has been destroyed and nothing is left to hold them together. A result is that they retreat into a defense of individualism against the risk of exposing their own understanding to the multiplicity of realities that reside with and in all others. A consequence is withdrawal and a retreat into solitude and an ego driven experience where only 'me' is important.

***Analysis and Hypothesis 3: Defending against isolation******Analysis 3.***

Being in this dire situation of not being able to meet their attachment needs members of societies are anxious to fulfill this need in some way. The difficulty is that although they crave integration they don't know how to achieve it in a safe way. As was explained in the last

hypothesis they have developed a defence of individualization against the risk of exposing themselves to ridicule or misunderstanding from others. A result is that they seek to confirm their identities in a variety of ways, as follow: some test their realities in primary groupings especially the family and religion; some seek a Messiah or Saviour who will emerge and deliver them from this painful experience; others are of the view that technology may offer them the sort of hope that they desire; yet others put their faith and projections into youth as the ones who will become the saviours; some see relief in more trivial occupations that they can pursue with others; others deny the reality and put there hope in the current situation being a turning point which will lead to salvation. They also engage in a longing for the past and for the comfort and joys of a once shared social reality. In similar way they turn to a fantasied golden age in past history where there was a clear national identity and shared values. Of these activities engagement with the family is idealized and seen as a way forward for the entire world. Perhaps more realistic is the few references to seeing the future in terms of a global identity with shared global values. This is reflected in the following extracts from the National Reports:

**Australia:**

We surmise that there is still a yearning for a ‘saviour’, but perhaps now it is for one whose public persona allows citizens to engage in a fantasy of knowing the whole person.

When participants did feel in control, was when they described taking personal actions in direct relationship with others such as, understanding one’s own irrational fury towards a neighbour, picking up litter on the beach, helping the daughter of a friend’s friend, or challenging the authority of institutions through legal channels. There was great admiration for (and pleasure taken in) someone like Julian Assange who was seen to be an individual challenging the power elites. Thus, hope is linked to subversive actions by individuals, rather than communities.

**Austria:**

On the one hand traditional spaces for the generation of meaning, like spiritual and religious groups are not seen as efficient. On the other hand there is very much hope that the new technological developments, which are partly used already, like social medias and other social technologies will be fruitful. The group is very optimistic that future dialogues will be both integrating and mindful, particularly in large group settings.

**Belgium:**

Do we invest the time and energy to take our children for a walk in the forest when they have too much energy? They are running from one activity to the next and doing multiple things at the same time (e.g. mobile phone, games, Facebook). The demands are increasing and putting pressure on young people. Schools, for instance, are made responsible for the education of our children. In that way we dis-empower ourselves. Another participant is concerned how this evolution will affect (future) teachers? Will they still be happy in their jobs with so much responsibility on their shoulders?

**Bulgaria:**

There is an ambivalent attitude towards autonomy, which is an expression of internal resistances towards it. In the context of the observed a-sociality (poverty of associations) autonomy is desired yet feared because dependency from parents does not develop into mature co-dependency (membership) because of the basic poverty of the associations of actual human environment where the opportunities for rewarding associational life and a sterling civility are

scarce. Stuck in an endless puberty, individuals wander between family (“home”) and society where their civil roles belong.

**Canada:**

Others felt that that the Internet and the mostly young people who used it extensively for social networking were the source of new local and international communities which held the key to the future. Everyone can join a series of unique electronic communities devoted to their particular interests. They can engage or disengage at will. They can become powerful political forces very quickly. There was however the slight hope that the young would carry on.

**Chile:**

Religiosity is also indicated as a spiritual wealth to comfort those who suffer and to transmit the strengths of transcendence and faith. Facebook and Twitter are effective instruments to establish links and virtual networks of contacts and friends. The achievement of virtual links is very much desired, because it is proof of being known, of popularity, of being appreciated and of affection. Community life should be avoided because it is dangerous for one’s own survival. Thus, technology that provides virtual links is a protective resource that prevents the risks of having direct and intimate human encounters which cause frustrations. Instant communication technology enables the illusion of being part of Chilean society without suffering the frustrations and discomfort that inevitably occur when living in a community.

**Denmark:**

(1) Where native Danish children suffer from ADHD and other sophisticated problems, second generation immigrants are characterized without further ado as troublemakers. Where there were substantiated criteria for what treatment should be given to early damaged children and other children requiring treatment, the public management systems put indirectly a pressure on local authorities so that law has to give way to budget considerations. Feelings and wishful thinking are undermining language, the democratic debate and thereby also the rational leadership of society.

(2) The Listening Post functions as an ideal model – a room for reflection – which is more or less absent in society today. Too paralyzed to act citizens prefer to stay in a mood of analyzing and reflection. A revival of the juvenile urge for change and will to act we saw in the 70s pop up now and again as a possible scenario for self-organization when young people don’t do anything.

**Estonia:**

The fact that, this year, people spent more time at Christmas in their own surroundings than earlier was the next topic of discussion. Grandparents and their families stayed home rather than visiting. There were no overnight stays as there had been earlier. People were relaxed. They shunned stress, contacts, being in groups, extra activities, and moving about. It was said that there was no visiting a fitness centre or going swimming even though there would have been time. The lack of activity made people feel guilty, even if it felt good.

**Faroe Islands:**

The primary school is a huge social equalizer! We learn our children, that everybody is alike and to stay a ‘normal smooth member’ of society. This leveling will result in a generation not creating the ‘originals’ and supreme individuals to take us and the society further. We teach our kids not to take the necessary responsibility in accordance to do what’s right, and parents are

learned not to take responsibility for their children. The interface between primary school and family is in a vacuum with no interaction.

**Finland:**

Children have parents, but who is the elderly's "father/mother"—a faceless system? And can that faceless system be trusted? In the turbulent process of change in society, keeping up "no matter what the cost" is understandable as there is an internal demand to protect oneself from experiencing the dread of remaining alone, of psychological death. On the whole, in order to be in contact with others, people cannot afford to do anything other than choose whether or not they will participate.

**France:**

It seemed that people looked to the past and to the relatively limited environment of the family, which allowed them to resist meaninglessness and despair. The family is certainly a locus of regression but also of resistance against the destruction and destructiveness of the outside world and the death drive, but also a locus of rootedness in self, and undoubtedly also a locus that provides the hope and vitality to live (to survive)...to act. It allows to maintain relations between individuals, between the past, the present, and the future. It allows for self-questioning and the welcoming of difference. In this way, the family provides a transitional space as defined by Winnicott.

**Germany:**

On the other hand it may also serve to help catch our breath and win distance. Defence can thus be used both destructively e.g. to play the role of the eternal victim, find scapegoats and act out aggressions. And it can be constructive if leading to setting feasible limits and dealing with issues that make sense. We presumed that the satisfaction of basic needs of human beings plays a role as well as readiness to develop trust and take risks to attain effective cooperation, finding a meaning in one's own action, developing conditions for mental well-being, raising educational potential or linking up networks (a talent younger people obviously have developed better).

**Hungary:**

We can observe our own driving rules as persons, families or groups, but there are other outsider guidelines which force us to follow them. Not following them can also displace entities to the periphery of a society. Our society is downtrodden and full with hopelessness. The LP members don't have palatial plans for this year and we started discussing, how the society can regenerate itself. The great leap forward can start with personal, internal reforms, rethinking our internal guidelines and values.

**Ireland:**

Members talked about being affected or not affected by the current turmoil. A member commented 'I want to be in the struggle – that's where life is, in the struggle'. There is a sense of the crisis creating some common ground. There was a parallel with the bad weather 'the first time I ever spoke to some of my neighbours was in the snow'. Within the crisis there is energy and possibility. The awfulness of the situation we are in could –just – be a transformative space. A member illustrated the possibilities created by all the empty retail space, how used for studio space where a mix of people came on board and now 'it can't be controlled' – this is a very creative moment to be in. Members attended to the mixture of fear at the loss of control and excitement at the possibilities opened up.



**Italy:**

(North) The different reactions to the feeling of disorientation, regarding not only the loss of object but also a loss in self perception, coming together with anger and depressive lived experiences, oriented toward individual-shaped solutions: turning back to traditions and values of the past, which appears as a idealized Arcadia, the rediscovery of the great narrations, the search for new extra national models, as the Anglo-Saxon ones, which seem anyway to be feebly applicable to Italian situation, or the acceptance of a new status of adolescence, as a way of life.

(South) It is as if there is no safe place inside and outside members' experience where significant relations can take place. Who and how to trust seem to be safely experienced in the close knitting of the family or in the virtual reality of social networks and chat room. At the least this is the way in which children are growing up and that represents, at the same time, the difficulties adults members of society are finding in building safe places.

(Centre) The hierarchy and the old order of the world, along with the clear divisions and status as perceived by group members, gave a sense of protection and security in the familiarity. The Church was mentioned as losing its credibility after the disclosure of the pedophilia scandals. "There is no guiding hand," one member said, yet it seems the 'institution' was seen powerful in the negative sense, and perhaps planting the fear of terrorism like a rapidly spreading plague, contaminating and contagious, infecting our lives.

**Peru:**

The resistance of participants to get in touch with a painful part of Peruvian history was evidenced in their interaction. Whenever a member would mention terrorism or Shining Path, they would collectively silence the member who mentioned it and after a pause they'd manage to change the subject and turn it into something "nicer" such as social responsibility. One of the members mentioned that it is very typical for Peruvians to live by the "we're OK culture", "even when we've had the worst day and someone asks how we're doing we say OK and smile, and we tend to do the same with bigger issues".

**Poland:**

People not looking for new people to meet – appreciating and noticing the ones they already know. A positive side of nepotism (versus bureaucracy) – I want to hire someone I trust. I trust people similar to me

**Portugal:**

Some people expressed on this topic the idea that the crisis might also be seen as an opportunity, for some people the economic crisis works as a turning point and see other opportunities, while others just seem to "crumble down" and get paralyzed. There was also a reference to the fact that the crisis might have existed for a long time before, but it just seems that it had a psychological effect whereby it is all over the media and everyone speaks about it currently in Portugal.

**Serbia:**

Is there enough sense of togetherness and confidence that we can do things together? Generation gap – the exhaustion of older generation and there are no results so they focus on the individual plane. Can individual work and work done by the groups have the power to resolve difficult situations, and to what extent? The theme of taking individual responsibility

divided into two directions: individual efforts spreading through the society as a whole and organized.

**South Africa:**

The group was becoming depressed and there was a bid to search for something positive. The World Cup was a success – crime was held at bay, South Africans and those who came from outside were all caught up in the excitement. There was a common bond that united all. The facilities were excellent and most things were completed on time and worked. Patriotism increased. The hope was expressed that the next president will be able to “integrate the Freudian personality parts” into a meaningful whole.

**Spain**

Because of the economical and social crisis people’s concerns focus on their more immediate needs and difficulties, increasing a feeling of individuality and isolation from society and creating a kind of schizophrenic state of mind where the emotions are anesthetized and we live our lives as if we were only observers of what is happening to us.

**Sweden:**

When our basic needs for survival are threatened we create defences against the perceived danger inherent in abandoning old, previously well-functioning and ingrained patterns. Fragmentation and splitting, easily visible in the public debate but also in various encounters between people, can be such defences and lead to difficulties in seeing and coping with essential new circumstances for our continued existence. In contrast to the earlier themes of poverty and misery it was established that contributions to charity, and new forms of taking social responsibility in the community are increasing and that new forms of collectivism arise. A new sort of simple kindness and generosity in everyday life, amongst strangers was described with examples from the bus and shops, as well as new forms of bartering and primitive economy in a modern urban environment.

**Switzerland:**

In the short term people could find consolation in parts of life which were going well and yet there was a foreboding sense of concern about the long-term. Would families remain connected as they moved further from each other both geographically and in terms of values? Does this represent a previous grounding force of authority in society which is becoming increasingly dissipated? Would children be able to find their way in the future which is unknown? Would our current experience be sufficient to guide us into the future? There were fantasies of holding onto things as they are now, of not wanting things to change physically (both people and infrastructure) as a way of preserving the status quo and avoid thinking about future concerns.

**UK:**

Is anything new or is it a repeat of the old? Are we doomed or will we be OK? A new generation is inventing new stuff. They are throwing away things I relied upon. There is a paradigm shift. Oldies have something important to say. Technology globally is another added structure; we’ve been used to small structures like organisation structure. Technology is a metaphor for living/reality.

### ***Hypothesis 3:***

Because

Not being able to meet their attachment needs members of societies are anxious to fulfill this need in some way. But having developed a defence of individualization against the risk of exposing themselves to ridicule or misunderstanding from others this makes things very difficult. A result is that they seek to confirm their identities and to test their realities in a variety of ways. These include primary groupings especially the family and religion. But it also includes seeking a Messiah; placing hope in youth; use of technology; trivial local endeavours and hope that this may be a turning point. They also engage in a longing for the past and for the comfort and joys of a once shared social reality. In similar way they turn to a fantasied golden age in past history where there was a clear national identity and shared values. Of these activities engagement with the family is idealized and seen as a way forward for the entire world. Perhaps more realistic is the few references to seeing the future in terms of a global identity with shared global values.

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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](http://www.opus.org.uk) where they can be found under **Listening Posts**.

### **Concluding Remarks.**

As was stated in the introduction 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. This is not only continuing to be confirmed by the evidence of this latest Listening Post research but also by events occurring at this time throughout the Arab world. There can be little doubt that it is leading to the development of a new way of life and a new culture. The background against which we view the world remains the same, a world where globalization 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 little sense of connectedness, little sense of belonging, and no community or society. The culture 'the glue that held us together' no longer provides 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 there appeared to be an increasing awareness that if there was to be progress, a way forward, there had to be the creation of a common meaning and recognition that this required the development of relationships between people. The experience of members of societies in being isolated and alienated from basic humanity is an uncomfortable position. However, it now seems clear that the reasons that they retreat into individualism and isolation is because to attempt to connect with others is seen to be risky and threatening to the sense of self. It would appear that the only way that members of society can live with the uncertainty and multiplicity of realities is to defend their own personal world. A result is of course to prevent the development of common meaning and to encourage an environment where only 'me' matters.

This leads to a seemingly inevitable expansion of the development of shallow connectedness through social networking; and individual pleasure through consumerism. Some suggest that the future is to be found not in a national identity but in some form of global identity; and that we have the beginnings of a global culture and global values. It seems perhaps inevitable that the notion of a 'global village' will have a considerable impact on the future way of life but what that new way of life will be seems a long way off at this time. At the start of the year who would have thought that Egypt and Tunisia would have been looking at a new political system as a result of public demonstrations.

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.