SOCIOMETRY

A group exercise at the Agora for the Great Transition in Paris

AIMS OF THE EXERCISE

The following questions were meant to spark debate surrounding potential points of tension. During the exercise, participants answered by physically positioning themselves along a spectrum, with two opposing answers on either end.

QUESTIONS

1. When you think of the ideals you hold, are we living in times that are generally worse or better than (say) in the 1960s?
   a. Worse
   b. Better

Some comments made by participants:

“Factors need to be separated: Materially we are better off, things have improved for women, but the trajectory is negative.”

“Other indicators that things are worse include climate change, more poverty, rent prices. That’s why Trump was elected”

“Ideas that make the world appear worse have sunk in.”

“Why should we answer binary questions? Why compare? Quantify? Evaluate?”

2. Between despair and hope, where do you sit regarding the possibility for us to avoid global disaster and reach a Great Transition in future generations?
   a. Despair
   b. Hope
Some comments made by participants:

“The biodiversity crisis, climate change, and planetary condition are reasons for despair.”

“It depends on the day and the environment.”

“The Transition will emerge from disaster and grief is a necessary part [of that]. We have to hold that tension and have faith.”

“There are cracks in the dominant ideology we can exploit, and the movement is getting stronger and more visible.”

“The activist dilemma is: do you motivate by using fear or using hope?”

3. We live in times of growing political polarisation. How worrying is this?
   a. This is a worrying situation in itself. We need to improve social cohesion to save our liberal democracies. Extremism doesn’t lead to a better world.

   b. It is not worrying in itself. This is a necessary phase of the Great Transition that we have to accept. We have to travel through uncertain times on our way to the new system.

Some comments made by participants:

“There is a clash of opinions, but perhaps this is a case of yin and yang.”

“Polarisation is not a new—we are just more aware of it”

“This is the connectivity revolution, with new forms arising, like localism, municipalism. It’s more complex vs more polarised.”

“It’s moving in the right direction. It might be the beginning, or we are in the middle of a revolution.”

“So-be-it attitude leads to disaster (fascism)”

“The loss of purpose is dangerous to democracy”

“Social media algorithms bring out the tribalism that humans are evolutionarily wired for.”

4. Do you think that people with more conservative views should take part in the co-creation of the Great Transition?
   a. Yes, I think that they have important ideas/aspects to contribute. Wide acceptance of this journey of deep change is key.

   b. No, I think this would dilute the essence of this project. Instead we need to convince people with different views of the virtues of our progressive vision.
The majority of people were standing on the (a) side, in favour of conservative people taking part.

Some comments made by participants:

“Is it us versus them?”

“It’s judgmental to say we shouldn’t involve conservatives:”

“Is this an ideological echo chamber if we don’t talk to them? (enemy narratives)”

“There is virtue signaling going on in the fact that many people say that conservatives should take part. Is this political correctness. How many here have worked with conservatives?”

“It’s not about left vs. right. It’s the authoritarians we can’t talk to and they are on the left and the right.”

“It’s judgmental to say that we shouldn’t involve conservatives. They’re not here, let’s not kid ourselves. We need to bring them with us.”

“They have things to contribute to the Great Transition from different but important moral intuitions.”

5. **Do you think that identity politics as it’s currently unfolding plays a positive role towards the Great Transition?**

   a. Yes, it plays an important role in creating a more just society. It is a key element of the Great Transition.

   b. No, the current type of identity politics is divisive, creates political polarisation and leads to authoritarianism.

Some comments made by participants:

“Identity politics provides people with meaning”

“Identity politics is inclusive”

“It gives those that were repressed a voice.”

“It’s using values and not just identity.”

“Identity politics are not allowing us to be constructive and build on what we have.”

“Identity in support of minorities should be distinguished from identities slipping into the social/political sphere.”

“Identity becomes a label based on categories that is instrumentalised, and it’s difficult to see relationships.”
6. What do you think should be the goal of social justice?
   a. Equality of opportunity
   b. Equality of outcome

   “What do you mean by equal opportunity? Is it objective?”
   “It’s about best conditions for the best race.”
   “But what about people with a different trajectory?”
   “What about quality of access?”
   “We would never have equal opportunity. It’s a question of luck, but that we can eliminate/neutralize systemic bias.”

7. Which principle is more important for the next system?
   a. Collective autonomy
   b. Individual autonomy

   Only 3 people positioned themselves on the individual autonomy side.

   Some comments made by participants:
   “I feel uncomfortable with these terms: there is no collective without individuals, and if collective autonomy doesn’t enhance individual autonomy, then it’s not good enough.”
   “Our autonomy in an interdependent world might be better described as embedded autonomy.”
   “Collective means control!”
   “In our acute ecological crisis for our species to survive we will need collective autonomy and outcomes.”