

**"Switzerland 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.

The major pre-occupations were connected to feelings of a lack of personal security. Many people shared stories of vandalism, theft and intrusion in which people's homes were invaded and ransacked. These were ordinary people who were asking why me? Why steal from a small apartment? This heightened concerns about the security of society in which the 'unidentified other' was able to live outside the rules of the community and behave as they want seemingly without consequences. The fear of 'invasion' recurred on differing levels, individually, on a family level and at work with competition for roles and people talking about fears of being pushed out of their work.

There was also a concern about the impact of schooling and education. School children are 'streamed' at age 11 in a manner which has a very definite consequences on the choices open or closed to them in life. If a child is in the bottom stream, they have opportunities to learn manual skills and to follow an apprenticeship, however the apprenticeships available are in trades that few people seem to want their children to follow such as butchery. People discussed the struggle of facing unemployment, of trying to maintain optimism and life-style whilst holding onto the difficulties that unemployment brings, such as difficult feelings of failure, shortage of money, which detracts from people's ability to make plans for the longer term as well as role reversals in the home, with men who were previously bread-winners taking up home-making roles.

A current advertising campaign was discussed, which draws attention to Switzerland's values, with a rather provocative question which asks whether Switzerland's values should be discarded? This raised a debate about what are Swiss values? And the answer was hard to agree on. Perhaps this reflects the Federal, Cantonal and Communal approach in the country. So that it is easier to state the values of the local community or canton in which one is more identified than the federation, which feels further removed.

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 two key major themes:

1. Security and Insecurity

The theme of lack of personal security emerged strongly with factors such as theft, unemployment and changes in working conditions all leading to a lack of personal security. Connected to this were personal expressions of aging, of becoming older, of wearing down and of losing energy. These feelings seemed to push people to form close knit circles of friends with whom they could share their concerns, their frailties and in which members could feel 'ok' due to the support felt from within the group. These close knit 'clans' could shield their members from unknown others, providing a sense of security when cocooned with friends but which could also make the outsiders appear more menacing. On a very micro-level the individual concerns expressed could also be a representation of the larger concerns about security and insecurity on a more national or global level.

2. Long Term and Short Term

Members agreed that a theme centred on the difficulties of holding onto both long term and short term thinking. In the short term people could find consolation in parts of life which were going well and yet there was a foreboding sense of concern about the long-term. Would families remain connected as they moved further from each other both geographically and in terms of values? Does this represent a previous grounding force of authority in society which is becoming increasingly dissipated? Would children be able to find their way in the future which is unknown? Would our current experience be sufficient to guide us into the future? There were fantasies of holding onto things as they are now, of not wanting things to change physically (both people and infrastructure) as a way of preserving the status quo and avoid thinking about future concerns.

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.

One central hypothesis is offered this year which seems to draw many of the pre-occupations and thematic considerations together.

Analysis: Switzerland, home to the World Economic Forum, the International Olympic Committee the Global Fund and headquarters to many other prestigious international organisations, ranked first in the WEF Global Competitiveness Report, struggling with issues of petty crime, basic education and issues of security. On a societal level this represents the contradictions that the country struggles with. Everyday concerns of ordinary people, living in a society that is ordered, affluent, technologically sophisticated and which plays a prominent role internationally. There seem to be concerns that people may get left behind in the 'march of progress' and increasing choice and it seems that no one wants to hold the lower end of society, of blue-collar jobs, of low economic status and of societal stigma. At the local level this is not easy to manage; unemployment living aside affluence, children who have known each other from infancy being separated into different 'streams' of life which could be seen to represent different strata of society – the international, the regional and the local with the concomitant expectations and opportunities afforded to each sector. Perhaps for this

reason, 'outsiders' of local communities are afforded even lower status by being seen to hold the negative, detrimental forces of society. This helps to maintain a split and a fantasy that if it were not for these external negative forces, that all would be well inside society at its various federal, cantonal and community levels.

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