

**"Poland and the World
at the Dawn of 2012"
Report of a Listening Post
held in January in Kraków**



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 identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

1. Paralyzing freedom

Contemporary people live surrounded by chaos. The world keeps attacking them with countless stimuli, pieces of information, events and possibilities. They are able to make free choices and they are not limited by anyone. However, an excessive number of possibilities makes them feel lost and frustrated. It is difficult to come to terms with the fact, that it is necessary to give up on certain things. People would like to have everything. Due to that fact, they are more focused on the feeling of loss, caused by those things they did not choose, and do not draw satisfaction from what they actually have. They believe they can have everything or nothing, be someone or no one. People are unable to deal with the freedom they have been given. It causes the lack of the sense of security, fear, disorientation, doubt and loneliness. Therefore, they start to look for patterns of behavior and kinds of inhibitions. Paradoxically, there has occurred a strong longing for conservatism and accepted patterns of behavior in a society, which until recently was dominated by the cult of freedom. People begin to appreciate the role of Catholic Church and the conservatives, not because of the values they preach, but because of the very fact of 'restraint'. Even non believers are glad that the Church 'keeps a tight rein on reality'. It turns out that freedom may lead to an even greater enslavement than previously experienced prohibitions, regulations and tradition.

2. The unpredictableness of reality and uncertain future

During last year people were accompanied by the uncertainty concerning the spectrum of economic crisis. There were fears concerning the publicized financial crisis, the mechanisms of which are not only difficult to understand, but also it is hard to evaluate the genuineness of the dangers they carry. There have been numerous lay-offs in companies. The feeling of stable vocational conditions has been weakened. A job position is not a guarantee of security anymore. Additionally, many experience professional burnout. Work ceased to give them pleasure. People feel underestimated, threatened and they find it more and more difficult to deal with the tension in

professional life. It has an impact not only on their mental health, but also on the physical one: many complain about psychosomatic symptoms. There is also fear and uncertainty, since the old patterns of reality functioning cease to exist. The model of a life path consisting of stages; studies – job – family, is no longer up-to-date. As a consequence, it can be observed, that parents care more about their adolescent children and the period of parental guardianship is prolonged. Those coming of age avoid adulthood and taking responsibility for their life. The reality becomes increasingly unfamiliar to everyone. What becomes inadequate, among other things, is the model of masculinity, fatherhood and family. People do not know how to act and are not certain what the future will bring. They do not know how to prepare for its arrival.

3. The strategies for dealing with reality – enterprisingness vs. passiveness

There can be determined two different ways of dealing with the reality, the fear and uncertainty towards it. Some people take responsibility for taking part in the creation of the world they are surrounded by. They perceive the end of the myth concerning stable employment in companies, they take a risk of working on their own account and establish their own business activities. They decide to fulfill values which are important to them. There is a growing number of people acting socially and realizing their own projects effectively influencing the reality. Active and enterprising people are also ready to develop and improve themselves. They are open to learning from others and willing to broaden their horizons. The other strategy is to passively 'slide' through life. Some people avoid self-responsibility and difficult subjects. Such people do not wonder about who they are or what they want from life. They copy patterns from the media and are amenable to manipulation. This type of a person is often characterized by an arrogant attitude. They expect to have their needs promptly fulfilled without their own labor input. They expect someone else to solve their problems and take care of their safety. Nowadays often and often people do not realize where welfare comes from, or how the world functions. Their attitude is immature, they choose easy and perfunctory solutions. They are please with 'going with the flow'. Bipolarity of the discussed attitudes is very distinct.

4. Omnipresent technology

Technology, electronics and the Internet are generally present in the life of a contemporary person. There are constantly invented new tools and ways of communicating through the Internet, which are being endlessly improved. Human mind is increasingly preoccupied with the virtual data. People try to keep up with novelties and the ever changing electronic reality. Some of them, however, are not able to adapt and become excluded from these processes. Those are mainly the elderly. Some people fear technology and others feel aversion towards it. They are disturbed by the fact, that their online activity is used for marketing purposes and they are being manipulated. Virtual reality offers many possibilities of establishing contact with other people. People can form societies, identify with a chosen group, highlight their individuality and at the same time, find people similar to themselves. A 2.0 civilization is being created – a civilization of participation. However, there is a question of the quality of relations on the Internet. Virtual participation tends to be more important to physical relations between people. It is important to ask a question if it is us who use technology and not the other way round. The Internet is a place, where thanks to user's anonymity, it is easy to give vent to negative emotions. The tensions and discontent with the real world is often expressed online. It can be noticed in aggressive comments, attacks on other people and the creation of secret groups threatening to destroy the present order.

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.

Hypothesis 1

*Paralyzing freedom: the crisis of the sense of responsibility,
the feeling of lack of influence and satisfaction*

Since it is difficult for us to function in unstable and constantly changing reality, we tend to choose simple perfunctory solution, often those popularized by the media. The aversion against confronting the reality is intensified by the availability of virtual reality; many professional and social activities are conducted online. People look for virtual substitutes of satisfaction, 'five minutes of fame'. The lack of realistic outlook on reality makes every action ineffective and frustrating. Disoriented parents protect their children much longer than necessary, preventing them from taking responsibility and acting independently. No one is ready to take on the most essential challenges of contemporary world and as a consequence the world seems even more threatening – driven by the resultant of chaotic forces.

Hypothesis 2

*Taming the fear: being schematic (passiveness)
versus taking on challenges (activeness)*

The world seems unstable and unpredictable. It is very difficult to act effectively, therefore, many give up the possibility of becoming an influence. They are carried by the course of events, pieces of information, short-lived news and media operations. They exploit to the very end the existing patterns and possibilities, becoming immersed in consumerism. Others tame the fear by taking action which expresses their individuality and inner values. They accept the challenge creating enterprise enclaves and frequently forming groups sharing common views and objectives. Those people and those groups seem to act in isolation from 'the rest of the world', building their own reality and actively objecting to mass trends.

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