

**"Spain and the World
at the Dawn of 2011"
Report of a Listening Post
held in 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. The personal impact of the Economic
and social crisis on the individual**

The primary reaction in the group was 'My main concern is that the Spanish economy could suffer a crash and that I could not pay the mortgage of my house. I try to save every penny I can, and I repay my debts as soon as possible'.

One of the people in the group said that he comes from Andalucía and has been unemployed for two years. There is no work neither for qualified and well trained people nor for those who lack special training. The situation is very bad for everyone.

He says that he is 41 and that he is now too old for the work market therefore, he has to become self-employed, to be his own entrepreneur and try to survive.

Another person says that her preoccupation has to do with the feeling of apathy of the people. She gives the example of a couple with two children that she hasn't worked for three years. Another person says that it seems that all the companies are reducing their structure and personnel to a minimum and by following this trend the country is going to become paralyzed. The feeling is that the country is falling into a coma and the situation is more critical than people think.

Another person in the group tells another vignette from his sector, pharmaceuticals. "In our sector, it is uncommon to have such a huge number of unpaid bills. One of every three pharmacies is for sale because the government is unable to pay on time."

2. Paralysation, passivity and fear of a social revolt

Another person says that since we have almost five million unemployed people and there isn't a revolt, a large amount of our economy must be hidden.

People from the group say that in Spain we are now as we were during the sixties when we exported many workers. The issue now is that many immigrants are leaving the country and that very qualified people have to go abroad for work.

A very good image to understand the contrast with other countries is that in Spain the investment Banks are called 'Capital Risk Banks' so here it is very difficult to invest and create new companies. We live in a society of mistrust. For example when interviewing for a job, you almost have to prove that you really want to work. The problem is that there is a real big mistrust in the economy, institutions and politicians which blocks and paralyzes the system.

At the end of it all, the only thing that gives you some rest is that you get your paycheck on the 25th of every month.

A woman says that even within the companies that provide a good salary, you can't be sure that you are going to live well. Sometimes the company abuses the rights of their employees. Other times the unions or a few employees abuse their own rights, their colleagues, or the company itself.

One person made the following questions: "Why are there so many problems at the workplace? Why is there so much mobbing?"

The group responded something like: 'We have difficulties in exercising our authority as well as having too many conflicting behaviours throughout the country.'

"I have felt trapped by the passivity within my organisation. The crisis has awakened people somewhat, so it has some positive aspects."

"Now that I have been unemployed for a year, I feel lively and self-confident."

3. The feeling of paralysis, collapse and mistrust towards the government institutions and companies

A man commented that the Spanish government has been unable for two days to pay its debt and finally China came to buy our debt.

There are some voices that are concerned that now, due to the crisis, everything seems to be allowed and we could lose our independence, rights and welfare that we spent so long fighting for. Unions don't represent the workers as we could see in last strike, where there was a feeling of a fictitious confrontation between the unions and the government without any regard to the whole population.

Everybody tries to defend their privileges against the common sense or the society. The unions, the traffic air controllers, the companies, the public-sector workers.

We live in a country where there is not a real democracy instead we live in a sort of Partitocracy system, that reminds one of the middle ages. There is no real separation between the different powers. Judges and Courts are elected by the Political Parties,

the Economy is regulated and directed by the Government. The Institutions from the time of the dictatorship are still here and have not been adapted to the real democracy. So they have a perverse power and it is easily corrupted.

The referendum in Catalonia and the last elections are the examples of the disaffection towards politics with more than 50% abstaining.

One person explained that, right now, there is a general distrust of mass media. The Media is in crisis because people don't trust them and their information because of their obvious links with the political parties. There is a feeling that no one is telling the truth because everyone is defending their own interests.

4. Internet and the globalization slash the value of relationships, work and contents

One man says "I have quit my Facebook account because I feel in one way infantile and in other way exposed. Even my brother wants me to be my nephew's Gestapo on the internet and I have told him that I am not going to do that".

Facebook can be a great tool but we don't use it properly. LinkedIn is useful in a professional way. You can join forums that are specialized.

The Internet should have provided an opportunity for competition and thus for lower fares for services and goods but what we can see is that there is more competition but not everything is cheaper. Even now Google is not so free as it used to be. It is hard to find the information you search because the big companies and others have paid to appear always in the first pages.

Now we are not citizens but consumers and as consumers we think that we can demand everything and pay almost nothing. For example through the internet you can get almost everything for free but we risk killing the companies and the people that produce contents or services. The obvious example is cinema but it is interesting to acknowledge how theater is in a very good position even when it is really more expensive.

Another person tells how the private medical insurance companies are suffocating the professionals that work for them, and that the clients always want more services and to pay less. But this trend is self-destructive. There is a sense of abuse.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post 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 personal impact of the Economic and social crisis:

Because of the economic and social crisis people's concerns focus on their more immediate needs and difficulties, increasing a feeling of individuality and isolation from society and creating a kind of schizophrenic state of mind where the emotions are anesthetized and we live our lives as if we were only observers of what is happening to

us. The social problems of this economic crisis are projected on personal and individual problems in order to avoid group and social conflicts.

Paralysis, passivity and fear of a social revolt:

The fear of the violence that results from control in our society is internalized, repeating a behavioral pattern of passivity and dependence on our parents and institutions. The capacities of thinking, reacting, and resolving problems are projected on the politicians, who are overwhelmed by the expectations and repeat the paralysis because of the fear of conflicts that could arise any possible change. People are paralyzed, trapped between the desire for change and the worry that it will not result in anything better than what we had in the past.

The feeling of paralization, collapse and mistrust towards the government institutions and companies:

Intimacy, individuality and selfishness is a safe place when is confronted to the paranoid, perception of groups and institutions.

People gets out from their individuality and joins a group just when you need to fight against other groups. Everybody thinks that the normal functioning of a group or an institution is in basic assumption of fight and flight.

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