

"Bulgaria and the World at the Dawn of 2011"

Report of a Listening Post
held in Sofia on 5th 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.

Social Roles

- A volunteer in a child welfare center for abandoned children. Shares indignation and disappointment by the fact that biological parents are treated with advantage over candidate for adoptive parents – a fact that “condemns abandoned children to institutionalization”.
- A public media consumer – disgusted by the familiarity and lack of respect in many newspapers and news programs.
- An informal 'house keeper' of a building inhabited by several private and professional companies – anxiously balancing within a fragile equilibrium of interests and emotions.
- A social work trainee in an elementary school setting practice. Feels unsatisfied by the quality of the practical work being offered there and considers the training useless and meaningless.
- A creator of a website dedicated on the issue of domestic violence in a small team of two. Feels no sufficient support and experiences solitude (“we have only ourselves”). Experiences “lots of positive emotions though but many worries as well in the role”.
- Of a future husband and parent – “how is all this going to happen?”
- Of a professional – suffering from heavy workload, in a demanding role which is consuming lots of energy and resources but offers positive emotions as well (such as feeling of mastery).
- Of a motorcycle driver – “I want to organize my own motorcycle club. I want to give expression of some more 'wild' parts of myself, to organize a community, and to receive support.”

- Of a daughter of ailing aged parents. Experiences both them and herself as victims of the public health care system. Complains from the scarcity of public social care delivered in the community. Feels exhausted both physically and emotionally. Experiences burden and solitude in this particular role.
- Of a social worker, resentful of “people’s inability to recognize the differences between humans. . .Our society doesn’t want to see the individual human being. There are many invisible people nowadays in Bulgaria!”
- Of a nongovernmental activist for the children’ rights – she is experiencing some lack. “The 'system' is concerned with its own point of view only and does not consider human personality. Despite the fact that the system if built of humans it remains un-sensitive towards life as such. As if life doesn’t matter at all. At the same time there is a kind of over-expectation for some perfection. “Mistakes and deficits (such as mental illness of a close relative which had to be hidden from society) are harshly sanctioned. The end result is total disqualification.”
- Of a person who a) wants to acquire her own autonomy from her partner; b) is seeking for a useful job; c) wants to communicate harmoniously with her parents: “Without a partner and a meaningful job you feel alone. [Intimate] partnership, job they engulf you, and then [after] you remain with. . .what?”
- Of a student: “How to communicate with my parents as a mature parson? How to integrate my role of a student with that of a working woman? How to be alone when everyone else is with his/her mate?”

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 the following interrelated themes:

1. The invisible people (the invisible parts of ourselves). Are there visible people at all?
2. The stigma of the society.
3. The solitude.
4. Participation and support.
5. Health care and social care.
6. The problem of autonomy and the process of achieving personal autonomy.
7. The feeling of helplessness.
8. The new roles and the loss of old ones.
9. The satisfaction is rather diffident.
10. Is there a community within Bulgarian society at all?

11. You are studying one thing but you are practicing quite another as an occupation later.
12. The trust.
13. Family and sociality.

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. 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 interrelated hypotheses followed:

Analysis 1:

A stable characteristic of the social roles can be observed. To a degree they are not social. As a rule the participants in the 2011 edition of the LP and in the many of the previous ones identify themselves with roles which don't make them part of organizations, associations and even families. The typical type of participant is often a kind of singleton, often living in an un-hospitable environment made of anonymous majorities or face-less bureaucratic powers, referred to as the State or the Society. This is a world without members where there is not membership. This challenges the very existence of society itself and the results of the listening to something which is doubtful in its existence. In this context the helplessness about the autonomy (the opportunity to be autonomous is being taken away, it is under pressure, is being attacked or is a privilege) reflects a possible dependency without a clear object of this dependency.

Hypothesis 1:

There is an ambivalent attitude towards autonomy, which is an expression of internal resistances towards it. In the context of the observed a-sociality (poverty of associations) autonomy is desired yet feared because dependency from parents does not develop into mature co-dependency (membership) because of the basic poverty of the associations of actual human environment where the opportunities for rewarding associational life and a sterling civility are scarce.

Possible reasons:

A possible reason for this state could be an experience of helplessness in the real world where social dissociation makes us un--real and pushes us towards escape into the ideal world of pre-fabricated individual projects (models) and the predictability of the ready-made (ideas).

Analysis 2:

A (social) cause has become an equivalent of a deviance. Instead of connecting people it separates and even divides people. A cause, instead of engine of a society, has become a form of escape from reality. In order a given civil community to thrive and to be sustainable it should be based on tolerance towards not knowing a on a capacity for curiosity towards others. Instead we fail helpless pray to our own and others' envy, forced to hide our successes preventing a possible unleash of resentment. Individual wellbeing doesn't transform itself into wellbeing of the community but in an occasion

for a discord (and poverty). Participant don't tell stories about projects, endeavors, situations where they were active, creative and successful.

Hypothesis 2:

Stick in an endless puberty, individuals wander between family ('home') and society where their civil roles belong. Engaged with either the fight for self-assertion and or flight from the authority they often miss to develop themselves into successful creators of concrete things from the shared reality with the others. Social roles are not social but rather private. Thus even the drive to achieve personal autonomy mutates into a kind of (social) role – undermining its own authenticity.

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