SHARED SOCIETIES CONCEPT:

LESSONS FROM RESPONSES TO CURRENT CHALLENGES OF DIVISIVE ATTITUDES AND RHETORIC AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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The Shared Societies Concept emerged around 2007. It was a response to the continuing marginalisation and exclusion of weaker communities and pervasiveness of inter-group conflict, with all the negative consequences.

In this paper I want to look at the lessons we can draw from the Shared Societies Concept in relation to emerging challenges such as the growth in divisive attitudes, rhetoric and behaviour and the Covid-19 pandemic, and equally what we can learn from those experiences about how a Shared Society can be created and maintained.

I will first say a few words about the concept and then look at the lessons we are beginning to learn from the pandemic. At this stage we are dependent on anecdotal evidence but that points us to phenomena that are worthy of more in-depth analysis and study.

PART 1: THE SHARED SOCIETIES CONCEPT

Shared Societies is an attempt to develop a new framework for addressing marginalisation and exclusion of identity groups in a holistic and multidimensional way so that the society works for everyone. It is clear that there are many factors leading to community fragmentation, many of them reinforcing each other, and therefore the solution must be multifaceted. In that sense we have to go beyond specific sectoral remedies such as good relations programmes, social protection, economic investment, fair employment, equal access to opportunity, anti-poverty programmes, human security, conflict resolution, education, etc. They are all important, but none are sufficient in themselves and, if done in the wrong way, they can actually reinforce and accentuate the deep divisions that exist. We have to understand how they are interrelated.

Like other emerging concepts, Shared Societies was the product of critiques of existing approaches to social exclusion. I was invited to work on these issues with the Club de Madrid in 2007 and we established a specific programme which is ongoing (though I have moved on since late 2019), and we developed materials that are the most comprehensive articulation of the concept and which can be found on the Club de Madrid website[1].

While we started by considering the negative – social exclusion – we quickly turned to the other side of the coin – a Shared Society – and we define it as:

> The term Shared Society indicates the way of life, culture, values, customs, practices and benefits of the society are not owned by any one group but belong to all. Therefore everyone feels at home.

We recognised that there are many elements which are characteristic of a Shared Society:

- access to opportunities,
- economic security,
- fairness,

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[1] http://www.clubmadrid.org/programa/shared-societies-project/

- fulfilment,
- happiness,
- health,
- mutual respect,
- mutual support,
- peace,
- sustainable environment,
- wellbeing.

Equally a shared society is characterised by the eradication as far as possible of:

- want,
- ignorance,
- idleness,
- squalor,
- disease,
- poverty,
- drudgery,
- domination and oppression,
- violence.

The first five were identified by William Beveridge in 1942 during the Second World War as the "Five Giants" which had to be beaten simultaneously if deprivation was to be overcome. He had been commissioned by the United Kingdom Government to prepare a report about social services,[2] and went further, providing a vision for the country as it faced an uncertain future and a blueprint for social policy after the war.

What is needed to achieve such a society?

We identified four guiding principles that need to underlie all actions and all relationships:

- respect for the dignity of every individual,
- respect for human rights and the rule of law,
- equality and fairness,
- democratic participation.

We also identified ten areas of policy which needed to be addressed, which we called the Ten Commitments that have to be made:

Institutional Arrangements

- I. Locate responsibility for social cohesion within government structures.

- II. Create opportunities for minorities to be consulted.

Safeguards

- III. Monitor structures and policies to ensure they are supportive of social cohesion.

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[2] "Social Insurance and Allied Services , Report by Sir William Beveridge" *CMND 640,* 1942
https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1942beveridge.asp

- IV. Ensure the legal framework protects the rights of the individual.

- V. Deal with economic disadvantages faced by those discriminated against.

Service Provision

- VI. Ensure that physical environments create opportunities for social interaction.

- VII. Develop an education system that demonstrates a commitment to a Shared Society.

Intercommunity Development

- VIII. Initiate a process to encourage the creation of a shared vision of society.

- IX. Promote respect, understanding and appreciation of diversity.

- X. Take steps to reduce tensions and hostility between communities.

These are just a summary and a fuller definition of each of the Commitments can be found in the Project materials together with suggested options for action. We can see that these Commitments address many of the issues that are addressed in successful conflict transformation processes and in part they were drawn from experience of managing intercommunity conflict. What we are offering is a conceptual framework that captures the interlinkages between them. Following Beveridge, no single strategy can bring about a Shared Society.

For example, there is increasing interest in the idea of a Universal Basic Income, on the grounds that it will reduce deprivation (Commitment V) but also that it will give the recipients the economic security to pursue their aspirations and live fulfilling and productive lives. In Finland a pilot programme to provide Universal Basic Income was stopped because it was felt that most of those who received it did not use the opportunity in what was considered to be a purposeful way. Financial support in itself may not be sufficient. It requires a culture and values (Commitment VIII) that validates and encourages a sense of personal responsibility and purposeful pursuit of personal aspirations and personal fulfilment (Commitment IV).[3] It also requires an education system (Commitment VII) that helps to develop these qualities and provides appropriate skills and understanding and the removal of obstacles (Commitments IV and V) to pursue them.

Equally, action related to one commitment needs to be taken in a way which enhances rather than undermines progress in others. For example dialogue (in relation to Commitments VIII or IX) which does not take account of power imbalances will only make them more salient for those who feel their concerns in this regard are being ignored.

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[3] Enspiral (https://enspiral.com/), based in New Zealand, is one example of a network/community with a vision to support people "to spend their lives working to solve the greatest challenges of our time" and has supported hundreds of people to launch and build all sorts of initiatives, projects and world-changing ventures. While mainly linking people at a professional level it demonstrates that at all levels people will achieve more with the support of a collaborative network that encourages, mentors, and provides information and resources.

To avoid these unintended consequences it is advisable that a Shared Society Audit is carried out to check if proposals will actually contribute to the strengthening of a Shared Society. This applies both to the policy process and to peace negotiations.

Is a Shared Society a realistic goal and does it work in practice? In principle we can expect a Shared Society to be more resilient and ready to address crises and challenges because it has generated significant social capital[4] and public engagement, which can mobilised when a whole of society response, involving both government and public action, is needed. To consider these questions empirically, the rest of this paper will look at two global challenges that have emerged and consider if the Shared Societies Concept has anything meaningful to say in relation to them and if our experiences of dealing with them has provided insights into the concept: The two issues are the emergence of hostile and divisive attitudes, rhetoric and behaviour; and the Covid-19 pandemic.

PART 2: EMERGING CHALLENGES

2.1 HOSTILE AND DIVISIVE ATTITUDES, RHETORIC AND BEHAVIOUR

Shared Societies have existed to a greater or lesser extent throughout human history, and when the Shared Societies Concept was first specifically articulated in the first decade of the 21st century, it reflected a widespread aspiration at that time in favour of co-operation, diversity, pluralism, tolerance and co-existence, both locally, nationally and internationally, though it critiqued the current assumptions about how that is to be achieved. However that consensus could not be taken for granted, and already there were growing expressions of an oppositional outlook in public discourse, which was hostile to respect for difference and consideration for the needs of others, and marked by a more confrontational and aggressive tone. But this also was not new. Such attitudes have always existed and surfaced as a prominent force in Stalinism and Fascism in Europe from the 1920s and 30s, and McCarthyism in the United States from the late 1950s. In recent times the tea party protests of 2009-2010 in the USA aimed to give expression in the Republican Party to the views of those who felt their sectional interests were being ignored by the party and should be given prominence. As a result of its failure to have significant impact on the party, support shifted to Donald Trump, as someone outside the party establishment, in his successful campaign to be the party's candidate in the 2016 presidential election.

While the existence of such views is not new, they have become more prominent and challenge and undermine efforts to build a Shared Society. In finding an appropriate response it is important to understand the underlying dynamics: the dissatisfaction which is being expressed; the demagogues who capitalise on it, and, today, its dissemination through social media and the use of big data.

Dissatisfaction

None of us likes to think we are unkind and hostile to others. We all have generous and caring aspects to our personalities but we also have suspicious and defensive aspects to our nature. The circumstances that we find ourselves in will reinforce one or the other tendency. Hostile and negative attitudes towards others are often expressions of dissatisfaction and

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[4] Putnam, Robert D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,* New York: Simon and Schuster).

feelings of being marginalised and left behind compared to other groups – a form of defensive aggression. We can think of those living in declining industrial or agricultural communities who feel modernization is passing them by and is undermining their status, life style, values and culture; or minority groups who want to be accepted as full citizens but feel blocked by subtle and not so subtle prejudice and discrimination. The situations and world views are very different, but both feel an existential threat.[5] Unpredictable and uncontrolled challenges, real or perceived, cause chronic stress and reactions can follow a typical pattern of increasing disaffection, hostility and militancy:

> **Disillusionment**: We all have hopes and aspirations we want to pursue, and leaders may have promised us opportunities to achieve those aspirations. They can be as simple as providing a good home and education for our families so they in turn can pursue their aspirations. When we find ourselves blocked by circumstances, such as economic downturn or loss of employment, we can easily become disillusioned.

> **Sense of having been failed**: We are likely to believe that we have tried as hard as we can to fulfil our aspirations, and so we are likely to believe that we have been let down or failed by others who blocked our opportunities.

> **Scapegoating**: We look for someone else to blame. Given the human propensity to be suspicious of strangers, we are likely to blame those who look different to us for taking jobs or undermining our status, culture and values.

> **Distrust of political establishment:** We also blame and reject political leaders and employers who promised much but failed to deliver, and we feel abandoned by them.

> **Distrust of experts:** Equally**,** we may hear experts providing explanations which do not equate with our perception of the problems, and their solutions may require us to make changes which seem unfeasible or unfair. We may conclude that experts do not understand our situation or take account of our interests, but represent others.

> **Distrust of evidence:** The evidence on which experts rely may be statistics or other research which seem remote and intangible compared to what we experience – our "felt reality." Therefore we trust the "evidence of our own eyes."

> **Distrust of rational argument:** If we are not articulate or accustomed to debate, we may struggle to engage with those who can argue fluently and present complex ideas. Their views can seem counterintuitive compared to our felt reality. We therefore may conclude that rational discourse is a way of denying our opinions and

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[5] Yuval Noah Harari, 2018 "Why Technology Favours Tyranny" *The Atlantic* October 2018 succinctly describes such patterns by saying "Perhaps in the twenty-first century populist revolts will be staged not against an economic elite that exploits people but against an economic elite that does not need them anymore. This may well be a losing battle. It is much harder to struggle against irrelevance than against exploitation." On the other hand Hannah Arendt argues that totalitarian systems are able to maintain control if people feel "superfluous": "Older than the superfluous wealth was another by-product of capitalist production: the human debris that every crisis, following invariably upon each period of industrial growth, eliminated permanently from producing society. Men who had become permanently idle were as superfluous to the community as the owners of superfluous wealth." *The Origins of Totalitarianism* p.150, 1958, Cleveland, Meriden Books.

our relevance and instead support those who offer simple solutions that reflect our opinions: demagogues.

Many will not be vocal in expressing their views in such circumstances but they are susceptible to and support those who encourage them to adopt extremist positions sometimes involving aggressive language, which disrupts open discussion of the issues, and, ultimately, encourages the use of violence: demagogues.

Demagoguery

Nationalistic populism can easily touch the uncertainty that many citizens feel about their situation, but seldom provides solutions to their problems, which increases the frustration, alienation and anger. Demagogues, by definition, seek support by appealing to the desires, prejudices and fears of ordinary people, but demagoguery is a pernicious influence because it does not help people to understand and assess their fears but offers leadership that claims to have the answer:

➢ They have the effect of amplifying and reinforcing the fears and concerns that people have, whether based on reality or not.

➢ They discourage consideration of the complexities of the situation and realities that need to be taken into account, so they do not help their followers to reflect on the situation and other perspectives.

➢ They ignore or suppress the underlying concerns and needs of their supporters about the impact of modernisation and social change, and instead identify scapegoats.

➢ They seem to validate chauvinistic and nationalist sentiments which people may have but about which they have hitherto felt uncomfortable. When they are expressed by people who seem authoritative, then they become more acceptable.

➢ They offer vague promises and simple solutions which may damage the interests of other concerned parties and are unlikely to make a real difference to their followers' lives.

➢ They encourage authoritarian deference to the leader and the movement they lead.

It is not surprising that disillusioned disaffected people will gravitate towards such demagogues. They are looking for people they can trust and have the capacity to deal with their concerns. They want to gain or regain meaning and purpose in their lives. They want to be treated with respect and dignity. They want certainty in a complex world and have high expectations of those who tell them that they understand their concerns and offer them hope and simple solutions. But in fact demagogues, by looking for followers and discouraging them from thinking for themselves and taking responsibility, are disempowering and patronizing. If, as is likely, their solutions are impractical and they are unable to solve the problems, they leave people more disillusioned.

Demagogues do not look for win/win solutions but "winner takes all." It follows that they are comfortable if those who disagree with them and challenge their positions also adopt uncompromising stances and it is difficult to avoid doing so in situations of heightened tension and hostility, making the conflict more extreme.

As noted earlier the link between disaffection and demagoguery is not a new phenomenon, but social media has added a new dimension.

Dissemination and Big Data

Social media has provided a voice for those who feel marginalised and ignored and demagogues have been more effective in reaching those people and harnessing their support, by using social media and, specifically, by using big data to identify views and opinions that will appeal and targeting those who are most receptive. Those expressing hostility towards other sections of society are not the only ones who use social media (and the traditional media) to amplify their views and connect to like-minded people. Advertising, religious movements, social movements, protest movements and other politicians have also become more "media savvy." It is noteworthy that a number of those in the USA and elsewhere responsible for establishing agencies that use the internet to promote right-wing views did so because of their "unwavering commitment to neutralising left-wing bias in the news, media and popular culture" and their frustration that President Bill Clinton had been successful in using the new systems of information technology to enhance his popular support.[6] They were determined to challenge that.

Social media gives everyone a platform, which, from a Shared Societies Perspective, should be a positive development and it is important that the views of those disaffected are given proper attention. But it is most effective at communicating short simple statements and also gives prominence to slogans, pictures and short video clips to the detriment of thoughtful discussion of issues. And on their own platform on the internet, people can be as aggressive and offensive as they wish without seeing the consequences or, until recently, any effective control. By repetition, oppositional attitudes and views are entrenched and uncompromising and rigid tendencies in public debate and the policy process are amplified. This works for demagogues, who, as has been noted, tend to present issues in a stark, polarised and uncompromising way ignoring the nuances and points of view on each side of the argument because in that way they can mobilise their supporters, diminish their doubts and encourage them to coalesce around a simple message and solution. In the process truth and accuracy are manipulated and undermined.

In ancient Greece, Aeschylus said that in war, truth is the first casualty. Winning can become so important that some parties will believe that misinformation, distortions, half-truths and lies are acceptable and they are unscrupulous in trying to influence and manipulate the public. This not only happens in war-time. We have seen that hate speech has often been used as a preparation for war, as in the Balkans in the 1990s, or ethnic cleansing, as in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and Rwanda in 1994. Misinformation has also been common in the political and commercial spheres, as Vance Packard documented back in 1957 in his book on the advertising industry, "The Hidden Persuaders." We can also think of the fantasies about little green men from space that were reported with apparent seriousness by the "National Enquirer" in the USA in the 1960s and 70s, which may have accustomed people to false stories. But misinformation has been taken to a new level by modern electronic communications where any information, pictures and videos can be

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[6] See, for example, Carole Cadwalladr: "Robert Mercer: the big data billionaire waging war on mainstream media" *The Guardian* 26.02.2017:
https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/feb/26/robert-mercer-breitbart-war-on-media-steve-bannon-donald-trump-nigel-farage

altered and made to look authoritative and it is difficult to check the source and reliability of material. As far back as 1964 Packard also warned of the threats to privacy posed by new technologies such as computerized filing, modern surveillance techniques and methods for influencing human behaviour in *The Naked Society*.[7]

Responses from a Shared Societies Perspective

Unfortunately these dangers to fair and open debate have not been addressed and in the last decade these voices have become louder and seem to dominate public discourse and have had a profound impact in many countries.

It is tempting to assume that the way to counter such influencers is by copying their methods and trying to compete with clever appealing slogans. However well-intentioned such an approach may be, it is disempowering and patronizing. In purely practical terms it will not work, because the demagogues already connect with and reinforce the fears and concerns of their listeners who are likely to ignore alternative views. The resources required would be enormous. In any case it is very difficult to break the self-sustaining mutual reinforcement between demagogues and their followers. People do not easily change their ideas or their allegiances and a clever slogan is unlikely to make a difference. It also does not take account of how people change. We need to recognise insights from fields such as neuroscience, behavioural economics (e.g., nudge theory) and moral philosophy, knowledge resistance and strategic ignorance.[8] We know that people are mainly guided by emotional responses to situations and their reasoning capacities are mainly applied to justifying those initial assumptions rather than critically assessing them.[9] So we are all rather impervious to rational argument. It is therefore appropriate that the Shared Societies Approach is based on engaging with the humanity in people, their concerns and their feelings. In addition, the Shared Societies Approach rejects forms of communication which attempt to manage people, which, as a form of manipulation, is disrespectful and disregards their capacity to think for themselves. Instead the Shared Societies Concept offers an alternative response.

From its inception, the Shared Societies Concept is based on the recognition that in a healthy society the views of **all** sections of society are taken into account, not least those who defend their sectional interests in the belief that their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups. We have noted that a Shared Society is one where people feel at home and that they belong. That means that they are **all** respected, valued, treated with consideration, their views and concerns are heard and they can contribute – they have voice and agency. In efforts to transform inter-group relations attention is often rightly directed at the grievances of disadvantaged minorities, who feel their aspirations are blocked by prejudice and discrimination, but sustainable futures also requires the involvement of those sections of the dominant group who feel that their perceived status and privileges are

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[7] In 1960, in *The Waste Maker*, Packard was also prescient about another issue which has become a critical current concern: consumerism/over-consumption, planned obsolescence and the problem of waste.
[8] Klintman, Mikael (2019) *Knowledge resistance: How we avoid insight from others Manchester:* Manchester University Press*;* McGoey, Linsey (2019) *The Unknowers: How Strategic Ignorance Rules the World*, London: Zed Books Ltd**.;** Thunström, L., Nordström, J., Shogren, and van 't Veld, K. (2014) "Strategic ignorance of environmental harm and social norms," *Revue d'Économie Politique*,124:195-214.
[9] Haidt, Jonathan (2012) *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion,* New York: Pantheon*.*

threatened by change and whose concerns are often overlooked or dismissed as bigoted and racist. Both groups are in different ways "outsiders."

Therefore, before discussing contentious issues it is important to change the form of discourse and the ways of engaging, from confrontation and aggression to joint inclusive processes of shared analysis and problem solving, considering the concerns and needs of all parties and how they can be met. This is what mediators are trying to encourage in conflicting parties in order to move into negotiations. How does it happen? We know that the parties in conflict seldom enter negotiation willingly. More often it happens when they recognise that they cannot achieve their aims in any other way. But this may take a long time to happen and whey they do enter negotiations, they do so grudgingly and reluctantly, still hoping to "win," as they see it. In such circumstances the resulting negotiations often ignore the underlying sources of conflict and the requirements for a long-term solution – a Shared Society for all. Peace processes typically only include those with a power of veto[10] and the negotiations deal with sharing power and resources between those present, and other stakeholders are left out. Those left out may not have a veto but their dissatisfaction may eventually lead to discontent which undermines any settlement.

From a Shared Societies Perspective it is necessary to identify ways in which one can engage with such individuals and groups and understand the elements that shape their world views.

How can that be done in wider social discourse?

From what has already been said about the Concept of Shared Societies we can identify a number of basic principles to follow.

We want to be treated with dignity and respect, even if we are not showing dignity and respect to others. If people feel disregarded and irrelevant, ignoring them or telling them they are wrong, only reinforces that feeling, and increases their inflexibility. It helps if they can find **a sense of agency** – that they can and should play a part in making the situation better.

We do not want to be judged. It has been noted already that we all have kind and caring aspects to our personalities and we tend to see ourselves in this way. We are on the whole altruistic, generous and considerate to those closest to us and only become more reserved, distrustful and unwelcoming towards those who are outside our own cultural groups and networks. We find many ways to justify this and would be shocked to be told or treated as if we are bitter, prejudiced, selfish, unreasonable and wrong in our attitude to others. Therefore, we should try to **avoid being judgemental**, even when disagreeing.

Our attitudes and views are fuelled by underlying concerns which we may not acknowledge to ourselves. For example, politeness can be a form of controlled anger, and anger often is an expression of underlying resentment, fear or hurt. It is important to **connect to the underlying concerns** which may have little to do with what can be seen on the surface.

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[10] Security Council Resolution 1325 identified one section of the population – women - who were often excluded and "Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict" (paragraph1): http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325

Rather than joining in a clash between competing arguments and competing interests with our own counter-arguments, which only intensifies the polarization, we can introduce the understanding that there are many aspects to the situation which need to be taken into account, including the concerns of all interested parties, and in this way create a joint problem-solving approach. We can do this in many ways:

- ✓ Stress that things are never black and white, even if they may seem that way.

- ✓ Show confidence that solutions can be found – which take account of the different solutions proposed by each interest group, but going beyond those solutions.

- ✓ Share stories which focus on real, lived experience – one's own and others' – as opposed to opinions. They can describe situations from different perspectives. (Constructing narratives is more dangerous as they are often constructed to support one point of view. They do not encourage critical thinking, and will be ignored or rejected by those who have a different perspective.)

- ✓ Encourage critical thinking and challenge all points of view by asking questions:

  - o What is the evidence for the views expressed?
  - o Why do you assume that others hold the views that you attribute to them? Have you any evidence?
  - o What would happen if we introduce your proposal? What would be the benefit and what would be the cost? To you? To your society? To others?
  - o What would be the impact of other proposals?

- ✓ Encourage questioning of the motives and interests of the person making an argument. Why do they take the positions they do? A mediator/facilitator can provide a model by inviting people to examine his or her motives and interests.

- ✓ Listen to the concerns of all interested parties.

- ✓ Engage on the human level, person to person.

It is also important to remember that involvement and participation is not only a matter of rights. It is also necessary for the effective functioning of society. The state cannot manage everything. Even the most caring government will not fully understand the needs of its citizens if it does not listen to them. There are many issues where the people have to be actively engaged and take responsibility for their own actions and their impact on the community as a whole. In these circumstances the most important role of the state is to be an enabler and encourager. Examples include some aspects of curtailing pollution and climate change[11] and the recent pandemic which brings us to the second recent challenge which we can look at through a Shared Societies Lens.

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[11] The relevance of the Shared Societies Concept to environmental sustainability and climate change was considered by a working group that was convened by the Club de Madrid in 2016: http://www.clubmadrid.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Shared_Societies-Report-13.pdf

2.2: COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Humanity has always been at risk of the emergence of new diseases to which people have not already built up natural immunity, and for which there are not existing remedies, either in terms of vaccines or understanding of effective public health measures. History gives examples from the past such as bubonic plague (the Black Death) in the 1340s and 1660s, Spanish flu in 1918, and more recently Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and Ebola. In late 2019 a new strain of coronavirus (COVID-19) appeared. It has proved very virulent so it has spread very quickly around the world, and while the mortality rate is fairly low it is sufficient to have led by 16 August 2020 to an estimated global death count of 771,518.[12] In the absence of effective treatment the consensus among medical experts is that the only way to limit the disease is to avoid direct person-to-person contact. To achieve this requires closing almost all aspects of normal life, including travel, workplaces, educational establishments, places of worship, entertainment and hospitality, exempting only essential services. This in turn requires the willingness of the public to support such measures. However the negative effect of such restrictions on the economy and personal and social wellbeing cannot be underestimated. At the start of the pandemic people did not really know what would be the appropriate response, and there was some reluctance to introduce restrictions and a few political leaders, such as the President of Brazil, have resisted such measures, and prioritised keeping the economy operating. However most countries did adopt strategies based on minimising social contact, and it is remarkable how easily it was possible to build consensus around this strategy.

The experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has illuminated many key theoretical, policy and practice questions in many disciplines, not only medicine and health, but also human behaviour, social systems and governance: what strategies have been most effective in reducing infection and mortality? Was the strategy of minimising social contact by closing down most public spaces, workplaces and events, and maintaining social distancing the right response? Why has the virus had a differential impact on each section of society, and is this an indicator of limited progress in achieving a Shared Society and greater equality? Has the febrile atmosphere in some countries amplified and fuelled other tensions, such as racial prejudice and inequality, exemplified by the increased activity of the Black Lives Matter movement, first in the USA and then across the world? What has been the impact of the pandemic on "far right"/nationalist groups and their capacity to connect to prevailing public sentiment and gain popular support for their ideas?[13] Has the pandemic been used by some political leaders to acquire greater powers[14] or to introduce policies which might have been challenged at other times as contrary to social or environmental considerations?[15] How has

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[12] Based on figures from the Coronavirus Resource Center at Johns Hopkins University, considered the most reliable source of data on the pandemic: https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html

[13] See, for example, Stelzenmüller, Constanze "Germany's far-right a major loser from Covid-19", **Financial Times** 18 June 2020 https://www.ft.com/content/d79a157d-c1bc-49e4-a8b1-f8800fc4f012

[14] See, for example, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-53062177

[15] See, for example, https://www.thequint.com/news/environment/save-amazon-of-east-assams-plea-against-mining-in-dehing-patkai-rainforests
https://www.coalnet.in/coal-mining-allowed-by-nbwl-in-part-of-assams-elephant-reserve/#

Covid-19 had an impact on other humanitarian issues and been an indirect cause of deaths.[16]

This paper does not propose to consider any of these questions, important though they are. Covid-19 has provided an amazingly rich source of examples and learning on how communities come together and how relationships between the people and their leaders can rapidly and radically change, and those experiences are the focus of the rest of this paper. Do we have a better understanding of what has been happening if we look at the responses and reactions to them through a Shared Society Lens? And what do we learn about Shared Societies as a result of Covid-19?

Most of the information we have at this stage is anecdotal, but nonetheless important for identifying the phenomena that will need further study after the pandemic. Firstly it is evident that in many countries a Shared Society emerged very quickly, which in itself is significant as it demonstrates that a Shared Society is feasible and can quickly develop. It may be ironic, but not surprising, that a sense of solidarity has grown during the Covid-19 pandemic, even though it is a time when it is necessary for people to minimise direct face-to-face contact. A crisis does bring people together and the elements of a Shared Society are strengthened, as can also be seen in times of war. A common threat creates a sense of common purpose to meet the challenge; there is a recognition that through no fault of their own many people will need help; and it minimises concern about freeloaders or people who take advantage of the society without contributing, which in normal times raises reservations about the desirability of a Shared Society. That it can happen at a time of social distancing is a salutary reminder that personal interaction can contribute to the development of a Shared Society but the sense that each is contributing to the common cause is a more important stimulus.

What have we seen happening in practice which brings people together in a virtual sense and in turn reinforces the sense of community and even global solidarity?

Practical responses:

- At the beginning of the restrictions on movement in Italy, people made music on their balconies.
- In the United Kingdom, a ritual clapping for the health service and health workers took place at 8.00 p.m. every Thursday evening.
- Across the globe people became even more connected for work and pleasure, using Zoom and other internet platforms for video and audio conferencing and meetings.
- In many countries people offered help to older or ill neighbours bringing them food, medicine and other essentials.
- Good news stories such as these were widely distributed on social media and the mainstream news services.
- Leaders - media, political, commercial, religious, cultural – attempted to influence the development or strengthening of a co-operative inclusive response (in effect, adopting a Shared Societies Approach) in different ways: by example; through encouragement; new policies; releasing funds; press conferences; and addresses to the nation. Many had advisers to provide insights from behavioural science into the

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[16] "Hunger Virus: How Covid-19 Is Fuelling Hunger In A Hungry World", *Oxfam Media Briefing*: 9 July 2020: https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621023/mb-the-hunger-virus-090720-en.pdf

best approach to gain public co-operation in the measures adopted as it was recognised that the willingness of the public to change their behaviour was an essential element.[17]

The contribution of leaders:

- Assessment and analysis of risk: Most countries took the threat from infection very seriously and introduced social distancing measures, while a few encouraged life to go on as normal. It was not always clear why some leaders chose the latter approach. They may have assessed the risks from Covid-19 against the economic risks and the risks to social, health and personal wellbeing and decided to accept the risk of an epidemic. But few made that choice explicit[18] and some either denied and minimised the significance of the virus or avoided and ignored the issue altogether.
- Some imposed draconian measures, imposing very strict controls as in China and some other countries in East Asia. In this way they reinforced public awareness that the threat was very grave.
- Most imposed detailed rules with some level of enforcement. This approach also helped to encourage a sense that the pandemic was grave.
- Some set out guidelines and then mobilised people and their sense of personal responsibility to implement them, as in Sweden.
- Some, particularly in Asia, introduced thorough procedures to identify outbreaks and then limit their spread, mainly through testing for the disease and then tracing and tracking others who had been in contact with those infected and requiring them to quarantine. This demanded a high level of public compliance.
- Many countries introduced additional measures to mitigate the damage done by the restrictions through social protection measures for those who could no longer work and compensation schemes for employers. Such measures were mostly introduced in a blanket way without taking into account the most desirable economic activities to protect or particular sectors to support, but in fact these funds could be used to support other government long-term priorities and concerns – "doing double duty" as Joseph Stiglitz[19] has called it. Some countries chose not to implement such measures, but others did not have the resources or capacity to do so even if they wished.[20]
- Most tried to build trust and confidence that the disease could be defeated.

Salient factors in the different responses to Covid-19?

Of course not all countries managed to achieve a co-operative and inclusive response, so what factors might have made the difference? It is a working hypothesis that the countries that were most effective in building that response where already Shared Societies or quickly

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[17] For example on 22 March the UK government released a paper that gave advice on how best to implement the measures being proposed: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/options-for-increasing-adherence-to-social-distancing-measures-22-march-2020

[18] President Jair Bolsanaro of Brazil is one who did prioritise the economy even when Brazil had one of the highest rates of infection.

[19] Joseph Stiglitz in a radio interview: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000ldmk

[20] George Gray Molina and Eduardo Ortiz (2020) *Temporary Basic Income: Protecting Poor and Vulnerable People in Developing Countries*, New York: UNDP. The authors argue that unconditional emergency cash transfers can mitigate the worst immediate effects of the COVID-19 crisis on poor and near-poor households that do not currently have access to social assistance or insurance protection and calculate that it is feasible as for 132 developing countries it would cost between 0.27 and 0.63 per cent of their combined GDPs. https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/transitions-series/temporary-basic-income--tbi--for-developing-countries.html See also reference to ongoing universal basic income at page 3 above.

adopted a Shared Societies Approach.[21] Many of the issues raised here are also aspects of good governance in general.

Underlying cultural factors

Existing level of national consensus: Some countries were already closer to the ideal of a Shared Society than others. It is to be expected that those countries could strengthen their levels of solidarity more quickly and effectively than others and it would be more sustained. Generally, influential leaders in politics, media and elsewhere initially showed willingness to co-operate and implement a consensus strategy, and took care that their approach and actions were expressed in ways which demonstrated respect and commitment to a Shared Society rather than undermining it. In some countries a special task force was established involving opposition politicians and others from outside politics. Tensions might later arise between government and its critics, whether in politics, the media, business or different sectors of civil society, if there was dissatisfaction with the handling of the crisis.

Level of compliance: Some cultures, in East Asia for example, value compliance and conformity and they had less resistance to measures such as test and track, which were introduced to contain the virus, even though they are an intrusion into private life. But that does not mean that other societies cannot and do not become more co-operative if they have clear and consistent information and see the value of supporting the national strategy.

Individualism/Libertarianism is deeply embedded in some cultures and seems to work against the functioning of a Shared Society Approach, as libertarians resist any imposition of rules or government control or the perception that their freedom is being limited. The implications of this stance is captured in the following images:

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[21] Joseph Stiglitz, ibid., talked of the significance of "a high degree of social solidarity": https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000ldmk

The placards of the protestors express their belief that it is one's personal freedom to take risks without seeming to realise that one has a duty to care for others and not to expose them to risk – a Shared Society message. It is generally agreed that wearing a face mask is important because it reduces the risk that the wearer will affect others and less effective in protecting the wearer from contracting the disease. And if you take the risk of catching the infection you are then a carrier of the disease who may infect others.

The following mural by the street artist, Banksy, brings out this distinction, but also captures something quite profound - helping others is a more powerful motivator than helping oneself:
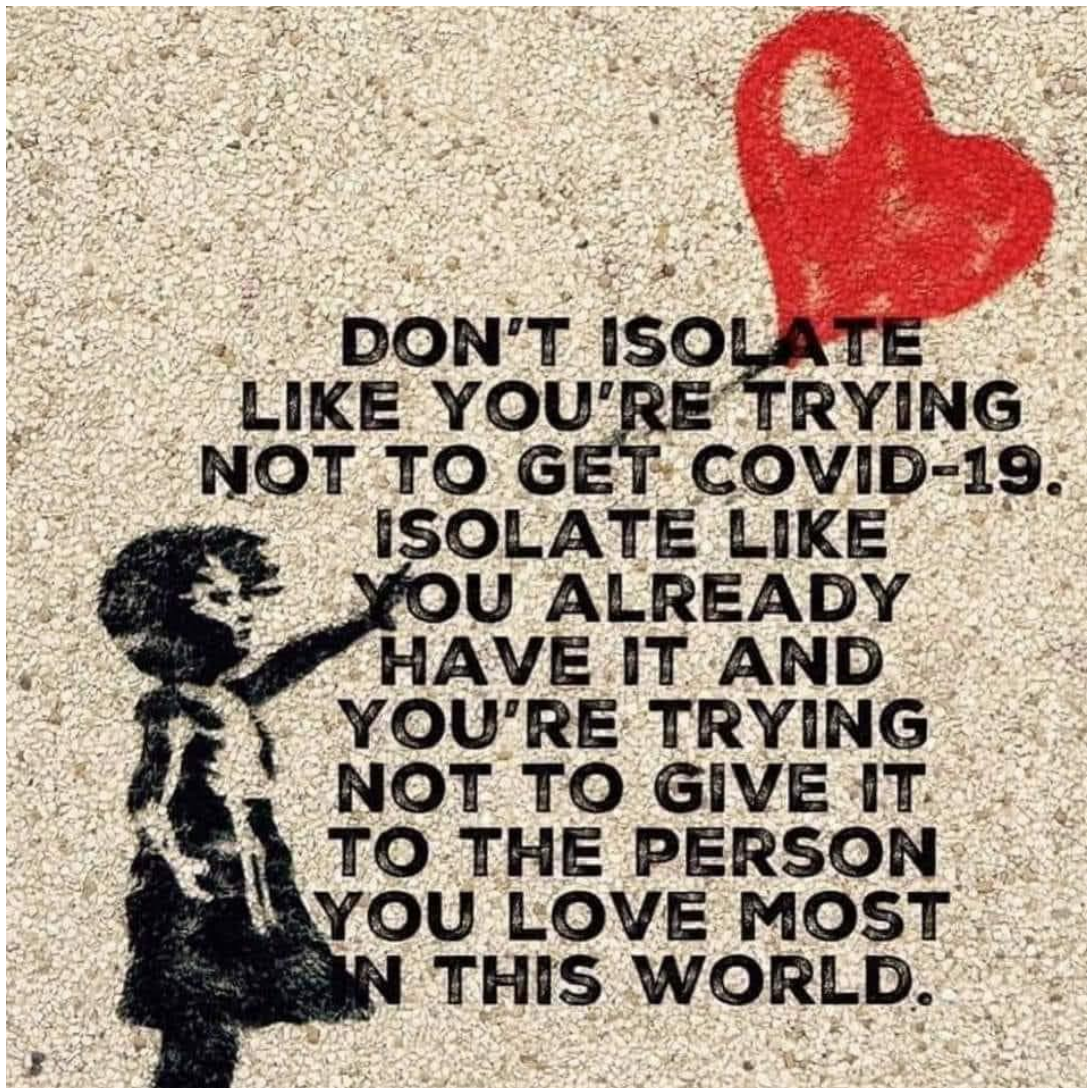
A Michael de Adder cartoon[22] also brings out the idea that it is not sufficient to think of one's own needs and welfare, but it is important to remember that one's actions impact on others more vulnerable:

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[22] *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, 31 March 2020
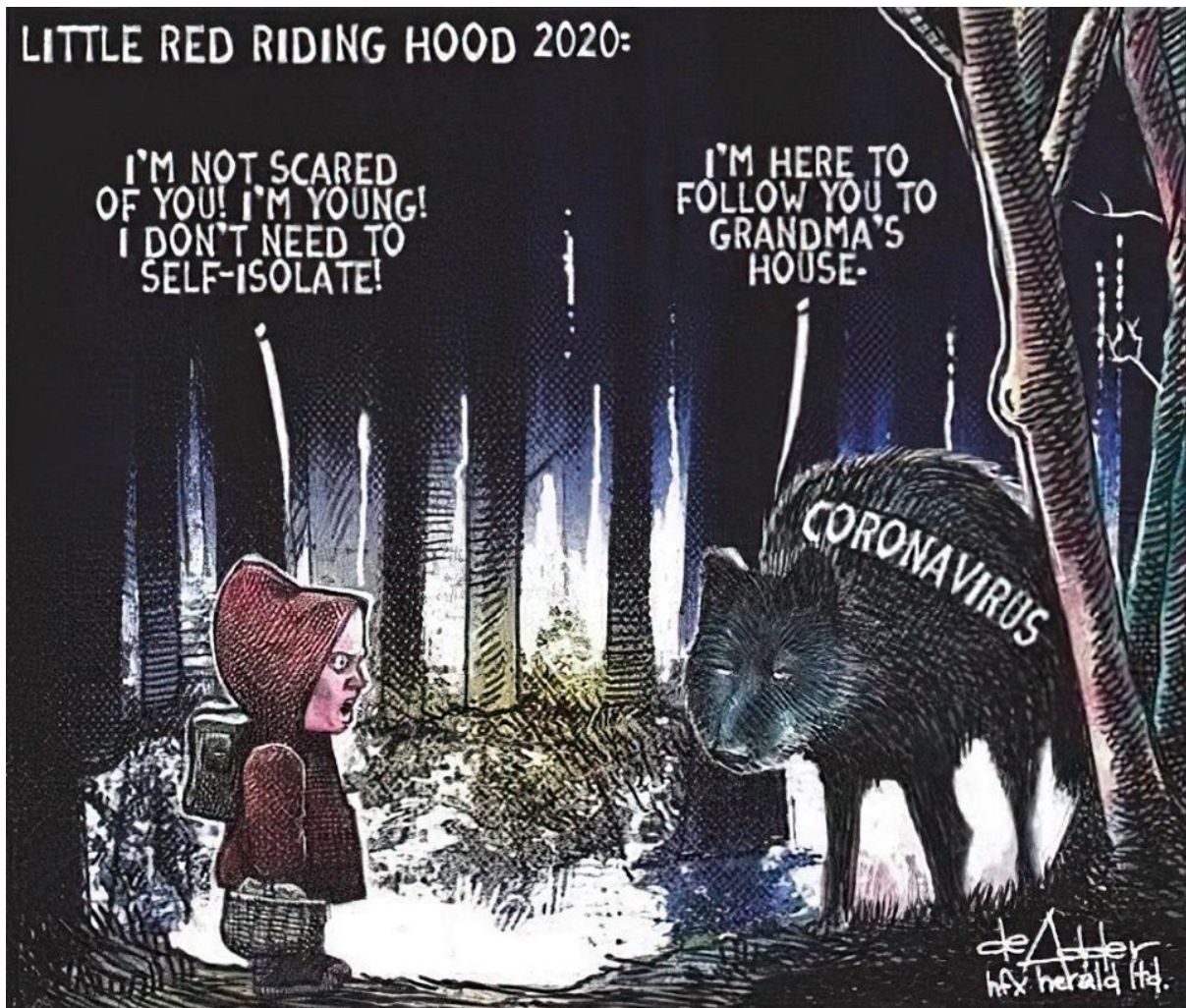
In a less graphic way, the UK government also tried to encourage the public to comply with the social distancing measures by saying it would *"protect the health services"* because they reasoned that the public is very committed to the health service.

Form/Style of Government

System of government: There is no evidence that authoritarian regimes or liberal regimes have been more successful in building consensus and acceptance of the national strategy for tackling Covid-19. The basis of co-operation may be different and other factors may have been salient in the capacity to mobilise public support for the government's strategy. There are some indications that decentralised systems have some advantages particularly in understanding what is needed at local level and in implementing systems such as testing and contact tracing. However there is also evidence that co-operation between central government and lower levels of government, whether states, provinces or municipalities, has not always functioned well and there have been problems in sharing information and resources. It may also lead to different policies and strategies in different parts of the country which may be justified in terms of local conditions but which can cause confusion. The response to Covid-19 is a reminder that local involvement and decision-making is important but it requires a collaborative approach across all levels, based on respect and good communication.

Enforcement or self control: there are two contradictory sets of assumptions about human behaviour. On the one hand, there is the assumption that most people are cognitively fragile and unreliable. They are part of the problem. They have to be directed, and on that basis some countries relied on setting out rules, demanding compliance and enforcing the rules in various ways, including the issuing of permits to be out of the home, and police action. On the other hand there is the assumption that people are able to take decisions and act responsibly particularly if there is a sense of togetherness and therefore one can rely on their self control. They are part of the solution. On that basis some countries have explained their understanding of the nature of the risk, set out guidance and expected the public to use their own judgement on how to behave responsibly, which is closer to the Shared Societies Approach. Experience from responses to previous crises indicates that people do not panic and are able to take initiatives and contribute to meeting the challenge. In the current pandemic self awareness and self control seem to be particularly significant when restrictions are being eased. Some of the countries that rely on self control have had low transmission rates and they seem to be better placed to manage the transition to lower levels of restrictions. It seems the public in those countries continued to apply their judgement responsibly. In countries where there was stronger enforcement of the rules and people were expected to do as they were told, there was greater confusion when the restrictions were eased and it became necessary to use one's own judgement in how to apply the more flexible guidelines.

Building confidence: Most governments felt that it was important to encourage the public to believe that the pandemic could be overcome, but there were at least three different approaches. One was to show confidence in the **people** to accept the restrictions and comply with them. They explained how, collaboratively, the society can face the challenge; they encouraged a rational informed optimism; and they endeavoured to make "hope possible rather than despair convincing", to borrow a phrase from Raymond Williams[23].

A second was to show confidence in the innate capacities of the **country** to overcome the pandemic and this was done in two different ways:

> **Resilience**: reminding the public of past achievements and that the country has come through other crises before and can do so again because of "our determination and moral fibre" or

> **Exceptionalism:** characterised by combative, bombastic reassurance that **"**we are special with special qualities that others do not have; we have world-beating systems and services"; and we are "winning."

Covid-19 is an impersonal leveller and presents different problems than those that arise in other crises such as war or earthquakes. It cannot be intimidated or cowed like a human opponent. There is also immediate tangible statistical evidence of the country's ability to manage the pandemic through comparison of rates of infection and death rates, though they must of course be treated with a degree of caution as circumstances will differ from country to country. Nonetheless Covid-19 can expose the gap between rhetoric and reality and the more high-flown the rhetoric, especially the belief in exceptionalism, the greater the gap is likely to be.

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[23] Williams, Raymond 1989, *Resources of Hope*, p118, London, Verso Books

Public trust in leadership: In tackling the pandemic, the governments of all states, even the most totalitarian, need the support of the public and their willingness to take personal action to protect themselves and others from infection. Any strategies adopted needed some level of consent and co-operation from the whole population. Initially individuals were not able to make an informed personal assessment of the risk and how to respond, as the nature of the threat was completely unfamiliar and the assertion that the threat was very grave did not match most people's initial experience when infection rates were low. Therefore it was important to gain public trust in the information that was being provided and the strategies that were being implemented. Many governments introduced regular public briefings, sometimes on a daily basis, which helped to reinforce the gravity of the situation. In this context the messenger was important and in some countries medical and scientific experts were at the forefront, with limited involvement from political leaders. These briefings were low-key, careful and detailed. In contrast in other countries political leaders were in the lead, sometimes supported by experts, and their briefings were sometimes low-key and careful like the experts,[24] but in other cases less precise and less connected to the scientific evidence and with more rhetoric and vague generalisations which were sometimes exposed as inaccurate and unreliable under questioning or by subsequent events.

Some leaders were already respected and trusted by at least a proportion of the population, but all had to work at extending and deepening public trust in new circumstances.

Consistency is central. Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the World Health Organisation, has said[25] "Mixed messages from leaders are undermining the most critical ingredient of any response: trust." It is therefore surprising that leaders did not always behave consistently. It does not engender trust if the government is changing its position without explanation or if the leader is not following his or her own advice: to take one example, recommending wearing a mask and then appearing without one.

If restrictions on daily life are to be introduced, they needed to be **fair and proportionate** and applied to everyone. An instructive series of incidents happened in the United Kingdom. The Chief Medical Officer in Scotland broke the restriction not to travel by going over 40 miles to visit her holiday home. After some hesitancy she resigned, saying "people across Scotland know what they need to do to reduce the spread of this virus and that means they must have complete trust in those who give them advice."[26] Then on 4th May a member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies resigned in somewhat similar circumstances after allowing someone to visit him in his home against the restrictions then in place. He said "I deeply regret any undermining of the clear messages around the continued need for social distancing to control this devastating epidemic. The government guidance is

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[24] It has often been argued that women leaders have been more successful in managing Covid-19, but it has also been suggested that a female leader may be a signal that a country has more inclusive political institutions and values which, as this paper concludes, is the best basis for tackling the pandemic. See for example "Why Are Nations Led by Women Doing Better?" *New York Times*, May 16, 2020, Sec A, page 4 https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/world/coronavirus-women-leaders.html

[25] Opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 13 July 2020: https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---13-july-2020

[26] https://www.gov.scot/news/statement-from-the-chief-medical-officer/

unequivocal."[27] However when it was revealed that the Prime Minister's Senior Adviser had travelled 260 miles at the end of March, he was supported by the Prime Minister and did not resign and expressed no regrets. It is widely believed that the government lost a great deal of credibility from that date.[28] The police reported that when they spoke to people about complying with the restrictions some referred to this incident. A recent study from University College, London has confirmed that that effect is still evident[29]. The authors observe: "Public trust in the government's ability to manage the pandemic is crucial as it underpins public attitudes and behaviours at a precarious time for public health.

The public also look for **clear and timely decision-making**, based on the best information available and after careful consideration of all aspects of the measures proposed. Speed is of the essence because the spread of the virus has been changing rapidly and the timing of preventative action and measures to mitigate the impact of the restrictions is critical. Leaders were reluctant to introduce major restrictions or relief measures in the hope that they would not become necessary, but ambivalence and hesitancy could be dangerous and allow the virus to spread more rapidly. On a number of occasions advice was given and then under questioning spokespeople gave confusing and contradictory explanations and it was evident that the policy had been introduced before all the implications had been considered and the government was not clear about what they were asking the public to do.

Of course it was difficult for political leaders and experts to be clear and consistent in their statements when there was little understanding of the virus and how it was spreading. In this situation it seems that, compared to leaders who appeared unconcerned or brash and gave reassurance which turned out to be misplaced, the public had more confidence in leaders who were decisive, on the basis of the knowledge they had, but **open and transparent** about their imperfect knowledge. Kang Kyung-wha, Foreign Minister of South Korea, has said in a radio essay that "full disclosure about what a government is doing or not doing in the midst of a crisis may be difficult, but it is all the more critical, for this is the only way to win the public's trust, which is the most important ingredient in effective crisis management."[30] She went on to say that the government acknowledged what they didn't know.

There may be multiple factors leading to a specific government strategy and in this situation it is again important to be open and transparent. It has been difficult to balance the need to limit the spread of infection against the negative impacts of such measures on social and economic life. For example, one consideration in deciding if schools should be functioning is that parents may be unable to work if their children are at home and being home-schooled. The government may characterise attendance at school as a moral duty to ensure the educational and general wellbeing of children, shaming parents or teachers who are uneasy with the strategy. But this may sound unconvincing if there is a second unstated motive which is to bring parents back into the economy and in those circumstances the government

[27] *The Guardian*, 5 May 2020: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/may/05/uk-coronavirus-adviser-prof-neil-ferguson-resigns-after-breaking-lockdown-rules
[28] The Independent 26 May 2020: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/dominic-cummings-lockdown-uk-papers-resign-boris-johnson-a9532256.html
[29] Fancourt, Daisy, Steptoe, Andrew and Wright, Liam "The Cummings Effect: Politics, Trust and Behaviours during the Covid-19 Pandemic." *The Lancet*, 6 August 2020: https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(20)31690-1.pdf
[30] https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08hprdh

is willing to accept a degree of extra risk of transmission of the infection through schools. If the public are uncertain of the motivation of the government, it provides a fertile ground for conspiracy theories to flourish.

Some governments attempted to show their **sensitivity** and empathy in relation to the difficulties that were being imposed both on individuals and organisations and also took steps to ameliorate the situation with cash payments and other assistance which provided some momentum to the economy. Others have shown scant regard for the circumstances of their citizens. Too much sympathy could have a debilitating effect and encourage people to feel a victim and feel resentful that they have been unfairly treated. Too little sympathy leaves people destitute unless civil society steps in and provides some level of relief. A happy medium is needed.

A level of inner confidence is needed to be able to express the qualities and attitudes described here and engage with the public in an authentic way, and share uncertainties and vulnerabilities, but when it has been done the response has often very positive and supportive and creates a mutually reinforcing cycle

Of course, uncritical trust can be problematic. In spite of the evidence that consistency, fairness, clarity, openness and sensitivity engender confidence, it has to be recognised that the absence of such traits in some leaders has not seemed to have shaken their core support. Nor have their supporters been influenced if their country has performed poorly at containing the virus in comparison to other countries. The pre-existing underlying grounds for their support are more salient to those supporters than the management of the Covid-19 pandemic and they ignore or dismiss any reasons for doubt. However they have lost the credibility of the rest of the population and this has created greater polarisation within the society as a whole, which damages the country's capacity to deal with the pandemic.

Managing Dissent

It is easier to communicate if there is a public and political consensus. Gaining the goodwill and support of the public is difficult in any situation but it is much more difficult if there is dissent and differences of opinion. Initially opposition was muted and there was no focus for dissent. Opponents of the government, in politics and the media, wanted to give the government the benefit of the doubt and offer their support. But even where there was initial good will, tensions did arise between government and its critics - whether in politics, the media, business or different sectors of civil society - if there was dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the crisis, especially if the level of infections continued to mount. It is a difficult situation for those unhappy with the government's approach as any effective strategy requires public confidence in the political leaders and criticism will undermine that confidence. But if it is believed that the approach is wrong and perhaps exacerbating the problems then there is a duty to raise those concerns. It is therefore important that there channels which allow divergent thinking to be expressed in constructive ways.

Critical politicians have to be careful to avoid the charge of political point-scoring and making political capital out of a tragedy; the media of wanting to make money; and business leaders of protecting their businesses in spite of the risks to their workers and customers. The government on its side may also be tempted to seek political advantage from its handling of

the pandemic and it has to be prepared to listen and be open to genuine concerns. All sides need to be able to show their commitment to a collaborative approach and, as noted already, be willing to admit mistakes.

There may also be public unease within the wider community about the performance of the current leadership and decreasing willingness to comply with its strategy.

The pandemic developed so quickly and the responses were so radical that it took some time for the rumour mill, conspiracy theories and trolling on social media to catch up. So for some time it was easier to manage dissent in a measured way without hostile voices making reasoned discussion difficult. As the pandemic progressed and critical voices have gained traction and reinforce each other, it has become easier to engender greater polarisation within the society as a whole and create confrontational arguments between people and interest groups, which damages the countries' capacity to deal with the pandemic. It is noteworthy that when government actions are criticised it is often on the grounds that they are being unfair to one or another interest, forgetting that the ultimate cause of the government restrictions is the virus which does not discriminate in its progress and has no concept of morality or fairness. For example the travel industry during the course of the pandemic has expressed anger at government travel restrictions as "yet another blow to holidaymakers."[31] Forgetting for a moment that their real focus of concern is the industry not the consumer, directing criticism at the government increases dissatisfaction in the wider community about the government rather than the ultimate cause of the curtailment of travel – the virus.

Those attacked and blamed compound the problem by directing the blame at others but not the virus. Some have blamed other countries or inter-governmental agencies making a global response harder to achieve. Some blame colleagues and experts within the administration or at other levels of government[32]. Reference has already been made to the benefits of openness and transparency and that includes acknowledgement of differences of opinion within the administration, but refusing to take responsibility for a decision by blaming others implies that there were failures in communication and a breakdown in consensus decision-making within the administration. Divisive, as opposed to constructive, management of dissent within the authorities gives permission for dissent within the community, and lowers public confidence and respect and the willingness to comply with restrictions. It gives momentum to a vicious circle, in which the society becomes more polarised and the capacity to deal with the challenge is weakened and undermined. None of these responses actually addresses the challenges of assessing risk and helping the public to understand those challenges and engage with the issues.

Most of the public debate sees risk in terms of absolutes, not realising that there is a gradation of risks and specific actions may reduce the risk but do not remove it completely.

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[31] For example Orihuela, Rodrigo, Philip, Siddharth Vikram and Neumann, Jeannette, "Spain Battles to Rescue Tourism After U.K. Quarantine Order" *Bloomberg.com*, 26 July 2020 https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-26/u-k-assailed-by-spain-airlines-for-imposing-quarantine-order

[32] For example Parker, George, Cookson, Clive, Neville, Sarah, Payne, Sebastian, Hodgson, Camilla, Gross, Anna and Hughes, Laura, *Financial Times* July 16 2020 https://www.ft.com/content/aa53173b-eb39-4055-b112-0001c1f6de1b

The actions to limit the risk are cumulative so cannot be assessed on their own. Multiple actions are more likely to reduce the risk than one single measure and some measures are more effective than others. So priorities have to be made in terms of what measures are to be taken, and the decisions and advice are based on the current level of risk of being infected which will change as the virus waxes and wanes. Governments will not always get that right and their advice may change in the light of circumstances. They could have been more effective in explaining that.

Governance competence and effectiveness

The way that governments manage many of the factors discussed above are significant in creating a collaborative relationship between the people and their government in facing the challenges. They are fundamental aspects of good governance, and the ultimate test of a government is whether it is able to govern effectively and competently. The pandemic is a test of leadership as we have seen. But even with good competent leadership, the reality is that many states do not have the resources and capacities to manage a crisis situation and their services have been stretched beyond their capacity to cope. Some states both in the developed and developing world do not have a public health system that can respond in a co-ordinated way. They may lack expertise in a range of disciplines and may not have the resources to provide material support to their communities, or have chosen not to make it a priority because, until now, the value of public health as a common good has not been recognised.

It is too late to address these challenges during a crisis, but in quieter times there has been a lack of will nationally and globally to identify and make available the necessary investment in resources and skills to establish effective systems to deal with shocks, or, even better, to avoid shocks. It had been well recognised that the risk of a pandemic is very real,[33] as are climate change and other threats, but that knowledge has not been sufficient to set aside sufficient time and resources to make the necessary preparations. That would require some slack in the system and some spare capacity to address these issues but that goes against the pressure for lean, low-cost structures and systems and discourages preparation for events that may never happen. Perhaps the experience of Covid-19 will demonstrate that such an approach is in the long run more effective and efficient and lead to a reorientation of national priorities. The historian, Peter Hennessy, has said[34] "if politicians could pick up this new consensus and run with it, finding the right tone and pitch of language in which to express it, the early 2020s could be one of the most creative and productive patches of our history, and a worthy memorial to the Covid fallen."

In summary, to quote Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the World Health Organisation,[35] the three key requirements for controlling the disease and getting on

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[33] For example, see Pegg, David, "What does the leaked report tell us about the UK's pandemic preparations?" The Guardian April 24 2020: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/24/preparing-for-pandemic-national-security-risk-assessment-coronavirus. See also Sellwood, Chloe, *Operating Framework for Managing the Response to Pandemic Influenza* NHS England, 2019: https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/nhs-england-pandmic-influenza-operating-framework-v2.pdf

[34] https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08hg1bl

[35] Opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 13 July 2020: https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---13-july-2020

with our lives are "a focus on reducing mortality and suppressing transmission," "an empowered, engaged community that takes individual behaviour measures in the interest of each other," and "strong government leadership and coordination of comprehensive strategies that are communicated clearly and consistently."

LESSONS

The experience of responding to Covid-19 to date reflects and confirms many aspects of the Shared Society Concept as applicable to the Covid-19 response but also to other challenges such as climate change, intergroup conflict prevention, etc.:

- ✓ It is a reminder that a Shared Society is a holistic concept which comes about as a result of action and attitudes at many levels and across the whole community.
- ✓ A Shared Society is more resilient.
- ✓ It has pointed to the importance of respect for the dignity of others and ensuring that everyone has a sense of agency and voice.
- ✓ Those with influence at all levels can undermine social solidarity and personal commitment to the community by the way they expressed their opinions and by their behaviour, if they do not ensure that they are demonstrating respect and commitment to a Shared Society.
- ✓ While trying to avoid national characteristics and stereotypes, it does seem evident that some societies and cultures imbue qualities and attitudes in society which lead to a willingness to contribute to a Shared Society, though there will be sharp differences in determining who are seen as members of that society and who are outsiders. But these characteristics are not fixed and impervious to change when there is clear evidence that existing systems, structures, attitudes and relationships are clearly not fit for purpose in present circumstances.
- ✓ Divisive, as opposed to constructive, management of dissent within the authorities gives permission for dissent within the community, and lowers public confidence and respect and the willingness to comply with restrictions. It gives momentum to a vicious circle, in which the society becomes more polarised and the capacity to deal with the challenge is weakened and undermined.
- ✓ The pandemic has given momentum for the potential to initiate change. Whatever approach was taken in each country, it was possible to introduce change rapidly.
- ✓ Most fundamentally it has shown a huge shift in what is politically feasible: governments of all types have adopted measures to manage behaviour, introduced new levels of social protection, and showed openness in engaging with the wider community. And communities have responded.
- ✓ It is no longer possible to say it cannot be done. It is no longer possible to say "We do not have the money or we will face a political backlash. We have heard all these and many more objections in the past to proposals made in negotiations or in demands from social movements. But the magnitude of the responses to the pandemic now shows that the problem has been a lack of political will.
- ✓ In the right circumstances people and vested interests are willing to change, albeit sometimes reluctantly.
- ✓ These insights are relevant to inter-group and inter-state conflicts and to universal global challenges.
- ✓ In relation to climate change, the current situation is proof that the state can, when it wants to, act quickly and radically. Also, that the majority will comply with such sudden change when there is a clear scientific case for action and an urgency needed to protect those things that people value.

AFTERWORD

On 26 June 2020, Brian Eno, the English musician, made an interesting intervention in a radio essay[36] which offers an analysis close to the Shared Societies Perspective in this paper. Some extended extracts are included in this afterword because they identify the same trends and reflect similar conclusions:

> *If we have learned one thing from the Coronavirus experience it's that a certain style of government and leadership, a style that's dominated the last few years, isn't going to be of any use to us at all in the 21st century. The countries that have suffered worst from Covid . . . all share a single governmental style - macho, media-savvy, authoritarian leaders whose primary talent is self-promotion. . . . But in the face of an actual threat, coronavirus, all that macho posturing proves to be worse than useless. What was needed was preparation, expertise, cooperation and good data - all complete mysteries to the macho mind. . . . The urgency of climate change is propelling us towards two starkly contrasting visions. The first is the billionaire's utopia where a few rich people secure themselves behind strong walls while the rest of us collapse in a fireball. The other vision is our only chance, where we rethink our institutions and global arrangements so that in dealing with the upcoming disruptions of climate change and pandemics we build something new. . . . We have to make a society that works in the long term by valuing all its different intelligences; by engaging everybody rather than excluding most. It is a future build on co-operation and inclusion not division. We have seen the first green shoots of it in the better responses to Covid and in the proliferation of anti-discrimination activism, which could also be called pro-inclusion activism. If we want to live in a stable creative society we need to rethink things so that everybody in it feels welcomed and valued. The more people have an investment in society, the more they'll want to nurture and improve it.*

Clem McCartney
Independent Consultant,
Benone,
31 July 2020

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[36] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aJmaxJAp3o