

**"Portugal and the World
at the Dawn of 2006"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on 11th January



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. Themes were not easy to summarize, however they can be grouped as the following:

- a) Social instability, social uncertainty and social chaos.*
- b) Strong performance pressure and too much focus on economic success.*
- c) Lack of enjoyable leisure/private life.*
- d) Difficulty in defining social pressure as being either internal or external.*
- e) Paradoxical situation of simultaneous lack and excess of social identity.*
- f) Alienation, anomie and lack of emotional attachments in contemporary life.*
- g) Need for an inner attitude of peace and to find our own individual way of getting fulfilled.*

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis:

Nowadays social roles are not very clearly defined. An example is the instability of marriage and gender roles. Once there were stable social labels and stereotypes and people would follow to them for life, but not anymore. Society conveys the idea that you can be whatever you want and fulfil all your desires but that you must work very hard for that as an individual. At the same time there is the anxiety of having so many choices and the feeling that we are losing something important along the way. This contributes to a feeling of diffuse identity and a kind of depersonalisation.

People need to define their inner identity by their professional identity and their success in work (external identity). This is linked with social pressure for competition and success. The question was raised as to the nature of social pressure: Is this pressure internal (intra-psychic) or external (social)? This theme was discussed at lengths. It was not clear if the pressure is mostly internal, ego ideal or super-ego like, or more external, of the type "peer-pressure" and "role-model".

There is a feeling of lack of protection of individuals in society, a lack of formal social support. This is exemplified by the lack of budget for retirement plans by the state. Also, employment is not as safe as once used to be, and young people have to strive hard for starting an independent life. The psychologist and social worker's labour life is professionally unstable. On the other hand, Portuguese people give much value to safety

and protection. We feel we have sacrificed our private life and leisure/holidays in order to keep up with economic demands and work and this is felt by some as disturbing.

Hypothesis:

Due to the a) *dissolution of traditional values and social roles*, b) the *rapid social changes, mobility, and fast transformations* and c) the *failure of the state to protect and take care of the individuals*, there is a lack of safety and structure. This generation (in the late 20's and early 30's) has a lot of apparent freedom and the illusory possibility of making many choices in every aspect of life. But in fact there is a lot of pressure to conform and many restrictions to choose freely. This paradox leads to weak, superficial and ambivalent compromises in every sphere of social life. This creates a vicious cycle resulting in an increased feeling of lack of inner integrity, and in an ever stronger need to conform to external superficial norms to defend against fears of uncertainty and insecurity.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis:

There is a strong pressure for innovation and to adapt to new technologies both at work and at leisure. This pressure is made stronger and more upsetting due to the lack of formal social support and of consistent social structures and boundaries. The need to perform and the simultaneous fear of failure are very strong. There is the sensation of a hard pace and speed in social life and of strong pressure to go along with the speed of changes, otherwise failure may ensue.

There are some difficulties in having a private life outside work, and in dealing with free time and tediousness, a lack of tolerance to routine. There is a lack of internal safety, and incapacity of relaxing and also bearing boredom and empty periods of time, and also a lack of intrinsic satisfaction in work. We are overwhelmed with sensorial stimulation and experiences, and with a superficial and external use of time.

People are almost hypnotised and "robotised", as if in a kind of modern slavery and Faustian pact for safety. People act and react without insight and inner vision.

There is lack of emotional linking and attachment to places, people and things, and everything decays, gets old, and outdated very rapidly. The feeling of lack of safety is also due to weak or inexistent emotional linking with places, things and people, which leads to insecurity, inner emptiness and a deep loneliness. This causes the urge to fill the inner subjective void with stimulation and experiences with sensorial impact, which do not have a deep personal meaning.

Hypothesis:

Because there is much *alienation from inner needs* there is a lack of attention to and lack of words to express individuality and emotional needs. Hence, we have a lack of identity and as a defence we centralise our worries on work activities, as a projection of our inner malaise and anxiety. We replace inner satisfaction and well being with success and external signs of wealth; we live as if in a "reality-show" where we feel constantly observed and must perform ambiguous roles which are neither inside nor outside us. Society has become borderless and one participant said it had even become "borderline" (in the clinical sense of the word).

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Organisation of the event: Tiago Mendes and Pedro Santos