

AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Bulgaria and the World at the Dawn of 2013
Report of a Listening Post held in Sofia on 13th January



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post we were invited to identify, contribute, and explore our experience in our various social roles. This part of the evening was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to our social context.

Shared social roles' experience

Role 1: of an employee in an organization for international adoption of orphaned children.

Role 2: of a clinical psychologist in a drug addiction clinic.

Role 3: of a program director at a university department.

Role 4: of a governess in a rich family.

Role 5: of an activist on a web-based consultation for victims of violence.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was for us to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. The following represent some of these themes.

- The interest towards pure profit, at any cost dominates many projects and organizations that are expected to provide care (for drug addicts, for students, for orphans waiting for adoption etc.)
- Often these organizations' leadership does not recognize relational competence of its professionals or considers these competences as counterproductive to the organization's agenda.
- Technocratic, instrumental, and often inhuman professional practices have more power and dominance in those professional organizations which provided the context for the social roles studied in the current Listening Post.
- People in need who are providing for the incomes and the identity of such organizations do not receive an adequate care and services. The overall experience is that of abuse and/or unacceptable neglect.
- Sometimes material wellbeing contrasts painfully with the dysfunctional way of functioning of many human systems (families included). This way is experienced as authoritarian, totalitarian and at the same time as enmeshed and undifferentiated. The end effect is that of trauma (isolation and dis-connection) over some of the most vulnerable social actors (patients, young employees in process of development, children under special care etc). Perhaps this traumatic experience could be even widespread.

- However the optimism and hope are rather alive despite the fact that most of the known Bulgarian institutions, the social ones included, have kept their totalitarian, and authoritarian cultures, to the large degree, intact.
- This culture vitiates strongly their capacity to help and to care and to be supportive for those they are responsible for. These quasi-totalitarian top-down relations are being strengthened by the strong feeling of dependency of the employees within their organizations – both economic and organizational. This dynamics further rigidifies hierarchy and power relations.
- Such rigidity is being observed within some families where, sometimes, based on strong patriarchal values, presented as traditions children are over-controlled and as if insulated from some spontaneous contact with their peer environment and from society as a whole, whereas society itself is being experienced as menacing and potentially dangerous.
- As a whole notions and values such as ‘common’, ‘communal’, ‘community’, ‘common good’ etc. are either deprived of their true meaning or perversely (ab-)used for private profit.

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.

The first impression is that social roles explored are, with very few exceptions, those of employees. Dependency, implicit in these relations, is relatively high and almost all of the participants experience themselves as the weaker part in these relationships. The ‘employee’ side of the social experience is manifest whereas the civil side of Bulgarian social experience remains, as a rule, in obscurity.

The second impression is that despite of the relative high degree of responsibility of the roles explored their performers feel isolated and or misunderstood by the overall leadership of the organizations.

The third impression is that without no exception participants in this Listening Post identify themselves as bearers of some new and progressive (more humane) practices and world views manifested by either an increased empathy, better alleviation of some suffering or something similar such as better learning of students.

We can assume that at the current LP we have met a sample of agents of the new, who attempt to bring some innovations within a particular social (working) environment. This environment’s primary task has been announced to serve to the protection and care but is marked with greed and sometimes with frank abuse instead. It is possible that this abuse is a reaction of some anxiety brought forth by the rapid opening of the whole society to the outside flows of ideas, values, practices and information. It is possible also that the same society experiences itself vulnerable – with a corrupt oligarchic elite, isolated and provincial universities, and self-absorbed autocratic public service institutions to the pending change.

At the same time the ‘vertical’ world view operates as an organizing model and values within each of us. For example we tend to stay longer within particularly close proximity, in a satellite-like relationships with particular patriarchal authority figures, unchallenged by nobody, least by us – sort of ‘patriarchs’, founding fathers-like figures.

The social destiny of these 'agents of the new' (still not 'agents of change') is probably informative about the level of the political and social influence the social innovation has reached in Bulgaria. Still, this innovation is fragile, weak and unsustainable before the forces of the status-quo (the imitation of change) and the greed (another expression of the anxiety and defenses against change).

The good news is that the agents of the new can identify themselves as such as an expression of some sustainability of their identity and projects. The bad one is that the agenda of innovation is still weak and vulnerable, partially because of the alienation of its bearers.

There is some hope that through the attention on the current leadership and the current political power these, so far personal, projects suggest a possible venue of development – namely the emancipation from the role of an (dependent) employee and experimentation with some more political, more social (e.g. civil) social roles.

About neuroscience and its relation to the eugenics movement; key 20th century thinkers participated in the Eugenic Congresses in 1912, in 1921 and again in 1932. There was a sense of grappling with the thought that the world we experience is a world at war; a world in of extinguishing civilization.

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