

FEAR: THE MAIN THREAT TO THE EVOLUTION OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN THE NEXT 5 TO 10 YEARS?

Questions for the biggest challenges facing democracy in the next 5 to 10 years:

What are the biggest challenges for active participation of people as citizens in politics and civic life, to people choosing and replacing their representatives through free and fair elections? What are the challenges to the protection afforded by human rights to all citizens and to the rule of law being applied equally?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Underlying assumptions

1. *No single democratic practice is recognised as the 'perfect' system, there is no point of arrival, it is a collective journey.*
2. *Citizens feel fear, frustration and deep anxiety when their development and security needs are not met.*
3. *A violent call for bread and jobs, and/or for political change as in North Africa in 2011 or Ukraine more recently is not so unusual.*

What is fear a problem? Isn't developing a democratic society bound to be messy, demanding and occasionally frightening?

Yes, but too much messy is disruptive and can be very frightening for many people, particularly for those who have a stake in the society, and whose identity and place in the systems depend on it staying largely the same.

Any shocks to systems on which people depend, particularly shocks that are violent and costly can affect people's belief and confidence in change itself, so are not only disruptive, but can precipitate a desire for a return of the old order.

The default position in democratic practice is to win elections by connecting with voter fears to win inter-party competitions supported by allies in the newspapers and media who magnify/amplify and simplify.

Messy change has since the 2008 financial crash has come home to wealthy democratic societies because the majority of people are much more aware they are much less resilient and much more exposed to global forces and less protected by government than they had supposed.

B Two strategies for exploring fear and its challenge to democracy:

1.) What new 21st Century life knowledge, skills and habits are needed by people and societies to help them be more resilient to the shocks affecting them, and therefore less fearful?

Easy options include the offer of more 'purposeful' agendas, often ones that fragment complicated questions to simple choices. These can also provide *an opening for instinctive anti-democratic politics*, promising order over chaos (Nationalism, Fundamentalism inter-ethnic, inter-faith agendas, and administrative fascism).

That the declared 'top three' political priorities of some developed country political parties are '*education, education, education*', resonates here.

The evolution of consciousness *and the recognition of 'the self' as a primary agent in building personal resilience has become part of a general understanding of leadership and personal growth in the 21st Century.*

2.) How can national systems that support lives and livelihoods be made less vulnerable to shocks?

This is the field where a **rationalist positivist approach dominates**; the idea is institutions come together using logic and collective problem solving at a global, national and local level.

Because there are numerous causes and no clear solutions, citizens recognise the need to support experts and institutions' able to develop multiple pronged approaches that recognise multiple stakeholders in a whole interconnected system.

Most significantly they recognise *any comprehensive approach requires lots of people, institutions and communities to shift their mind set and behaviour*. (These include threats to the eco-system, practices of unsustainable production and consumption, climate change and obesity, and most environmental, economic and social problems).

Complaints at the loss of voice shared by many citizens include the views that:

- *Democracy has fallen into the hands of oligarchies feathering their nests using their political patronage to achieve position power over lead public agencies and institutions, and lobbying policy-makers over the heads of the public at both at municipal and regional levels;*

- The power of enterprises to be both local and global secures *global shareholder benefit at local public expense*; (e.g. threatening jobs if their local requirements are not met, moving taxable income offshore from income generated onshore.)
- There is a growing *disconnect between tens of thousands of citizens and the large public and private organisations/utilities serving them*. Efficiency means little time is spent on responding to individuals, people are members of groups, and different groups are serviced differently, which results in an organisational practice that views customers through the lens of big data as 'group types', disconnected to the practice and culture of their customers as people. Group types coupled with efficiency targets have been a recipe for human rights violations and damaging national scandals.

C What Impact will these challenges require from local democracy?

A shift in culture and mind set; local administrations will widen and deepen local learning and policy participation with a focus on those local social entrepreneurs and community leaders able 'to think the unthinkable' thereby supporting those working on the 'edge of chaos', the place where innovation emerges.

The two questions to help focus local administrations will be:

What knowledge and know-how will help people be more resilient to the shocks affecting our communities?

- Resources for the evolution of personal consciousness (Otto Scharmer, Theory U, Ken Wilber and other lead innovators)
- Resources for Clarity of purpose & values based decision-making (Richard Barrett at Barrett Values Centre)
- Resources for Sense-making in Complexity through participative decision-making (Dave Snowden and Cynefin Framework).

What is now needed at national level to help make our local services less vulnerable to international shocks?

- Forum for Global/local action and a network of networks;
- An International Observatory/Directory of practice to connect municipalities in transition;
- Prototype Volunteer based national disaster/emergency services;

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