

**"Italy and the World
at the Dawn of 2007"
Report of a Listening Post
held on 12th January**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post members 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. Two of the members were from outside the local context, the event started with 15' delay the participants were informed and, contrary to previous events, the sharing of preoccupations and experiences started very soon. It can be said that the way the process starts bears a significant role in the whole event. Theoretically this can be described as the way the group crosses the boundaries towards its collective preoccupations. Is society, and its citizens, ready to reflect on the internal and external state of its (theirs) affairs?

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part Two the aim was collectively to identify the major themes emerging from Part One. Several themes were identified by the members and these have been distilled into four major themes, they are:

1. Difficulties in locating oneself (role as "given and taken" process)

Members talked of how it is difficult to hold a role (private or public) and how its importance - in finding one's bearing - becomes clear when the role is violently taken away from us. When we do not have any choice in this matter our identities are fragmented and confused. The turbulent contexts in which we live are not helping either: stability and certainties are lost forever and what seems the "approaching new" seems to bring more of the old.

2. Hopelessness

Members talked of a wide spread feeling of hopelessness. There are no societal institutions or ideals that seem capable of holding the fragmentation we are experiencing. The relation between "real" - that is what we have difficulties in coping with - and "ideal" - that is where we would like to be - is broken beyond "reparation". There is no space or process or societal institution that can help us influencing change. We are doomed and only the next generation will take such doom away.

3. Ambiguity towards professional and professionalism

The situation we are experiencing is such that fears, pre-occupations, and anxieties do not find a manageable environment both in the internal world of the individuals and in

their external world. It is like a mix of explosive gasses that because cannot escape implode/explode. Ways of reassurance are assuming that human societies have always been violent and insecure, or that only professionals can talk about such situation. Politicians are, among professionals, the less helpful, but at the same time the - apparently - more powerful in making an impact.

4. Individual responsibility

The individual is left with the feeling that the responsibility is too heavy for him or her to carry however it cannot be ignored. New ways of looking at the issues are required before rushing into finding easy looking solutions. Women are the target of violence and they, because in larger number than men, could deal with it.

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.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Living with messy situations

Analysis: We experience a high degree of "mess" coming out of our realities and roles. It is not just rational and cognitive confusion, rather emotional and psychological turmoil. Such state of mind is like a storm in a swamp where our feet are stuck. Rather than stay with the feet in the swamp the temptation is to rush in forms of rationalisation and positive thinking, as if concentrating on the positive sides of our lives will make the source of anxieties disappearing. Somebody else - namely the future generations - will be able to sort this "mess" out and lift us from the swamp. But what if the future generations will not be up to the task? If they will not accept the role of "heroes" and "saviours"? We will end up - in our old age - caring for them. This will be left to the individuals because there is no societal institution capable of providing large safety net. Societal anxieties are at the same time usual and unprecedented. We fear the unknown and at the same time do not trust the institutions and the processes that previous generations have put in place for dealing with such anxieties. The members presented two ways of dealing with such anxieties: mutism and withdrawn or loud campaigning.

Hypothesis: Change is taking place at various levels in our lives and in our societies. We are experiencing fragmentation both at individual level (the politics of identities) and societal level (inability of social institutions) that lets us with a strong sense of hopelessness. Our destiny is not only out of control but also out of our hands and of societal institutions. The need for dependency (content) is stronger than before but the institutions (containers) are weaker than before. The prevalent feelings are fighting or flying and because we are not capable of finding our inner leader we incapable to became effective followers. We keep looking for leadership at traditional figure, but at

the same time distrusting them, as if we are the first to deny legitimacy to any form of leadership.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

The Language

Analysis: There is great difficulty in naming one single source for our anxieties. The group took 2 hour and 25 minutes before naming "the beast" that was towering above their heads: "mafia". And this name, although a single one, includes so many processes and fears. It is a shortcut but could be effective in mobilising energies and resources. Instead it does not help in understanding the reality any better. It is as if we, collectively, are unable of formulating a shared language, more like Babel where the dream of humanity as a whole was disintegrated once for all.

Hypothesis: The complexity of our world(s) is such that traditional ways of knowing and acting seem ineffective. We seem left only few choices: manipulating the reality or reducing it to reasonable chunks. In this we are tempted to apply to unknown situation known terminologies: is mafia like to corruption? Is Iraq like Vietnam? Is terrorism like WWII? As a member put: uncertainties (environmental, social, local, world) have ruled the end of our sense of omnipotence, we react through isolating from each other. This creates loneliness and violence. One way out could be in creating a new way of societal relationship: based more on sharing than participation. However any of such option requires the ability to listen and talk to - and not at - people. It requires the ability to reflect, or as one member put it: "compare myself to myself is the first port of call".

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