

In Praise of Distance

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For two weeks now I have not left my immediate neighbourhood to go out into the city and have only left my apartment to go shopping for food or to walk our dog. A couple of times I did drive out of the city. I have not used public transportation, which otherwise I would have done most weekdays. I have not seen friends and some family members. Probably many readers are experiencing comparable situations.

I have not looked in my appointments diary to see what I have coming up. Instead I have only been crossing out appointments as they have been cancelled. They have all been cancelled. I have not yet replaced any outstanding facilitation, training or mediation appointments with online meetings. It can wait. People have other concerns at the moment. I have put all my university teaching online, and that is working fine. I have not seen any students or colleagues, though of course I have spoken to them.

I am fine. I am fortunate that I am living in a wealthy country (Germany) that has an infrastructure and the political will to deal with the situation well, under the circumstances.

I am enjoying having time at home and I am enjoying doing more online teaching than ever before. It is a great bonus not to have to iron any shirts, because there is nowhere to go where I will need one. Yes, there is a loss in income. But when I look around me and around the world: mine are the problems that come with good fortune.

Ongoing projects are put on hold. Ongoing relationships are put on hold too. This is not just social distancing, which in itself I am experiencing as a great benefit. The rush is over, the pressure is off. Maybe I was expending too much energy trying to keep up with social engagements anyway.

This is the distance of a fundamental perspective shift. For me personally. For families, businesses, organisations, communities, towns, cities, societies and the global community. Some things can just wait. Others might go away as they were not important or no longer are. For the things that remain, cooperation is needed more than ever.

Ongoing disputes are put on hold. This is an opportunity. Let us embrace the perspective shift that distance brings.

I do not want to see this as another opportunity for (more) mediation using online means, or for more mediation under new circumstances. If matters are pressing, then do try online resolution methods, rather than wait and make things worse. If not, I prefer to hope that this shift in perspective will be a chance for people, organisations, businesses, politics, whatever, to put so many of their ongoing disputes and conflicts aside because with this new perspective comes the realisation that these are not worth fighting. It is time to cooperate.

May we go through and come out of this trouble cooperating more.