



International Listening Post Report: The World at the Dawn of 2018

Abstract

On or around 10 January 2018, Listening Posts were conducted in Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Faroe Islands, Finland, Germany (Frankfurt and Berlin), Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy (two in Milan), Serbia, South Africa (Port Elizabeth and Pretoria), Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and UK.

This report synthesises the reports of those Listening Posts and organises the data yielded by them into common themes and patterns to which some theory is applied. A single hypothesis is proposed.

In reporting on current dynamics in 2018 society, it is perhaps worth looking back over reports from the last 15 years to identify the most oft-recurring themes. These are:

1. Being overwhelmed by the pace and scale of change
2. Loss of faith in leaders and institutions
3. Loss of identity/way of life
4. Retreat to individualism
5. Search for scapegoats and saviours
6. Preoccupation with disaster, death and violence
7. Search for new meaning and order
8. Guilt and shame at privilege
9. Idealisation and demonization of youth
10. Idealisation and demonization of technology

These themes are all evident to a greater or lesser extent in this year's synthesis. This is neither surprising nor particularly interesting. The same applies to instances of splitting and projection, and expressions of fear, shame, rage, guilt and despair. To describe instances of these is to describe the human condition. What is, perhaps, more interesting is to analyse the data collected from a systemic perspective and to identify possible root causes, consequences and adaptive responses to the phenomena they depict.

It is hypothesised that the dynamics of society at the dawn of 2018 contain the features of systems maladaptation elucidated by Baburoglu (1988) in the turbulent environments described by Emery & Trist (1965). However, for the first time since these reports began, the dynamics also show signs of beneficial adaptation to turbulence or, at least, a recognition of the urgent need for it and of the possible form that it might take.

When a social system experiences turbulence in the system environment, Baburoglu (1988) identifies three 'mutually facilitating' types of maladaptation in response to such turbulence. Each is a form of disengagement from an intolerable reality evident in the global dynamics reported.

- (a) **disengagement from complexity**, producing *superficiality*, *(synoptic) idealism* and a second order response of *monothematic dogmatism*.
- (b) **disengagement from purpose**, producing *segmentation*, *authoritarianism* and a second order response of *stalemate*
- (c) **disengagement from relationships**, producing *dissociation*, *evangelism* and a second order response of *polarisation*

Although these forms of disengagement are mutually facilitating, the data collected has been crudely allocated between the three categories without acknowledging the overlap between them.

The fourth theme contains evidence of beneficial adaptation.

Theme 1: Disengagement from complexity

This response is prompted when we feel unable to cope with the difficulty and uncertainty of the problems we face. It is marked by a tactical retreat to a comfort blanket of reassuring and familiar ideas, and an increasing openness to new triggers prompting this reaction (Baburoglu, 1988).

Hallmarks of a retreat from complexity include virtue signalling, gesture politics and a predilection for the simplistic tidy-mindedness of quick fixes, 'ten top tips' and magic bullet solutions.

The second order responses are the requirement of adherence to guiding values or principles with no allowance for context, the adoption of a 'closed system' ideological perspective on truth and reality (such as no-platforming and safe spaces) and the trend towards identity politics where single issues predominate.

Theme 1: Current dynamics of disengagement from complexity

Disengagement from complexity

Citizens around the world feel overwhelmed by the complexity of modern life. This creates feelings of fear (*Australia*), inadequacy (*Germany*), panic (*Sweden*) disgust, guilt and impotence (*Israel*). We either blame technology for its inadequate information management capability and aggressive indoctrination (*Germany*) or we locate the inadequacy in ourselves. We can no longer distinguish truth from fiction (*India*), right from wrong (*Sweden*), significance from insignificance (*Germany*); it makes us confused, indecisive and inconsistent (*Sweden*). Choice is not a freedom, as we thought, but an enslavement (*Germany*). Our inner cave man is in panic (*Sweden*).

Technology

Technology represents a blessing and a curse (*Spain*). It entices us with the promise of perfection and immortality (*Italy*), offering us a way to bridging the past, present and future (*Serbia*) but, whilst it joins us, it also separates us (*Finland*). It encourages passivity and avoidance, making it easier for us to filter out difficult messages (*Israel*). It provides us with a narcissistic escape from reality (*Israel*), enabling us to airbrush away imperfection and present an idealised version of our lives (*UK*).

Pace of change

For some, it is not technological change itself that we find so hard so much as the pace of change (*South Africa*). The future is coming too fast (*Australia*). It leaves no time for reflection and thinking to contain our emotional responses (*Canada*). It makes us short-termist, blindly following the latest fad (*Italy*). It makes reality feel like a TV game show: we are entertained by the insanity and horrors being paraded in front of our eyes (*Sweden*) but are forced towards extremes by polarised discourse when we try to see the whole picture (*Israel*).

The terror of AI

Our fear of technology is projected onto Artificial Intelligence and Big Data. AI disables us from using our own intelligence (*Canada*) and represents our fears about shadowy leadership (*Spain*) and the dehumanising effects of technological advancement (*South Africa*). Big Data is feared as an unknown that can understand and control our desires and needs better than we can ourselves (*Spain*).

The rage of social media

Our rage about modern citizenship is projected onto social media, which represents the ultimate escape from complexity. It creates community feeling but also encourages unbridled aggression (*Denmark*). It requires an instant response that leaves us no time to think (*Australia*). Impersonal communication creates a paranoid environment (*South Africa*) leading to polarisation and differentiation (*Sweden*). It is a sophisticated vehicle for hatred of thinking (*Australia*); it amplifies problems and feelings (*Italy*) and creates a dialogue based on unevdenced belief (*Italy*). The circulation of pseudo-information creates rumour and anxiety (*Germany*). It confronts us with our own gullibility and makes us doubt our sanity (*Australia*), spreading a virus of social depression.

Public and private identities

As well as social depression, we experience social anger. Social media encourages aggression, amplifying and accelerating our rush to judgement (*Australia*) and weighing us down with negativity (*India*). Facts seem to have lost value (*Ireland*). This binary system of 'likes' and 'dislikes' is narcissistic (*India*) because it prevents the integration of our good and bad selves (*UK*) and stops us from being truly present. In our quest for escapism and self-esteem, the messages we send and receive are all distortion and hype (*India*). We conceal ugly unbearable truths about ourselves with cosmetic fake news (*UK*). The shallowness of our engagement leaves us feeling lonely and isolated (*India*).

Exploitation at work

At work, we are suffering from 'boreout' – the absence of meaningful tasks at work creating burnout from boredom (*Bulgaria*). Work is no longer a source of satisfaction but an experience of abuse and suffering that employers cannot acknowledge. Any 'help' is offered only as a means to get us back to work without addressing the exploitation and abuse we have suffered (*Chile*). Organisational narcissism makes us have to pretend to love our work and our employer (*UK*). There is the feeling that skills and knowledge are no longer of value to society (*Bulgaria*). I don't dare post on social media as they are being monitored by my boss (*Turkey*). Wealth should be the measure of human resources, not just about money (*Faroe Islands*). The growth of agile working teams and tribes is a response to lack of leadership (*Australia*).

Climate change

The ugly truth about our planet is only bearable for us when reduced to entertainment with beautiful photography (*UK*). This is a coming storm (*Ireland*) that represents a betrayal of future generations (*Faroe Islands*). We see climate change as a hidden threat (*Spain*) brought about by our wastefulness (*Germany*) and short-termism (*Faroe Islands*). It makes us feel guilty for our privilege and plenty (*Faroe Islands*). Through guilt we now wish to return the excess from our over-acquisition to those who need it (*Germany*). We feel helpless and clueless (*Finland*) because we still deny our own responsibility for the garbage (*Faroe Islands*).

Coming storm

We face a moment of passage (*Italy*). We live in the Age of Disarray, preferring ideologies of utility and growth to those of liberty and equality (*Denmark*). The old order is coming to an end. The noise from outside is coming in on top of us – the centre cannot hold (*Ireland*). The storm is building inside us too, and needs an outlet (*Ireland*). Alienation has reached a boiling point that forces people to seek safety around ideologies (*Hungary*). We want a fight to clear the air and get to the truth (*Ireland*). This is the calm before the storm (*South Africa*). We fear a tsunami of bad news (*UK*). Our anxiety is concealed in the pleats of the day but is about to explode at any moment (*Italy*). There is turbulence, uncertainty, things falling apart (*Italy*).

Theme 2: Disengagement from purpose

This response involves the disconnection of means and ends, often through according priority to immediate, short-term objectives at the expense of the ultimate aim of an activity. This produces a fragmented field of silos in which inter-connectedness is avoided so that local goals can be achieved (Baburoglu, 1988).

Another version of this involves segmentation: escaping from the impact of difficult choices by substituting an easier question and conflating one with the other. Equally, it may involve the creation of social enclaves in which conformity to local norms is a requirement, and all forms of difference are avoided. This can lead to authoritarianism in which the fragmented parts are coerced into conformity with a whole system purpose.

The second order response is stalemate: the siloes and enclaves become aimless as they detach from their meta-purpose; there is an obsession with process over progress; and a negative inter-dependence develops, based on inaction – we don't expect anyone else will bother so neither will we (Baburoglu, 1988).

Theme 2: Current dynamics of disengagement from purpose

Social isolation

Technology is both barrier and bridge to communication (*India*). It brings about a social isolation that makes society seem dehumanised (*Spain*). Globalisation has unwittingly created new borders while tearing down others, as we form ghettos, avoiding contact with those who are suffering or disadvantaged (*Chile*). We feel like aliens in our own country (*Turkey*). We feel unsafe to express political views (*Hungary*). I wish I were a chameleon, as I am being forced to adapt to my environment, hiding my feelings and true thoughts (*Turkey*). Technology provides no substitute for closeness and love (*Finland*). We retreat into a bubble to focus on our own survival (*Spain*), maintaining a protective emotional numbness towards others (*UK*) but, from here, we lose sight of what's going on in the world (*Spain*). We don't know whether we are tranquil or tranquilised: we feel oppressed and silenced and threatened if we hold on to our values (*Ireland*).

Stasis

Without the possibility of speaking openly, we are stuck in standby mode (*Germany*) searching for a comfort blanket to soothe ourselves (*Italy*). We become sterile through fear of making mistakes (*Italy*), and become ashamed at not doing enough; we know that signing petitions and engaging in Facebook 'activism' are pointless and not real forms of action (*Israel*). We feel it's a waste of time to get involved in politics (*Turkey*). Our sombre clothes reflect the lack of colour and cause for collective celebration in our lives (*Ireland*); we find it difficult to trust (*Ireland*) or take responsibility for the wrongs in society (*UK*) because it does not feel safe even to talk about them (*Ireland*). We need courage to overcome our passivity, stand and face our fears rather than run away or look away (*Italy*). We need a holy rage that harnesses the energy of anger and hope (*Sweden*). Only by overcoming our distress and fear can we open our minds to possibilities and identities and start to repair the wounds of the past (*Chile*).

Call for change

Young people want change and are not willing to accept the status quo (*Ireland*). They are dependent despite their protest and words – they expect change to be delivered for them (*UK*). But the system pulls back in response (*Ireland*). The climate of general uncertainty creates nostalgia for past certainties (*Germany*). Change looks like chaos and so causes fear (*Spain*). The bleakness of current events causes despair and fear of a return to the bad old days of indoctrination and violence (*Chile*).

Individualism

There is an individualist belief that they have earned their own success and have nothing to gain from political engagement. They see others similarly as deserving their own success or lack of it (*Bulgaria*). There is a frantic individualism with only small glimpses of

collectivism (*Canada*). Relationships are impaired by the feeling that only the self can be trusted. Voting is based on self-interest alone (*Chile*). There is a trend towards ignoring social rules, voter apathy, lack of ethics (*Germany*). Lessons are not learnt, so things change for the worse (*South Africa*). We are more fragmented (*Australia*) and disorganised than we used to be, making it harder to leverage change (*Canada*). The sense of community is destroyed and has to be reassembled as an ever-changing jigsaw puzzle (*Italy*). People are less tolerant of differences in society (*Bulgaria*). We fear that our individual efforts will not be enough (*UK*), creating a chronic state of dread about imminent loss. This makes us greedy for a more that we cannot receive (*Canada*) and creates a pervasive attitude of 'sauve qui peut' (*Spain*).

Broken politics

There is a growing nastiness in society; the social pact is broken due to frantic individualism and dishonesty among once-reliable institutions and businesses (*Canada*). Humanitarian work is in retreat and state intervention is now about bureaucracy, power and control (*Bulgaria*). There is a brokenness in the country and a lack of wholeness in politics (*South Africa*). We are victims of harsh and inhuman politics, used as a tool of evil (*Turkey*). Greed is seen as good for business and generosity bad (*Faroe Islands*). Power is an instrument of inequality (*Australia*). There is corruption and in-fighting at the expense of concrete action (*South Africa*). It is hard to maintain working relationships with those supporting different political parties; I have to maintain a single role and identity (*Turkey*). The hopefulness of the rainbow nation seems fake now; our country is downgraded to economic junk status (*South Africa*).

Theme 3: Disengagement from relationships

This response involves a retreat from libidinal investment in the lives of others. By retreating into a private world of self-absorption, we become less accommodating of others and less willing to submit to rules governing mutual conduct. This can lead to a denial of empathy or of shared values, leading to outright indifference towards anyone outside an immediate circle (Baburoglu, 1988).

Another response is to band together with others around an idea that promises to replace confusion with certainty or isolation with belonging. This includes religions and (often rigid or extreme) political ideologies.

The second order response to this is polarization, through the formation of in-groups and out-groups whose identities have a paradoxical interdependence (eg Brexit leavers and remainers). Such groups have an identity that depends on retaining an impermeable boundary between them and tends towards binary good/bad, attack/defend, right/wrong characterisations of each other.

Theme 3: Current dynamics of disengagement from relationships

Binary politics

There is no place in government for those with different views (*Turkey*). Our aversion to politicians is leading us towards grassroots movements born out of emotion rather than

reason (*Spain*). Politics is now based on evoking emotions not setting out goals and plans (*Italy*). Leaders retreat to the binary simplicity of yes/no, me/not me, good/bad that is wholly inadequate (*Australia*). This descent into binary thinking is akin to adolescence – we all act like teenagers (*Israel*). We experience leadership as manic madness – always seeking extreme responses, creating false conflicts and stirring up primitive fears of 'kill-or-be-killed' (*Israel*).

Self-interest at every level

Politicians are anchored in old thoughts and ways; we are losing the established order as we move from a solid to a liquid society (*Spain*). Following the disintegration of old ideologies and religions, we can no longer tell right from wrong (*Germany*). The system mirrors itself at every level: self-enrichment without accountability, creating the temptation for victims to respond in kind (*South Africa*). We experience not just state capture but mental state capture that disclaims responsibility for taking action and leads to a failure of duty towards the vulnerable and the young through negligence, laziness and neglect (*South Africa*).

Blame shifting

A leadership vacuum requires us to show self-leadership and self-authorisation (*South Africa*). We are not going to wait for leaders to lead, we are going to do it without you (*Australia*). However the projection onto leaders of narcissistic entitlement, arrogance and greed is a way to avoid the naked truth about ourselves as a nation (*South Africa*). Our view of leadership as insane is a projection of our distress at the repetition of old traumas (echoing the Holocaust in the deportation of asylum seekers) (*Israel*). We see ourselves as victims because we don't want to accept responsibility for our contribution to events (*Hungary*). Our despair is a convenient way of projecting responsibility into an 'other' (*Israel*). The potential consequence of this is war – a turning point that will force us to refocus our attention on what matters, and who matters to us (*Hungary*).

Fast forward

We are living simultaneously at different paces – our parent's generation lives slowly and our children live fast (*Serbia*). Old people are a link to the past, and are in less of a hurry (*Finland*). Parents feel guilt at neglecting their children to work, so they overcompensate by buying them gadgets that cause further harm (*India*). The young, the rich and the educated are moving abroad. Some villages have seen all the young people leave and now resemble homes for the elderly (*Turkey*). Lack of time spent by children with parents prevents communication of traditions (*Serbia*). Christmas has become an exercise in artificial happy families, with painful realities concealed in sparkly wrapping paper and empty rituals (*UK*).

Guardians of tradition

Young people mythologise the past (*Italy*). They have problems understanding their cultural heritage: some see the past as a golden era with security and freedom, others as involving war, destruction and political interference (*Serbia*). Others feel shame for their ignorance and forgetfulness of the past. Parents worry how to pass on values and traditions in a way that presents them as attractive and relevant (*Hungary*). They fear the next generation becoming rootless citizens of the world – 'unlocked' from the generation

above (*Serbia*). They want to explain to them about the value of life and how to impart dignity in death but the young are too focused on themselves to care about the lives and deaths of others (*Hungary*).

Herding mentality

Collective social identity is expressed in negative emotions, through the need to hate someone (*Australia*). People develop an 'opinion parcel' and stay in it (*Sweden*). It's unsafe to be yourself and say what you think. If you don't stay in your cage, you're a target (*Ireland*). We have a culture of non-discussion (*Faroe Islands*). Debate empowers some people and silences others (*Sweden*). Attacks evoke a heightened response: you either choose retaliation or victimhood (*India*). The group can be a source of strength, to stand together against injustice or wrongdoing but it can be manipulated to create a herding mentality, using fear to inflict bullying and self-harming behaviour (*India*).

Scapegoating immigrants

Immigrants are scapegoated, not viewed as adding colour to the national identity whereas previously they were recognised as enhancing cultural wealth (*Chile*). We accept the false perspective of a radical dichotomy between taking all migrants in and letting them all die (*Italy*). Difference is experienced as creating a power imbalance with narcissism giving rise to undeserved feelings of superiority, hate and aggression (*Chile*). We project our fears and neuroses onto the unknown other, preferring to see them as chasing dreams rather than escaping nightmares (*Italy*). Or we forget about their plight as we focus instead on gender difference (*Australia*). Immigration was once an heroic voyage in search of a new life (*Italy*); now it is a threat to jobs and welfare benefits meriting marginalisation and exclusion (*Chile*).

Disengagement

However, some distrust using insecurity as a pretext for withdrawing from engagement: it is a convenient defence against taking a stand or voicing a clear position (*Israel*). Obfuscation and guilt are connected (*Israel*). Others see withdrawal as the only option: tuning out, averting our gaze are coping strategies against unbearable reality (*UK*). Our phones are a defence against conversation that might reveal difference (*Hungary*). We are experiencing emotional drought, darkness, disappointment, despair. It is a struggle for collective psychological survival, keeping everything hidden and unspoken (*Turkey*). Our retreat reflects an oscillation between confusion and clarity: we feel equally uncomfortable in the overcrowded, deafening and dangerous public spaces and the deathly silence of solitude. The latter is a space where we lose all identity and spontaneity (*Ireland*) and where we stay until we reach a level of misery that draws us back to reality (*Hungary*).

Disconnection

By disengaging, we avoid the anticipation of terror (*UK*) and the feelings of despair that nothing can be done (*Israel*). However, it makes us feel homeless through being denied the support of once-reliable social structures. Digitisation has undermined human connectedness (*South Africa*). We are witnessing social amnesia and madness: independent thinking is not allowed (*Turkey*). People resort to technology rather than human contact to get rid of feelings of isolation (*Bulgaria*). We yearn for the feeling of

community, of being cared for (*Finland*). We want a sense of community and belonging, and of being welcoming to newcomers (*Germany*). We seek safe spaces for dialogue where deep buried values can be retrieved, hope can be retrieved from despair and fear and isolation contained (*Serbia*). Overcoming our fear and anger is like dancing on the volcano and riding on the waves (*Germany*).

Tribal conflicts

The storm brings change, an object of hope and fear (*Ireland*). We crave certainty amid the uncertainty. We want to move and be moved and for that we need to live dangerously, on the edge (*Ireland*). The world has become a battlefield again, where ethnic and religious identities take precedence over national identity. Nationality is not a unifying idea any more (*Turkey*). This is an ongoing war about world power – a contest between values (*Faroe Islands*). We feel forced to take sides, to take on sub-identities of group, community and political affiliation even though we want to stay in the in-between space (*Turkey*). There is a split between city and country, young and old, men and women; a confrontation between flags marking different identities (*Spain*). Globalisation allows us new forms of identification across borders that are being contested as debates of right and wrong rather than as dialogues exploring difference (*Faroe Islands*).

Gender conflict

There is a power struggle between men and women (*Faroe Islands*). The old patriarchy is ending but there is little enthusiasm for matriarchy (*Denmark*). We want more influence from female figures but also notice the absence of male authority (*Australia*). Feminism empowers women and creates danger for men (*India*). We are witnessing a significant redefinition of what it means to be a man in relation to a woman at work (*UK*). Families based on equality now have men and women competing to be best at the different roles (*Denmark*). New roles have to be negotiated as stereotypes break down, stripping out the content from traditional ideas of man and woman (*Serbia*) and leaving boys and men struggling to find a role (*Hungary*). The gender scene has been radicalised and led to a polarization of views of men versus women. There is a sense of having to be very careful when talking about it (*Denmark*).

Dredging up the past

The young need the wisdom of the old but do not listen (*Finland*). The old are concerned about the education of the young (*Spain*). Each generation distorts history, allocating responsibility differently (*Serbia*) and demanding retroactive vengeance for past crimes previously overlooked (*UK*). We seem to be fighting history – prosecuting bad behaviour from the past (*Australia*). Some of these are family taboos: the abhorrent views and behaviour of previous generations, deeds with consequences that are denied and unprocessed (*Hungary*). However, we all carry around unprocessed traumas from the past that shape who we are. These need to be faced rather than avoided (*Hungary*). Can we respect difference between generations even where views are offensive? There has to be outrage as well as speaking out (*Ireland*).

Generational conflict

In the generation gap, neither listens to the other. Both generations feel unrecognised – due to the narcissism of youth and the invisibility of old age (*Italy*). There is a tendency

towards over-vulnerability and oversensitivity to others, as feelings of shame and failure are easily evoked (*Bulgaria*). Identity politics are a polarization mechanism making like-minded people turn against each other. There is a tension between young and old – a new young people's revolt (*Denmark*). The young don't think, they just want to be on the side of the majority (*Ireland*). It's hard to know how to provide a supportive environment for bringing up your children when society doesn't provide it (*Bulgaria*). Older generations feel 'survivor guilt' at their privilege and plenty but also think they earned it through acquiring the survival skills (*UK*). It is difficult for them to steer a course for the young, as the modern world is uncharted territory for them (*Italy*). Solutions from the past apply to a world that will soon no longer exist (*Spain*).

Theme 4: Active adaptation

The three mutually reinforcing forms of maladaptation described in the first three themes can, if left unchecked, create a 'sealing off' effect that, in attempting to dampen the turbulence, also limits the potential for feedback control loops. Feedback loops are the mechanisms that facilitate beneficial adaptation through self-regulation and self-direction. Without them, the system risks becoming closed, in which event entropy will prevail.

However, the state of disequilibrium caused by environmental turbulence also provides the necessary conditions for active adaptation, experienced as a continuous, enduring state of meta-transition. Such adaptation requires conscious planning, guided by the emerging logic of cultural values, organisational philosophies and ecological strategies. It also needs purposeful attempts to shape the future in participative-democratic settings. It depends on citizens developing superordinate values with overriding significance for wider society. These should be deployed to reconnect means to ends through meaningful tactics and strategies, reunite warring factions in a common cause and create new hope of solving intractable problems by the institutionalisation and entrenchment of emerging adaptive patterns (Baburoglu, 1988).

Theme 4: Current adaptive dynamics

Reconnection

There are signs of a new maturity, in which we are developing new ideas of how to be useful to each other (*Denmark*). We see cause for hope in the potential energy of small groups as the unit of change (*South Africa*). To be mobilised from passive to active, we need to find our own horsepower (*Germany*). Staying in our private worlds will only bring disappointment (*Chile*); we need to lose our fear of organising, thinking and acting in groups to find a collective 'new way of doing things' (*Chile*). Life is 'a mosaic to be composed' (*Italy*), representing the possibility of making a difference through small things (*Israel*). Society is a mixture of positive and negatives: we can't have one without the other (*Germany*). All we can do is work for what we desire one day at a time (*Ireland*). This requires a sacrifice of ideological purism (*Chile*). We must ask ourselves what we are willing to lose, take a step back and look again with different eyes (*Italy*). This creates the possibility of *chimerisation* – engineering new societal antibodies that will accept new categories and paradigms (*Italy*). If we want change, we must be willing to see where we have gone wrong, be brave, pragmatic and confident. Change is led not by heroic leaders but by those whose example we can follow (*Germany*).

Social growth

Social growth is only possible if we build a collaborative economy in which we can accept responsibility for each other's happiness (*Spain*). It needs resilience and creativity (*Italy*) and a willingness to provide solutions as well as diagnose what's wrong (*Spain*). We should dispute the right of others to decide who has a say (*Ireland*), and effect a downward transfer of responsibilities from national to local, community and family level (*Serbia*). This is where the future can be made better, through the work of small thoughtful communities (*Serbia*). Small groups are like undergrowth – a spontaneous, productive and creative movement that spreads (*Italy*). In groups, we feel closeness from direct human contact, which allows us to express our emotions freely (*Italy*), glimpse the beauty of shared awareness (*Italy*) and find the courage to speak up (*Faroe Islands*).

Social repair

Re-engaging with the world through small gestures (*Italy*) gives us hope of encouraging a more caring and informed public (*Canada*). We desire emotional stability that comes from shared values (*Hungary*), ethics, meaning and culture (*Italy*). We doubt the sufficiency of individual efforts (*Finland*) but groups help us defend against such anxieties (*Italy*). In clusters (*Finland*), we connect through sentience and can contribute to something that is bigger than any one of us can see or understand (*Finland*). It is only through real relationships that we can create an in-between space through communication, words, gestures and tones of voice – a sort of 'demilitarised zone' where negotiations can occur (*Finland*). This enables us to build ethical bridges to achieve good things (*Finland*). It is a version of *Kintsugi* – the Japanese art of repairing fragmented pottery that treats breakage and repair as part of the object's history and beauty (*Italy*). Moving from the dark side to the bright side of the moon requires local not global action – it takes self-authorisation and collaboration to enhance the positives and overcome the negatives (*Germany*).

Social life

The mutual recognition of what is valuable and useful about small groups makes us optimistic without being able to say why (*UK*). In the in-between spaces, we can be curious about the other, exploring newness like infants in transitional spaces (*Finland*) and talk about what is missing from the public discourse (*Finland*). It helps us realise that Listening Posts are not just 'purging spaces' for guilt, shame and fear; there is room to acknowledge our pleasures, desires and hopes without being stifled by political correctness (fear of disapproval by the group) or guilt at the idea that we could possibly be happy in the current political climate (*Chile*). We are all searching for joy, for something or someone to love and for meaning and direction in life (*Switzerland*). It is helpful for us to rediscover simple, child-like pleasures from natural events such as snowfall (*Switzerland*) and try to balance out our pessimism by making space for optimism, joy and gratitude.

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