

**"Bulgaria and the World
at the Dawn of 2005"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on Wednesday 12th January



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be these in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. What might be called the 'social' 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. On this occasion, themes were difficult to name but can be drawn together as the following three interrelated statements:

1. While mobility and travelling opportunities for some people increase for others this creates problems.

Walk and travel in the town are hampered by both the travelling of others and by the litter spread all over the streets.

This fact provokes feelings of vulnerability, helplessness and anger. It also challenges our relations with the authorities and the (municipal) government. The world becomes attractive and accessible. However this leads to some personal losses: loss of connections with the grown-up children, loss of some traditional models of connectedness (traditional big family, where parents can convene and transfer the meaning of what is going on around to their children).

Part of participants experience shame from the unclean physical surrounding in the town, coupled with feeling of vulnerability and at times - helplessness. Emigration is still a problem. It leads to personal losses, although there is a considerable flow of money back in the country from those working abroad.

While being it the role of observers of what is happening around some of the participants experience meaninglessness and rage.

One member feels at a loss for a culture of mediation. He expects this role to be taken by the intellectuals, although he is doubtful whether they exist at all in our country. ("Do we have such ones? Is there someone who can mediate?")

2. The change (values, generations, work, new social roles).

The standard of living is rising. Communications and technologies bring quickness and commodity. At some places social trust increases (*"drivers show more concern to each other"*), while at some others it diminishes (*"every day my driving is a hell!"*) There is a positive experience from contributions to the life of the local communities such as good neighbourhoods, sponsorship/patronage, civil participation as well as a negative one - disappointment from the application of the new democratic competences from some politicians, despite of their instruction and training. The new generation (30-40 years old) is more eagerly recognized as contributing to the local communities' development.

3. Power, control, authority (social participation, entrepreneurship and initiative).

The revolt against the management inconsistency and the promises not kept is modest and mainly imaginative (*"I was considering leaving my litter in front of the Mayor's house"*). Civil campaigns of seeking public responsibility from the public authorities brings experience of incompetence (*"I am not intelligent enough for this stuff"*) and feelings of a lack of civil representation (*"In what organization of civil representation should citizen recognise their needs and hopes so as not to be more and more situation's observers? I don't have local roots, I am root on my own. And that exhausts me."*); of being not understood (*"I have the feeling that you can receive some understanding only when the Other is in some powerful position: an intellectual, a therapist, a media person etc."*), and of distortion of your own image.

4. Communication. Roles.

Some of traditional inter-generational relationships change. For the present generation a father can be recognized through his son instead of the traditional reverse. Relationships (between village and town, with the country as a whole, with the surrounding nature, between neighbours - within a same building and a town district) have been discussed.

The parental role is facing new challenges. Sometimes it brings feelings of helplessness, especially in regards to some social challenges, not so much in the "space" between the child and the parent (*"I cannot help my daughter coping with the world outside".*)

Although there are already resources available something that can bring *"pieces of he puzzle"* together in some complete whole (an "authority", a "project") is missing. *"We are not being thought to work in a team"* - said one of the participants regarding her failure to organise a service, provided that she had *"the rooms, the professionals and the clients"* available.

Some of the participants assume that this is a case of lack of some rules; of the "bad" past being present.

Some of the female participants shared their concern about the "man" in the context of the traditional vision about him.

Others shared some lack of clarity about themselves after 2007 : *"I don't have a vision about myself for the future. Shall I mow my daughters' meadows, or -shall I speak with their children in German? I am slipping, I don't have an image to guide me."*

An university lecturer asks his students to write an essays answering the question: "Is the law for prohibition of smoking at public places just and fare?". In a critical mass of students' answers no single disease is mentioned as a pro- or contra-argument.

"We have become already ethnically "profiled" in prostitution amongst the Europe's populations", shares another.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, 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.

Analysis A:

The facilitated movement of all creates new sorts of obstacles. The world becomes accessible to be reached and travelled around, but this separates us (with our children for example). New faces are rushing into our well-known spaces: *"this is no more my district"* as two of the participants have said. At the same time liberalization of ownership and of participation help some others feel more in a position of owners of our surrounding (*"At last, after some 15 years living here, I have the feeling that this town is also mine."*).

Technologies make communication easier. However emotional quality of communication (the feeling of being understood and of togetherness) is not necessarily improving.

These processes challenge our capacity to take our own authority and to manage our relationship with the public power. We feel dependent upon some import of both authority and skills.

Hypothesis A:

Under the conditions of non-integrated past and present increased mobility and movement provoke the need for not only observing but also for coordination with the Other and for action. In the, better acquired and performed, role of the observer the individual in struggling with the challenge to respond to the change with some action. This brings the feelings of dependency from some external sources of authority and management skills, helplessness, shame and anger. The mediating ("Ego") functions appear too weak to provide the individual with reality testing reliable enough so as he/she to be able to choose personal itinerary/career in harmony with the surrounding environment.

Analysis B:

The new conditions provide the chance to fulfil some, for long-time un-satisfied, desires. Economic development brings its first social effects: feelings of impoverishment and personal losses diminish.

Differences (by education, by wealth, by spatial and social mobility) become more tangible.

Reflection over change is still missing.

Hypothesis B:

Success in the free and apt usage of the "new" is unequally distributed. Inequality and difference are the new challenges and anxieties in times when the "old" anxieties, provoked by the extreme impoverishment, have receded before the effects of the national economical boom. These anxieties are still communicated only through the feelings they provoke (narcistic pride, envy, greed). It seem that learning from experience has been postponed for the sake of its consumption.

Analysis C:

Our sensitivity to the public authorities' failures and the need for its correction is mainly alive in some extreme situations such as those where our physical safety is under threat (as the garbage spread over the streets). Our relationships with the public power evoke feelings of helplessness, anger, personal inferiority and inadequacy.

Other changes in thinking are being observed - that, for example, the state is about management of human/civil relations and interests. Critique becomes more differentiated; people get together in more authentic and energetic groups. However this creates contrasts and disturbs the others.

Hypothesis C:

The need for "horizontal" (civil) organization is extreme and painful. The public space "in the civil mind" is rather narrow. Its boundaries are close to the physical boundaries of the personal body. This makes the field for social participation vague, amorphous and potentially threatening. The facilitated movement of all creates new sorts of obstacles. The world becomes accessible to be reached and travelled around, but this separates us (with our children for example). New faces are rushing into our well-known spaces.

Analysis D:

Public discourse is about macro-problems. There is no room for personal matters. Relationships between such spaces are those of contraband. There is an anxiety about falling down of the boundary because it is both obstacle and protection.

Our relations with "Europe" provoke feeling of inhabiting inadequate and clumsy province where occasionally time seems as if stopped. It is populated with either heroes from the past or with modern tireless "professionals".

The voice of those amongst us (those parts of ourselves) who have utilised the new opportunities, have experienced some success and have been satisfied from this is missing. Possible explanation of this is envy, remaining un-communicated and hidden.

Citizens are prone to mobilize deafening discourses, "militant truisms" of reasoning and of public speaking. Their possible function could be to alleviate the burden of responsibility and anxieties of the generation that will be active at the time of joining EU.

Hypothesis D:

The point of joining European Union brings both promises for improvement of standard of living and risks for meeting with the unknown, potentially alien, the "modern" in relations with which many citizens can feel peripheral and provincial, filled with dark past.

Shame, vulnerability and potential self-disappointment citizens either deny (as the fear of some illness) or project on/into various roles (the male one, some powerful shadows from the past).

Another coping strategy consists of mobilizing omnipotent pseudo-heroic behaviours.

Under such condition the public and the private live separately and vulnerable to each other, as well as many of the contemporary citizens. Thus the achievement of common meaning suffers - as the civil participation and the feeling of a meaningful personal place in society do. And vice versa.

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