

**"Estonia and the World
at the Dawn of 2010"
Report of a Listening Post
held in January in Tallinn**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives,' that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under four interrelated themes presented as hypotheses in Part 3 below:

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

Hypothesis 1

A human being/an individual has, inadvertently, created a large system of which he finds it hard to be a part. The individual feels that the demands set by the system feel overwhelming and create frustration, anxiety and a continuous feeling of discomfort. One has an unreasonable struggle to stay within the system, in addition to which staying within the system is solely the responsibility of the individual. It is difficult for the individual to communicate with the large, faceless system.

Individuals are increasingly worried about their own coping as a part of a large, faceless system. People experience that they face attitudes expecting them to know things that have not been told to them. They experience that they are expected to know how to do things that have not been taught to them. One has to appear calm although one is very worried; one must stay in good health although illnesses cannot be prevented; one must have faith in the future even though the financial situation of the State (large system) and the world (an even larger system) is deteriorating. This perception creates an

experience of fear, anxiety and frustration for an individual. One feels one is very alone with one's own worries. One feels solely responsible for facing and meeting the high demands of the faceless system. One is increasingly concerned that one may not know when and how to seek help. This creates a fear that one is not able to cope. The system has become alienated from individuals.

Hypothesis 2

People have become more passive. The requirements for efficiency set on the individual from the outside have become overwhelming. They cause anxiety and great psychological effort is needed for coping. One has to undergo extreme tribulation to achieve the experience of peace and harmony. External entertainment offers a quick fix and postpones the feeling of emptiness. People seize this. The paradox is that individuals have turned their own ideal into a norm and now find it impossible to meet the same norm. Facing the impossible, they continuously feel distressed, suffer from bad self-esteem, a feeling of guilt, inability and even fear of not coping.

People felt that they had to make an increasing effort in order to succeed. Personal effort is felt increasingly arduous. If demands are completely unreasonable, frustration and anxiety can be avoided by becoming passive. Then, one cannot fail, and not failing is good enough. The experience was that external entertainment is easily accessible and it makes one feel good fast. This way, one can transfer the anxiety caused by psychological effort away from oneself. One feels that there is no time for long-term effort.

Hypothesis 3

Large systems cannot be trusted. The proportions of coping (proportion between giving and receiving) are not in balance. The system requires more and gives less. Individuals must compromise in their autonomy, which creates a continuous experience of frustration and being manipulated.

The participants had been often disappointed when discovering over and over again that the currently valid systems in different fields of life cannot be trusted. People are lured to take out insurance but once something happens, the required compensation clause does not exist in the policy. Bus routes in the city are changed without informing people, which causes difficult situations and frustration. Changes are often experienced to be too fast, and one has to face new things all the time. One has to make a constant effort and find out what is going on, one cannot trust routines. What one has learned today may not be valid tomorrow. This is tiring and frustrating.

In the beginning, the participants said it was difficult to express their personal experiences. People are not used to share experiences and worries in public. One has usually kept quiet about one's true feelings and experiences or they have been processed in small, familiar circles, not in public. The history was also mentioned. It had never been possible to trust 'the system', it could have had complicated consequences. The participants also talked about times when the system had been afraid of the opinions of individuals and expressing observations out loud.

Hypothesis 4

The relationship between man and nature has changed. People are unable to prepare for surprises caused by nature, because people are alienated from it. Nature causes difficulties for people.

The participants had lively conversation on the exceptionally snowy winter in Estonia. The great amount of snow had taken people by surprise. It was impossible to store snow anywhere and it snowed more all the time. Even though streets were ploughed, the situation between apartment buildings was chaotic. Housing companies did not have service contracts for outdoor areas and therefore everyone had to shovel their cars out of the snow. Snow caused quarrelling between people. There was no space to store it, snow slowed down traffic and it was snowing more. On one hand, people felt that nature was particularly beautiful and it was admired. On the other hand, they hated it. Snow made the lives of urban people rather difficult for a while. The ability/inability to cope with snow also raised discussion.

The youngsters are narcissistic and demand exposure, individuality and personal success, but experience the older generation and the culture as a heavy featherbed, hardly acknowledging and appreciating success. Is it envy or caution?

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