Monday morning, November 12, 2018

**The Future of Social Cohesion in Manchester in tackling violent extremism**

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Change itself is changing – accelerating, over reaching and fast – its impacts are working at a pace, and with a reach, for which our institutions, leaders, gatekeepers and thought processes are poorly designed and ill equipped. Not all that has changed is for the worst; much is very much for the better - but then again, these too have stimulated further changes, many we did not foresee and others for which we are ill prepared.

Neither our parents or our teachers foresaw silk roads redrawn as China’s one belt one road; trade routes become virtual too; policy pivots reduced to a tweet; the personal no longer merely the private; the local somehow less geographical and more digital; distance between us contracted by a so called social media which is so anti-social that actual location is no longer proximity to neighbor and community for many is now mainly about opinions and beliefs – superficial, subjective, short-lived sparks of data thrown out into cyberspace through pages, apps and chat rooms.

Armed groups, corruption, the dark web; climate instability and erosion of species and habitat; rampant anti-microbial resistance; the developed world’s insatiable commodification and consumption – all are driving likely irreversible transformation of our natural, human and artificial worlds. The planet itself is showing signs of perhaps irreversible strain, warming, destabilizing, depleting.

Can we still steward each other forwards to greater freedom, within a sturdier justice, rooted in more sustainable economies, more stable peace, adjudicated by more resilient inclusive democracies?

The disruption and uncertainty swirling around us existentially is the major explanation as to why our systems - established but a few decades ago - the UN, the Bretton Woods instruments and institutions, the multilateral infrastructure - are under such pressure – because we all are - straining to keep up, straining to protect ourselves, straining to adapt.

And for people themselves? This multi-dimensional change at this scale and this pace – feels and is experienced by many of us not merely as unfamiliar, but as profoundly frightening and fundamentally unfair. And human beings are predisposed to react very badly to change that is not to their advantage.

The long steady gradual pace of changes which characterized our species for millennia, has been thoroughly over turned. More change has occurred in the last hundred years than in the hundreds of hundred years before. And more change has taken hold in our generation than in any generation before - in one life time!

It would be difficult/ tough to manage under any circumstances and - any student of management would tell you - rapid, scale change is not something most human beings like and many resent.

But add then in to this mix change driven by malicious nihilistic choices and actions of groups with plans for disruption and powers with disregard for the disruption they bring.

Global shocks - not only rapidly emerging trends - have pressed upon us perverse consequences for our systems of governance – with the most impactful among them - in the brief period of this century being 9/11 and its aftermath AND the 2008 financial crisis – and its consequences.

The hard, dehumanizing footprint of multiple acts of terror crimes perpetrated in countries around the world are twinned with the hard dehumanizing impunity attached to the impact of financial bubbles burst – these have generated a policy driven-negative deviation away from development aligned to greater dignity and deeper democracy.

I am speaking of the policies, practices and philosophies of **hyper securitization** and **deep public purse austerity:**  Hyper securitization has managed to do to fundamental civil and political freedoms what deep-purse austerity has done to economic and social rights.

These now dominant public policy paradigms - tipped onto the dynamics of rapid change, have rusted away public trust in public institutions just when it was most needed. Greater distance has unfolded between democratic institutions of and the demus populous – a distance between democratic leaders and elites and democracies constituents’ experience, expectations, and behaviors.

The Edleman global trust report, whose findings document a in their words “a shattering” erosion of public trust, puts it – “We’re at the end of the lifespans of the men and women who stormed the beaches of Normandy, who saved the world and built the (U.S.) liberal-led world order. Now that order seems to be unraveling in many directions.”

The system is not just being challenged – the system is no longer able to work – as people need it to. However wall-building, xenophobic justification of hardened borders and the fantasist mythologies of national superiority – are the complaint more than the cure.

The question is what we need to do and of what are we willing to do to enable a new governance by principle, scale and capability – suited to succeed in this unfamiliar world.

It is clear that we must innovate, reinvent and reinvigorate democratic political practice for our era of global finance, big data, extreme inequality, hyper securitization, mass migration and ecological upheaval. **Despite the claims to the contrary no one’s hope can be secured by ensuring the hopelessness of another.**

**We need to tell a stronger – more engaging and empowering democratic story – more powerful than that of hate**

It is not just individual strong leaders or monopolistic parties that are winning the hearts and minds of people desperate to assuage fear and to counter lack of consequences for those who abuse power, it is also strong stories - powerful narratives.

As human beings, we have a deep narrative instinct - stories are the means by which we navigate the world round us – they help us to interpret its complex and contradictory signals. It is not enough to challenge a perverse narrative, you have to replace it with another and the only thing that can displace a story is a story.

For 70 years, since the end of the second world war, a consensus held that seemed so obvious its story was barely told; that some ideas are beyond the pale, that certain beliefs are taboo because they are unconscionable and that fundamental building blocks – the journey to universal equality and dignity - should always apply. We should not need another world war to learn why these perennial truths must be constantly told.

**Forr the sake of averting a deadly future, we have to tell a truer story of our past - we need to teach the darkest chapters in human history** with renewed vigour and greater honesty.

**We must tell the stories too of hope, examples of courage in the face of adversity – iof genours compassion not merely fearful anger. And**

**we need to tell a stronger story of our connection**

Populists are sowing division; inflaming and instrumentalizing new and ancient hatreds. We have to tell a stronger story of human beings “astonishing capacity for compassion and for acts of altruism. we are also, among mammals, the supreme cooperators.

The urge to cooperate has been hard-wired into our brains but something has gone horribly wrong. “We have been induced by politicians, economists and journalists to accept a vicious ideology of extreme competition and individualism that pits us against each other, encourages us to fear and mistrust each other and weakens the social bonds that make our lives worth living.” It has changed our perception of ourselves and our perceptions, in turn, change the way we behave.

We must tell the story of how most people are [socially minded, empathetic and altruistic](file://Volumes/Downloads/Internet%20Downloads/Perceptions-Matter-Full-Report.pdf) and of how host people would prefer to live in a world in which everyone is treated with respect and decency.

Minister Margot Woolstrom has told a story – “A grandfather says to his grandchild: “There is a battle between two wolves inside me. One is evil; he is arrogance, ego, lies and despair. The other is good; he is peace, compassion, truth and hope. This battle is inside us all.” The grandchild asks: “Which wolf wins?” The grandfather replies: “The one you feed.”

* **We must become more equal.**

The recovery from the financial crisis could hardly have been less equal. While the wealth of the richest skyrocketed, post-financial crisis austerity has crippled the social-democratic welfare state and has eaten away at the EU project and left the poorest of the world unrelieved. We can all see the growing fury at governments and at political parties for not fulfilling their part of the grand bargain. Irrational rage against migrants, the populist scapegoats – betrays a deeper rage – at expectations unmet, at promises unfulfilled. White supremacists and radical Islamists alike take up rhetorical and literal arms against this corruption of the social contract.

And yet still today, the distribution of global wealth and resources is largely uncontested by any mechanism of governance with national governments unable put in place the necessary financial controls over money flows beyond their reach into “booming “offshore” zones, enabling tax evasion on a such scale that it is really an accepted fundament of 21st-century commerce”. It is this steady downsizing and privatizing of the democratic social contract has left populations “rummaging around for new things to believe in”.

**We must become more secure**

The war on terror – the counter-terrorism project and everything attached to it has driven a revolution of the democratic state with states of emergency part of the new normal and the infrastructure of distrust warping public movement, public organizing and public dialogue. Wrongly, human rights often have been treated as obstacles to counter-terrorism measures.

Summary executions, arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detentions, torture, unfair trials, attacks on civil society space, violations of the right to privacy and other fundamental freedoms are neither made somehow morally acceptable when committed in the name of counter terrorism nor are they proving effective in creating greater security.

People continue to feel and experience insecurity in their daily lives. Their experiences as victims of acts of terror, their fear of and flight from crime on the streets and their sense of betrayal when crime is perpetrated without accountability at the hands the powerful – from the high priest to the captain of industry - #metoo – these too are feeding our times and they must be engaged

**We must defend truth better**

In the losing battle for public trust in our strained systems of governance, the biggest victim has been confidence in truth. Persistent fake news, election manipulation, public lies told as if public truths by public leaders, unsurprisingly this has a cumulative, and profound effect on the public.

The inability to stem the swelling tide of disinformation has proven toxic – today large swathes of us are unable to distinguish between what is real news and what is fake. In the meantime, the big data companies (Google, Facebook etc) have assumed many functions previously associated with the state, from cartography to surveillance.

For populists, truth doesn’t matter at all. In such an atmosphere, anything is possible, no matter how previously unthinkable.

We need more empirical, inter-disciplinary research. Including in terms of how the media landscape is unable to cope and respond to it in many places around the world.

**We need to stand up for civil society more**

NGOs historically have been trusted as partial remedy and valued augmentation when issues and needs are unaddressed by government. When government is under strain and media no longer serving as reliable watchdog, civil society is just essential. Perhaps this is why populists are so quick on taking office to invest significant time and energy on constitutional and legislative reforms aimed at constraining civic space.

Civil society is facing an unprecedent clampdown all over the globe in the form of legal and administrative barriers, as governments impose new status registration regimes, frustrate the means of receiving foreign funding, impose administrative frustrations on access to bank accounts, premises and legal standing. At least forty-five or one-fourth of the world’s countries have passed laws restricting foreign funding and ninety-eight countries have passed laws restricting civil society space. However, the tide against civic space in general, and HRDs in particular, is strong, with growing restrictions and threats on many fronts, on-line and off-line, often including under the pretext of countering terrorism and addressing security concerns.

The failure of the more traditional means of civic engagement ie the political party, and the erosion of classical bridges between social movements and systems of governance – the kind of bridge that for example existed between labour movements and labour governments via labour parties – exacerbates the distance and heightens the hostility between the state and civic organizing.

But the benefits of vibrant, pluralistic unimpeded civil society are not imprisoned by national boundaries – but accrue to us all. Few scientific, literary, artistic, technological or indeed political breakthroughs - and even fewer acts of courageous compassion Without civil society? No end to slavery. No effective response to HIV - no affordable anti-retrovirals. No public exposure of child sexual assault perpetrated by the church and in football clubs. No legislation against child marriage or rape in marriage. No access to emergency contraception. No marriage equality. No protection of endangered species.

**We need to develop new understandings of citizenship** – given that its function in this changing world is almost itself unjust. Many countries have made efforts, through welfare and education policy, to neutralise the consequences of these accidental advantages of birth but still 97% of citizenship is inherited, which means that the essential horizons of life on this planet are already determined at birth. If in doubt of the power of this question, look simply at the latest from the US administration.

We need to reform not only **representative democracy but participatory democracy**. Technology offer ways to participate in political processes that while far away nonetheless affect us: if democracy is supposed to us some control over decisions affecting us should a US election not involve more people on earth- the Russians seem to think so?

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Economist and diplomat John Kenneth Galbraith, made a study of greatness in leadership, to find that the key characteristic of great leaders is “the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time.” Leadership of a nervous people in fearful times is a courageous business. It demands of those who would lead both vision and optimism, but courage too including courageous adherence to enduring principles.

Such leadership panders not to fear nor does it step aside from confronting hate. And it finds store for its strength in an unrelenting recognition of the dignity and rights of each and every one of us, to the exclusion of none of us, in the interests of all of us. In this, there is no North or South, no right or left, neither East nor West. There is only the humane and the inhumane.

“We must not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief; But do justly now, love mercy now, walk humbly now; we are not obligated to complete the work but neither are we free to abandon it.” (The Talmud)