Thank you—valuable insights from Glenn McRae. The Covid-19 pandemic has indeed forced us away from public gathering places and into online interactions. In many ways this has exacerbated the already-increasing social patterns of "silo-ing"—only interacting with like-minded people, which shields us from new ideas and adds to the polarization of public opinion. (We discuss these patterns in more depth in Ch. 5 of *Slow Democracy*.)

I'll be interested to know what sociologists learn in the years to come about the effects of the pandemic. There may be an unexpected counterbalancing effect, and the professor in the New York *Times* piece who noted that she was talking with her neighbors more may not be such an anomaly. It's only anecdotal evidence, but in community forums I've been involved in recently, both rural and urban, I've heard people comment that they've met many neighbors they never knew simply because (stripped of their daily commutes, trips to the gym, etc.) they were walking much more in their neighborhoods. I've also heard local leaders from multiple communities comment that their regular meetings (e.g. selectboard, school board) normally had zero public attendance, but when held on Zoom were now drawing regular public participation.

In any case, libraries can certainly play a lead role in enriching the cross-fertilization of ideas and worldviews—a quality critical to sustaining our democracy. As discussed in the keynote, simply inviting the public to engage is more likely to bring out "egalitarian collectivists" than the other three quadrants, so libraries will need to get creative. When hosting online events, you can:

• **Make the most of your local knowledge.** You know your community. Stay hyper-tuned to the pulse, and host online presentations on timely topics of particular local interest. Bring in topical experts, ideally representing a range of views. Follow up with a facilitated Q&A and/or discussion. (Zoom offers a small-group option that you could consider using; you could even recruit local volunteers with facilitation experience to keep the break-out discussions on track.)

• **Model diverse thinking.** Invite surprisingly diverse organizations to co-host a presentation/discussion. People are more apt to participate if they can "see themselves" among the organizers, and the more unlikely the coalition, the more intriguing the event will be. (We tell a story in *Slow Democracy* about a town in New Hampshire that was considering creating a community forest; the fact that the organizing committee included a senior member of the police force who was well known in the hunting and fishing community, plus a young environmentalist who worked for a local hiking group, affirmed that multi-faceted interests were being represented, and helped community members to stay open and curious about the complex negotiations.)

• **Don't be afraid to play.** The "Warm Cookies of the Revolution" group discussed in the keynote is a great example. Another example is the story of Mohamed Salah, an Egyptian and star-forward for the Liverpool Football Club.

Stay with me here—I know this isn't library specific, but it's a poignant reminder of the importance of informal connections.

Salah is an observant Muslim. When he scores, part of his goal celebration involves the Islamic act of prostration to God. And he scores a lot.

Liverpool soccer fans are not known for racial or religious tolerance. But Salah speaks their language—the language of soccer, that is. They love him. They love him so much that Stanford University researchers have studied ["the Salah phenomenon."](#) Since Salah joined Liverpool in 2017, researchers found an 18.9 percent drop in hate crimes, and a 53% fall in anti-Muslim tweets among Liverpool fans.

Stanford concludes "that exposure to members of a minority group in the context of apolitical leisure activities can be a powerful tool for shifting perceptions."

It's something for us all to ponder as we plan the next community event. Sometimes the best way to create connection may be less talk, more play.

2. Susan Clark's presentation was phenomenal! Such an energizing start to this week of learning. Right aware I shared the link with our new director Catharine Hays because Vergennes is looking into a community engagement project based on Slow Democracy. I am looking forward to reading her book.

This question is not going to be phrased gracefully but here goes. When striving to bring disparate sides together, Susan discussed creating a new Plan C. This sounds like a compromise where neither side will be happy. How does it work to invite input and then not use it going forward? How do you avoid people, who have such hard-wired opinions, feeling disillusioned by Slow Democracy?

To share a little, I am a retired library director from the suburbs of Chicago trying to avoid being a complete downhiller here. I was so proud to have led the Arlington Heights Memorial Library, one of Library Journal's five-star public libraries. Now I am delighted to help the Bixby in any way I can.

I celebrate this question! It's where I would locate the cutting edge of social change today. If we can master this one, we might save the world.

I'd start by pointing to the field of "polarity management" (see the work of [Barry Johnson](#) and an expanding group of [colleagues](#)). Polarity management sounds wonky, but put simply, the idea is to bypass the usual "either-or" thinking, and instead use techniques that get to "both-and."

Rather than pitting the advantages of my idea against the advantages of your idea, it involves engaging all sides in an honest, well informed assessment of the plusses and the minuses (or "benefits" and "overuses") of both options. With trust, skilled facilitation, and some luck,* you can then move on to identifying a transformational third way—what it might look like to identify and hold onto the best of both sides, while inventing a creative new option.

Solutions aren't created by leaders and imposed from the top-down. Inclusive, empowered deliberation is the "slow" part of slow democracy. Both sides are fully engaged, so this is not a case where you "invite input and then not use it going forward." Polarity management has been applied in the business world for decades, and personal coaches use it to help leaders navigate personal challenges. I think it would be very useful in government and local leadership processes.

*Trust is in short supply in many communities these days, and expert facilitation can be expensive, so I know this model isn't a panacea. That said, we can start by inviting this type of exploration into our own personal lives and families; it might inspire insights we can bring into our community work.