

**"Hungary and the World
at the Dawn of 2009"
Report of a Listening Post
held on 13th January**



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. We have identified the following themes:

1. **Crisis** – At the beginning there were frequent references to the first implications of the worldwide financial crisis (people losing their jobs and not receiving loans from banks for administrative reasons) and the casualties of the current unusually cold weather (during Christmas holidays 40 people have died, many in their own homes because of the lack of heating). This used to be unthinkable 20 years ago, even in colder winters.
2. **Reactions to Uncertainty** – There are different reactions to uncertainty: some narrowly search for ways of defining certainties, human interactions become unified, schematized – though previous splitting in political terms seems to be less prevailing.
3. **Creating your own 'small world'** – We have observed a tendency to deny negative information, create 'your own Only Positive News Channel' – digital broadcasting and the Internet are helpful technological platforms for that. Small societies, families and individuals wish to focus on their internal worlds – and exclude everything, what might disturb it. A contrasting force is the fear from Reality (hitting in unexpectedly), and a sense of guilt for not taking responsibility by ignoring facts or not keeping track of what is happening in the outer world, even if people feel they do not have any influence on it.
4. **Responsibility** – Ambiguous feelings were expressed about keeping younger generations away from media, vs. letting them confront reality and teach them how to deal with it. There was a general feeling of losing faith in democratic institutions, and other institutions (workplace, banks, pensions, health system etc.) as well. Especially younger generations suffer from losing clear value orientations.

5. **Hope** – Towards the end there appeared hope, that it would be possible to find your ways, by accepting circumstances and defining creative solutions to problems, especially by reframing (and not confronting) existing frames of references. (Examples: offering drinks for the homeless in the underground, building a new city based on new principles and assumptions, choosing a profession based on your passion and not on economic considerations, etc.)

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

Analysis: Value systems and institutions have a loose relationship at the moment in Hungary, they should support each other, but none of them are too well established at this stage. Sometimes we can see a nostalgia towards old values, new values are contradicting and fluid; institutions are weak, changeable, and at a constant political fight.

Hypothesis: Because of the apparent crisis of the institutions of capitalism (especially the crisis of a system, the function of which supposed to be managing financial risk or preserving the value of people's savings (handling risk and uncertainty) members of a loosely established system (economically in a peripheral position) experience extreme levels of anxiety, letting them to turn away from macro systems and focus on their immediate social/professional relations (small worlds).

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: Different worlds and value systems live parallel. Still, there is a feeling of guilt and being irresponsible, if you immerse in your small world, because you can not control the consequences of your own actions.

Hypothesis: Because increasingly different 'small worlds' might loose communication with each other, the possibility of conflicts increases, members of society experience an ambivalent feeling towards the media and try to restrict the information flow, creating new sources of ambivalence (guilt and irresponsibility). The only possibility to handle ambivalence seems to be to find creative ways to reframe differences, create new interpretations and forget about well established solutions.

Convener: Dr. Sándor Takács