

## **Lockdown Dialogues 12 November 2020**

### **Changes in society and human mortality highlighted in the Lockdown Dialogues**

This autumn, the third Lockdown Dialogues turned their focus to social changes and human mortality.

Once again, the Lockdown Dialogues brought together many different groups of people: Young people, the working-aged and pensioners, students, experts, civil servants and supervisors, children and young people who had cancer, their families and the professionals who worked with them as well as members of parishes and trade unions.

The dialogues dealt with vast topics. The Lockdown Dialogues included numerous dialogues with the future as their theme. During the dialogues participants discussed how societal structure will change as a result of the corona crisis and how people will learn to live with these changes.

As the crisis continues, talk of the future will also change. In spring, the state of emergency was a major turning point to an entirely different type of future. In autumn, as people have adapted to the exceptional conditions talk of the future has also changed to be more cautious and flexible.

Some of the organised discussion in turn dealt with illness and death during the pandemic. These dialogues highlighted human mortality and how limited an ability people have to influence issues and control the world.

### **Society is changing and new skills are needed**

*"Is it true that when you were young, you actually travelled by airplane?" (1)*

This current year had demonstrated to the participants that things that seemed impossible before the crisis can be accomplished in a short period. At the same time, they raised the question of whether making major societal changes would require more threats or optimism. What motivates us to act: Is it fear or enthusiasm?

People who participated in these discussions concerning the future believed that better problem solving skills and ability for lifelong learning would be needed in coming years. They believed that this was due, in particular, to the fact that many aspects of employment will very likely be contrary to what they are now.

Technology is expected to make new leaps to allow virtual reality to become a more powerful part of everyday life and work. Digital skills are becoming increasingly important. The more widespread use of telework through digitalisation will make some office spaces unnecessary. This will also affect mobility and housing. As people are less mobile for and during work this will act as a counterforce for urbanisation, and services can be provided digitally also outside growth centres.

While the reduction in air travel brought about by the corona crisis was seen as a positive environmental trend, many countries were found to be dependent on tourism.

Some of the participants had travelled to the other side of the globe, but never to Lapland. Travel within Finland is expected to also grow in the future. The discussions also outlined major trends that would mitigate climate change and prevent the decline of biodiversity. In these future scenarios, consumers become 'recyclers', who partake in the circular economy instead of buying new things.

The development of technology also raises concerns, as technology can on one hand increase equality, while on the other it will create new forms of inequality. Will everyone be able to take part new digital leaps? How does doing things virtually change us as people?

### **Working life and studies shaped by pressures resulting from exceptional circumstances**

*“Before, it was fun to get out of school to go for example to the dentist. Now it’s awful, if I have to leave a lesson.” (2)*

Working life is going through extensive transformations. The continuation of the coronavirus epidemic will affect industries and jobs in unpredictable ways. Many companies are struggling with uncertain the economic conditions and unclear prospects for the future.

Workplaces are still trying to find their footing with regard to digitalisation and telework. The benefits and disadvantages of remote work were further assessed in the dialogues. The flexibility associated with telework may turn into excess workload and the reverse side of its independence is the thinning of the work community. It is not yet clear how these issues can be balanced.

Public sector workers explained that in some cases the crisis has made work more flexible and efficient. Cooperation between different sectors has improved and hierarchies have decreased. On the other hand, professionals whose work involves the assistance of others said that they were still struggling with the challenges related to interacting online.

Many good practices have been based on face-to-face encounters, which have now been discontinued. Many essential things go unnoticed when encountering people remotely online.

Students described how continued distance learning has affected their lives. In the spring, students and teachers succeeded at distance learning by employing team spirit the help, but fatigue and loneliness have caused issues this autumn. The situation was especially difficult for those starting their studies. New students do not learn to navigate the campus, it is more difficult for them to get to know other students, and tutors can often only be reached by remotely. Some have even said that their studies have become meaningless, forced performance.

Young people of school age thought it was important that schools have not been closed for the time being this autumn. Distance learning implemented in the spring was not a proper replacement for real school, where teachers and school friends bring structure and meaningfulness to studies. Young people said that distance schooling had significantly increased the use of digital devices the use of which was extensive prior to this. As a result, physical presence has begun to seem more valuable.

Some young people also said that they had noticed that some of their friends had were not doing as well as usual during the autumn. They believed the reason for this was that restrictions implemented due to the coronavirus had decreased possibilities for hobbies and time together with friends. Doing poorly presents itself as substance abuse and restless behaviour.

### **Pandemic a reminder of human mortality**

*"Death may be difficult to topic to approach, but this does not mean that people do not have a need to talk about death." (3)*

The exceptional circumstances and the fear be falling ill and death induced by corona brought forth musings about human mortality and the ability people have to influence circumstances. We have to accept that epizootic diseases continue to kill people, and that in this respect the world has not changed as much as we imagined.

For some people, encountering human mortality is not new. Among the participants were people suffering from cancer and their families, for whom the isolation caused by corona was already familiar due to the risk of infections associated with cancer. Now, society as a whole is gaining experience of a limited lifestyle and of everyday life coloured by constant concern.

The coronavirus induces a fear of death in most people. This fear may be related to one's own previous experiences of illness or it may be fear on behalf of loved ones. In families which have encountered a serious illness and have lost close relatives, the coronavirus situation could also raise strong fears in children.

### **Dialogue participants felt that there was too little conversation about death:**

*"Death is not even discussed in hospitals, but rather an effort is made to keep everyone alive." (3)*

The restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus were considered brutal in circumstances where there was grieving and death. Nothing can replace the importance of presence and touch when someone is mourning. Grieving was also considered exceptionally oppressive when people could not even attend funerals.

Many people who become aware of their own mortality are wondering how they want to live and spend the remainder of their lives. Choices based on one's own values and efforts to create a better world seemed even more important.

### **Optimism is created together**

*"We can now choose to be the good in the world." (4)*

When people pondered over their own lives and the development of society, there was room for both optimism and doubts. Positive news about the development of the coronavirus vaccine led to the belief that this exceptional period would at some time come to an end and life would return to normal.

The dialogues demonstrated that confidence in the actions of authorities was still strong, although there were notable differences between given instructions and compliance with these. Dialogue participants saw some people's disregard for compliance with the instructions as indifference for other people.

Some of the dialogue participants said that they have noticed that as life is confined to their safe haven with their family and closest friends, the problems encountered by people who live outside this bubble are not visible to them.

However, the discussions also revealed confidence that people still have the ability to empathise with other people's life situations and strive to take care of each other. In particular, people's desire to share their experiences with one another and help the disadvantaged was held in esteem. Optimism is being put to the test, but we can work together to strengthen it.

### **Facts about the dialogue**

Number of dialogues: 21

Number of participants: 131

**Locations:** Espoo, Helsinki, Kirkkonummi, Kotka, Lahti, Mustasaari, Turku, Vantaa as well as online encounters with people around Finland and abroad.

**Discussion organisers who submitted a synopsis** (references to the quotations in parentheses): Children of the Station (2), Dialogue Academy/Aretal (4), Timeout Fund (two dialogues), Helsinki Cathedral Parish /Dialogues of hope (3), Maija Vähämäki/Turku School of Economics, Malmi Parish, Sitra (six dialogues) (1), Teacher Student Union of Finland - SOOL, Sylva cancer association (four dialogues), Union of Private Sector Professionals ERTO, Turku Cathedral Parish/Dialogues of hope, Ministry of Finance.