

## **Synopsis of the dialogues of the spring**

### **More than 1,100 participants in 162 Lockdown Dialogues**

Read a synopsis of this spring's many dialogues. The participants represented different backgrounds, genders, generations, regions, countries and realities of life. The dialogues will be continued in autumn 2020. Welcome to join in!

### **Lockdown Dialogues of spring 2020**

In total, more than 1,100 people participated in the 162 dialogues held in Finland between April and June. More than 80 actors were involved in organising the dialogues: NGOs, municipalities, ministries, religious communities, companies and individual citizens.

The participants came from around Finland as well as from other parts of Europe, Asia and America. The concerns and sources of hope brought up by the participants add up to a big picture which describes the different stages of this exceptional spring and the changes it caused.

### **From the start of the crisis to gradual opening up of society**

The dialogues traced a trajectory that began when everything suddenly ground to a halt at the initial stage of the crisis, proceeded to a state of waiting marked by uncertainty, and ended with relief – perhaps temporary – as restrictions were lifted in early summer. Participants said that while they were learning to live with the epidemic situation, they reflected on their freedom and the responsibility associated with it in new ways.

The lockdown also raised a wide range of concerns. People worried about not only their and their loved ones' health but also about vulnerable groups of people in Finland and other countries.

Participants were relieved to find that the basic functions of society are also maintained amidst a crisis, sense of community is strengthened and finds new forms and, thanks to the digital leap, a switch to remote work and distance teaching is possible in many places.

In almost every discussion, participants also thought about the future. What will Finland and the rest of the world be like after the coronavirus? How will the damage caused by the crisis be repaired? What can we learn from the lockdown?

The way in which the coronavirus crisis has increased people's awareness of their vulnerability and the fragility of society as a whole came up in the dialogues of this spring.

Facing a common threat also led many people to trying to understand how times of emergency affect the lives of others. Immersion in the experiences of others makes visible the fact that the crisis does not treat people with different starting points and life situations in the same way.

The state of emergency has thus drawn attention to factors associated with inequality, both locally and globally. At the same time, a desire and preparedness for societal change have also emerged, and many individuals and communities wish to strive for a new future.

### **The crisis stopped us in our tracks and changed our daily lives**

Participants found that the lockdown gave them pause. While it meant a slower pace of life for many, others saw their workload increasing and the pace picking up. Most participants said that they had paused to consider the basic things and reflected on what is important in life. Not everything in their former lives seemed quite so important, and people noticed that they needed much less to be happy.

Participants described the many challenges they encountered when trying to adapt to the restrictions imposed by the authorities and interaction via remote connections. After the initial shock, however, the crisis period turned into the new normal with new types of routines established in both working and private life. Many noted that life in isolation can also be satisfying. However, they also pointed out that anxiety and mood swings are part of the new normal.

The lengthening of the crisis meant that many people's lives became monotonous, and they grew tired of this situation. In late April, the lockdown turned into a type of waiting game for a while. This stage was characterised by concerns over how you and other people would cope, people's emotional stress and the unity of the nation. Participants described how they had found protection from anxiety and living with uncertainty in small everyday pleasures, people close to them, spirituality and observing nature waking up to a new spring.

However, they only felt actual relief once the restrictions were lifted and the holiday season was drawing near. The summer is also shaping up to be exceptional. Our life circle is still limited in some respects, and the joys of summer holidays must primarily be sought in the local environment. As restrictions related to social interaction remain in place, the summer may also be more lonely than before for many people.

### **Shifting balance between freedom and responsibility**

Most participants said they were forced to think about their actions and responsibility for other people during the spring. The knowledge that you can spread a serious disease even if you do not have symptoms woke people up to reflecting on the limits of their freedom. Many felt that the instructions issued by the authorities were ambiguous, and individuals had to make case-by-case decisions about what they could do and what they should not. This was not always easy, and different people came to different conclusions. We have thus had to renegotiate the limits of freedom and responsibility in many communities and everyday encounters.

In very concrete terms, the crisis made it visible to many people how responsibility for others is associated with exercising your personal freedom. Where can I go? How close can I get to other people? If I decide to do what I want, what will this mean for others?

## **New concerns as the lockdown continued**

In the initial stage of the coronavirus epidemic, participants' concerns were primarily related to their and their loved ones' health. Participants were weighed down by responsibility for their and their family members' safety. Many had to make decisions that could have serious consequences. Can I meet my parent who is suffering from loneliness? Can my child, who belongs to an at-risk group, go to school? People working in a job where they are exposed to risks were frightened. They continuously have to weigh the infection risk from the viewpoint of the clients they meet at work, themselves and their loved ones alike.

As the crisis went on, the range of concerns expanded: in addition to their and their loved ones' well-being, participants were concerned over how vulnerable groups of people would survive and feared that inequalities would increase further. The resilience of those with many responsibilities was also a cause for concern. Parents grew tired amidst distance work, home schooling, childcare and cooking. Things were tough for health care personnel and informal carers. Professionals of assistance work supported clients in difficult life situations. People were also concerned over the possibility that other illnesses of the body and mind remain untreated when the focus is on the coronavirus.

The crisis highlighted simultaneously the fragility and vulnerability of both the participants' lives and society around them. A large proportion of the participants felt that they were privileged in some way, however, almost independently of their social status. Awareness of their privileges led them to turn their gaze upon other people's distress. Concrete offers of assistance with service use and shopping were made more frequently. Although many people said they wanted to help those in a disadvantaged position also in a broader sense, finding suitable ways of doing so was not always easy.

## **Society is up and running, but what about aftercare?**

Most participants were confident about Finnish society's ability to cope with the crisis situation. It soon became evident that citizens will follow instructions issued by the authorities and that the basic functions of society will keep going even during an emergency. Participants took pride in how quickly we have found substitute practices and started doing things differently.

Participants trusted the actions of the Government and the authorities and felt that communication about the restrictions during lockdown was mainly successful. They welcomed the adherence to parliamentary and evidence-based decision-making in Finland. They found that cooperation between the authorities and NGOs went exceptionally well during the crisis. On the other hand, they were irritated by not knowing clearly which instructions issued by the authorities were recommendations and which were orders. They also wished for communication in a larger selection of languages.

At least some of the participants found the actions of the media confusing. They saw the media as inflaming societal confrontations and fears that did not match the participants' everyday experiences of living in the middle of the crisis. They also found getting an overview of what was going on in society difficult at times.

Rather than acute crisis management, the most worried and critical voices referred to the economic difficulties that loom in a near future: bankruptcies of businesses, unemployment, and the effects of a potential new recession on vulnerable people, especially children and young people. The situation was compared to the recession of the 1990s, and participants hoped that the mental and human impacts would be addressed better in the aftermath of the current crisis.

### **Communality carried us**

During the spring we saw that people are willing and able to take care of each other. In many dialogues, participants talked about how the sense of community had grown stronger. They even kept in touch with other people more than before during the lockdown. They also noticed that society was able to keep going while relying on remote connections.

On the other hand, the transition to remote encounters also resulted in feelings of isolation and inequality. Many suffered from a lack of physical encounters and felt that something essential was missing in their lives. Genuine closeness, a deeper understanding of others and spontaneous creativity are absent in remote connections. A number of participants noted that devices cannot replace the important role of physical encounters in human communities.

Fears of a declining sense of community were also expressed as the crisis continued. The lockdown has changed boundaries and relationships between people. In many respects, we are more distant from each other and fumble with establishing relationships in the new situation. This is why it was a relief to have permission to go out and meet other people as society started opening up. In some, however, this exacerbated the fears of the epidemic gaining strength. Assessing risks was considered challenging, as restrictions were lifted and citizens were urged to avoid contacts at the same time.

### **Mixed feelings about the digital leap**

Participants were enthusiastic about and proud of the digital leap, which was speeded up by the crisis. *We can do this!* *We can also attend school and work using remote conditions.* Many of those who started teleworking hope they could continue to do so also after the crisis. Working over remote connections have made it possible to get to know your colleagues in new ways when meetings allow you a direct view into their homes, and their family members and pets make an appearance on the screen. As the spring went on, however, many began to grow tired of interacting via electronic devices. They were fed up staring at the screen, interaction could be awkward, and difficult issues were hard to bring up.

The dialogues drew attention to inequalities associated with the digital leap. The nature of certain jobs makes it impossible for some to shelter from the virus within the walls of their homes. Many people also end up in a disadvantaged position because they do not have the required devices or skills. This can be seen in the world of work, virtual school and older people's daily lives alike. Not all pupils could be reached regularly while schools were relying on distance learning. The provision of some care and support services was interrupted, and meeting their clients' needs with electronic tools is difficult. Participants

hoped that society will invest in citizens' digital capabilities and easy-to-use digital services and tools to ensure that no one is excluded.

### **The crisis will hopefully bring permanent changes**

Participants reflected on how their lives, Finland and the world will change as a result of the crisis. Many people talked about a turning point: there will be no going back to the way we lived before, and the crisis will change Finland and the world as a whole in some way.

Participants pointed out that even before the coronavirus crisis, there were enormous problems in the world: climate change, overconsumption, great power politics coming to ahead, authoritarian governments, poverty and inequality. They have not gone away, even if the crisis has overshadowed them for a while. However, the lockdown has led people to reflect on the values prioritised both in their own lives and in society. Many participants felt that this could be a turning point towards a more ecologically sustainable and socially equal world which will bring about more sustainable ways of working, spending time, consuming and holiday-making.

They wonder if we have learned a lesson and can change the world, or if the world goes back to its old ways as the crisis recedes. Many expressed the opinion that the world after the pandemic will also be up to us. If the crisis is a turning point, we can attempt to influence the direction in which we will go. A common resolve is a precondition for this, however.

### **A future of threats and hope**

After the exceptional spring and present summer we are facing an autumn of which participants expect both threats and glimpses of hope. As the biggest threat is seen a potential new wave of the epidemic. This would mean a return to strict restrictions. Participants were particularly concerned over the bearing capacity of the economy in this situation. How long will society's resources last? Will there be work for everyone? Will organisations that help people in difficulty have any more money? Who will ultimately pay the bill for the crisis?

The autumn is also associated with opportunities. The events of this spring have changed many participants' relationship with other people, the natural environment, work and consumption. The presence of vulnerability and death in our daily lives has made people more caring and compassionate towards themselves and others. Many have rediscovered their relationship with nature and found alternative ways of being and living. Glimpses of hope are indeed born from thoughts of the mutual connection between people, caring, and a more sustainable world in human and ecological terms.

### **The dialogues built understanding and created hope**

The opportunity to come together and have a dialogue about life in lockdown was widely praised by the participants. Many noted that such dialogues were hugely important for them. They said the dialogue had relieved their concerns and helped them understand others and themselves better.

In a dialogue that emphasised constructive discussion and respect for others, it was also possible to disagree safely. Encountering the views of people with a variety of life situations who come from different circles and understanding the experiences underlying these views were seen to enrich participants' worldviews and create a sense of proportion. Many participants also said that sharing crisis experiences and learning from others restored their faith in the future. Together we can manage better.

### **Facts about the dialogues**

- Number of dialogues: 162
- Number of participants: approx. 1170
- Locations: Ahvenanmaa, Akaa, Espoo, Eura, Hanko, Helsinki, Huittinen, Hämeenlinna, Iisalmi, Joensuu, Jyväskylä, Kajaani, Kirkkonummi, Kotka, Kouvola, Kuopio, Lahti, Lappeenranta, Lohja, Mikkeli, Nokia, Porvoo, Riihimäki, Rovaniemi, Saarijärvi, Salo, Seinäjoki, Siilinjärvi, Suomensjärvi, Tammisaari, Tampere, Turku, Tuusula, Oulu, Vantaa, Ähtäri. In addition: Croatia, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Jordan, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States.

Dialogue organisers who submitted a synopsis:

ABF - Åland, Anna Herlin, Anna-Maija Hakuni-Luoma, the Museum of Finnish Architecture, the Children of the Station, the Crisis Management Initiative - CMI, the Cultura Foundation, the Depolarize Project & the Federation of Finnish Enterprises, Dialogue Academy Aretai Oy, Dialogic Oy & the Finnish Supervisors' Association, Eeva Nummi & Anita Nikkanen, the Finnish Pensioners' Federation, the Central Association of Finnish Pensioners, En säker hamn, the Finnish Epilepsy Association, the Timeout Foundation, the Timeout Foundation & Inno Ok, the Timeout Foundation & the Young Church Association, the Timeout Foundation & Plan International Finland, the Timeout Foundation & the Diocese of Tampere, the European Youth Parliament & the UN Youth of Finland, the City of Espoo, the Finnish Central Association of Families of People with Mental Illness FinFami, the Deaconess Foundation, Helsinki Cathedral Parish/Dialogues of Hope, the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities, the University of Eastern Finland, the University of Eastern Finland/Aducate, the City of Jyväskylä, Kalliola Settlement, Kalliola Oy, citizens Katja, Timo & Ilona, the Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy KANE, Kaskas Media, the National Church Council/the church's work with expatriate Finns, the Church Resources Agency & Oulu Deaconess Institute ODL/Ikäärvokas project, the City of Lahti, the Regional Council of Lapland, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, the Finnish Missionary Society & the Deaconess Foundation, the Association for Rural Culture and Education, Malmi Parish, the Marhaban-center/Tampere Parishes and the Diocese of Tampere, Mari Tähjä & Jani Turku, MDI Oy, Marja Lindholm, Naistenkartano, Nicehearts, Sivis Study Centre, Pro-tukipiste association, Seta – LGBTI Rights in Finland, Sitra, the Centre for Education and Research on Social and Health Services & the AI Academy/the University of Turku, the Finnish Confederation of Salaried Employees STTK, Finnish Development NGOs Fingo, the Finnish Parents' League, the Evangelic-Lutheran parishes of Tampere & the Diocese of Tampere, the UN Association of Tampere TAYK, Tiina and Antti Herlin Foundation, the

Union of Private Sector Professionals ERTO, Toni Kuoremäki, Turku Chamber of Commerce, the Municipality of Tuusula, the National Forum for Cooperation of Religions in Finland, Vake Oy, the Ministry of Finance, Active Citizens in Society – YAK.