

**"Spain and the World
at the Dawn of 2004"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on Wednesday 14th January
IEPP, Fernández de la Hoz, nº 1 bis
28008 Madrid



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. SHARING CONCERNS AND EXPERIENCES.

At the beginning the participants shared general views on social issues and how these were affecting their roles.

Another issue during this part was to explore the differences between participants and their experiences as members of a generation.

All the discussion was agreeable, respectful and in an informal tone.

Part 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In this part there were some doubts about how to organize the work of making the summary of the issues that came up in the first part.

The first proposal was to write down directly every issue that had come up but it was rejected because the group thought it wouldn't be operative.

There was another proposal that tried to organize everything according to the criteria of being an individual matter (personal or professional), social (as citizens or Spaniards) or related to the whole world. It was a very attractive idea and well developed but the group didn't identify it as such.

In the end and after having put in common the issues, the group decided to collect the issues that came up without any predetermined order.

The result was as follows:

- The dehumanisation of the society
- The lost of "values" in the society
- Persons as robots
- The culture of "you are worth as much as you have"
- Does democracy really exist?
- Changes in the limits and structures of the states, nations and governments.
- Individual problems, group problems and social problems (find a house, a job, elderly people, immigrants...)

- The feeling of being excluded... (from the access to buy a house, from the job market, from the channel or places where decisions are taken.)
- Lost of familiar and social links
- Freedom and responsibility
- The repetition of the male pattern of behaviour

Part 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Analysis and Hypothesis 1.

Analysis: The first issue that came up was: why, during the first part, the group didn't talk about the "plan Ibarretxe"? (a separatist proposal of the Basque government). The group thought that may be there was too much fear to discuss this issue at the beginning of this group.

There were some voices saying that personally they didn't care if the Basque country gets the independence. Other voices were prepared to think about it but the tempers were frayed when some people talked about all the victims of the terrorism, all the people that had to leave the Basque country because their lives were at risk or just because the coexistence is very difficult for those Basques that are not nationalist/ independentist.

Nearly all the group thought that accepting the " Plan Ibarretxe" is accepting terrorism, pain and confrontation as a mean to reach a goal.

Hypothesis: It does exist a global process of change in the "State" structures. Facing the globalisation process, small countries and states come back again threatening those big states that constitute the most important European countries (Italy, France, UK, Spain...)

There is a search for new particular identities as an answer to the globalisation uniformity. It might exist fear about losing a social identity in the midst of the building process of the European Community.

Nationalists claim for independence, money and more power for a part of the population, reflecting the strain between the richest regions and communities and the solidarity with poorer regions.

Terrorism and civil confrontation have to do with the difficulty to find enough room in the negotiation to make room to the claims that threats the limits, the rules, the stability and the concept of "State" and "Country" as it has been understood up to now.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2.

Analysis: "The feeling of being excluded"

There was a debate about how oneself, as citizen, can be excluded from the most important decisions that impinge on oneself, one's city or one's society.

It was discussed how the government took the decision of intervening in Iraq's war even when ninety per cent of the Spanish population was against that intervention and against the US policy.

It was a general perception that the politicians and the government treated the general public as if we were stupid and we didn't think or were able to think by ourselves. We were treated by the media and the politicians as if we were going to accept all the absurd reasons that covered the real interests and tried to justify the war.

The media and the politicians did a very simple analysis of the situation and a very rude confrontation of positions.

The only option for the people was: "You are with me, or against me?"

However at the subsequent elections, in may, nothing changed, and the people kept on voting to the same conservative party that brought Spain to Iraq's war.

Hypothesis: There is no space to think, to dig and look for trustful information, not only the politically correct information. There is no place to remain independent thinking critically. There is no place to look for complexity, shades of meanings and different perspectives because that make us feel uneasy with the uncertainty, fear, confrontation or even the rage that can be awoken.

The government, the big business trusts, the economic power takes decisions where the citizen is excluded, maybe because as citizens we can do nothing, maybe because we are too busy to be interested in them, or maybe because it is easier to blame the government or the international corporations of all the injustices and inequities of this world and preserve our way of living.

Our conscience can be shaken and be against the war or against all social injustices between the first and third world but at the end one can't get away from the system because one have to pay the mortgage of the house one is living in, the loan instalments of the car, the school for the children and so on...

So at the end, people leaves their morality and their conscience behind and countersign the system by voting the party that they think is going to be better in managing the welfare state and the stability.

There is a collusion of interests and a sense of deception and loss of the real values of life.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3.

Analysis: The problems that arose in the first part were the problems of the first world. Only 8% of the world's population live in this area, and thinking about the problems of our relation as citizens of the first world with the third world was maybe too uncomfortable.

There was a perception of having ignored the rest of the world and that perception had its own representation in how much time or attention does the media or our politicians, intellectuals...pay to the problems and situations of the third world.

We only remember the 3rd world when there is a catastrophe or when we have a problem related with them, for example the immigration policies.

There were some questions about why, generally, we are so insensitive. Why we don't react to the injustice. What is our responsibility as citizens?

There is an acceptance that culturally, in the first world, we are supposed to think that "you are worth as much as you have" and that is the only measure for everything. Are we exporting this mentality to the third world?

Hypothesis: We are living in a split manner our relation with other people's problems. In one hand it may be very difficult to become aware (ex: the media) of the great tragedies of the humanity as famine, wars, exploitation and injustice and in the other hand there is a need to calm down our conscience as society with projects of charity, non profit organizations volunteers programs and helps to the third world.

But now there is the perception that all this actions are not enough and we are also responsible of the origin of the problem and also responsible of the solutions whatever they could be.

Anxiety, stress, depression are symptoms that point out that something goes bad in our society and in ourselves, symptoms that can be the price that this society has to pay for leaving in the welfare society but in a consummism race, where we lose the perception of what is really important in our lives and where we lose the links that make us think that the other is important for us.

The TV programs and their contents can be the reflect of which are our interests and preoccupation. So if we just find frivolity, soccer, politically correct lies and rubbish at the TV, it might be because it could be too dangerous to be aware, and to keep in mind the reality as it is.

Analysis and Hypothesis 4.

Analysis: Women role in society. Some women in the group raised the question if the women liberation has got changes for the women that really worth. Another question was if the personal costs that the women has to face are compensate the professional life of women. A common vision was that it was very difficult to match personal and familiar life with the professional career. It does exist a big discomfort with the fact that women reached to introduce themselves in the labor market but that has not been reflected in a proportional access to responsibility and management positions.

Hypothesis: Women fighting for their rights have tried to be as men and have tried to show how are able to do any work men do (firemen, soldiers, policewomen...). Maybe women hasn't realized that are different from men and many of the problems of women comes from the repetition of masculine patterns, specially those that are present at work.

Maybe women has been mistaken in trying to be the perfect mother, the perfect wife and a successful professional in the same way that she was before. Maybe women is still reluctant to change the role of her motherhood and that of being wife in order to give space for the professional fulfillment and success.

The reason why there are so few women in responsibility positions has to do with the perception that personal life and familiar life will be sacrificed.

There is an ambivalent feeling and thinking about if fighting with men for power is worthy.

CONVENORS: Ignacio García & Carlos Monfort