

## AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

### Finland and the World at the Dawn of 2016 Report of a New Year's Listening Post



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

#### **Part 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

*In this part of the Listening Post participants are invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles. This part is concerned with what might be called 'the stuff of people's everyday lives' that relates to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants. Participants are invited to share their preoccupations and experiences as citizens of Australia, and to explore these from their various social roles, be these in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities.*

#### **Part 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

*In Part 2 the aim is to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.*

The sharing began, and continued throughout the day, with the topic of those seeking asylum, the way they are being treated, the extreme emotions related to the phenomenon, and the lack of a means with which to deal with one's own vacillating emotions in relation to the subject.

#### **Theme 1: Encountering unpredictability – encounters with external events and one's on internal reaction**

**Analysis:** In discussing this theme, the participants told of their experiences related the jolting phenomenon taking place in the Finland, the massive influx of refugees. The primary feelings dominating the discussion were confusion and insecurity.

Through the momentum and organisational skill of the government, various organisations, and volunteers, aid and management is continually being given new directions: situations are being taken under control; collaboration between government officials and volunteers seems to proceed smoothly; new decisions, registration procedures, and living quarters and the like are being provided at a rapid pace. The media constantly reports on new developments every other hour. At the same time, chaos has been created from both the

analyses and the new forms of organization. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is being followed, with food, clothing and warmth being provided.

But what will happen from here on in? Refugees have been taken in as people needing safety, but they are also frightening newcomers who awaken citizens' vigilance and scepticism. New crimes have already occurred – on both sides. The flood of refugees and the increase in crimes because of them have produced voluntary groups of vigilantes. Too, because of them, opinions have become divided. For some, the vigilante groups are a good thing and create a feeling of safety. Others think of them as a frightening phenomenon that should be forbidden. Some welcome the refugees, smile and look them in the eye, offer clothing, and bring food; others spit at them.

## **Theme 2: An extreme between what is visible and subdued matters surfacing simultaneously**

**Analysis:** We talked about the perception that, currently, people characterise the simultaneous existence of present extremes and collisions between these extremes. Topics related to refugees have encouraged Finns to speak publically about difficult topics that had not been brought up earlier, for example, violence directed toward women, the equality of individuals, the definition of good and bad. People ask themselves what is right and speak directly about what is wrong and forbidden.

On one hand, it is understood that refugees should be helped, but, on the other, there is fear about what will happen to us ourselves: how will the religions co-exist, should we meet the newcomers with a strange culture by preparing for "war", shutting our borders, throwing Molotov cocktails into reception facilities, refusing any social interaction, or "submerging firearms in the Atlantic" (as one participant had dreamed of doing), or by treating the refugees as people, without expectations and with love. As group phenomena, these possibilities are "inflammatory", as police try to keep the situation from getting out of hand with the use of daily reports. A person can find him- or herself vacillating between these two extremes. One participant told how, every night after listening to the evening news on the TV, she was "forced" to think about her own values, ethics, and humanity in relation to others.

The participants also discussed the fact that people live very different daily lives. On one hand, people feel good and can be happy and satisfied in their daily lives that are without disruption, and, on the other, they see extreme poverty, as well as great need and deprivation.

### **Theme 3: External happenings challenge one to internally work through the world's new circumstances**

**Analysis:** What is going on in society "gets under one's skin", and there are no ready answers to new questions; instead everyone must find their answer within. New issues have many different sides. Is reporting an illegal tent encampment to officials good or bad? Was the accommodation of the homeless removed while the safety of near residents from fire was ensured? Whose life was made easier; whose became more difficult?

Where can safety be found; what should be held onto, when even in sleep the supporting handrails become twisting and snakelike and in another dream rotting and deceptive. And what happens when refugees refuse the good provided for them, for example, the Finnish food that is offered them? How can those coming from different cultures be understood when the meaning of things is so different for them?

When people from different cultures live together, the concepts of good and bad, that which is good for others and oneself, become intermixed. One of the participants related her experiences. She had come to know a refugee family and took the daughter of the family to the swimming hall since most girls her age enjoyed swimming. When they were going into the water, the girl began to panic. Maybe on their flight from their homeland there had been a period spent in a rubber boat.

A picture of a drowned child has become an icon and raises sympathy for refugees and creates a wish to help, but it does not eliminate the reason for the problem. How does one stand the feelings of guilt amongst one's own well-being or lack of action in such circumstances, when refugees do not receive help in their own countries.

These things awaken both hate and fear, as well as dependence and suspicion, but still more is spoken of love, thankfulness, caring, compassion, and trust. And it is remembered that the world has never had to feed so many people, nor has there ever been so little war as nowadays. We laugh at the paradox of what a bad thing it is in many people's minds that our refugees do not work, but, at the same time, they complain that they take the jobs of Finns. A stranger is always in the wrong place.

### **Part 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

*In this part of the Listening Post the members are working with the information resulting from Parts 1 and 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 are 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**

Great changes are simultaneously occurring in various sectors and at certain levels of Finnish society: internal economic reductions, severe renovations of the public sector, changes in legislation, structural changes in the health and welfare system, and the sudden influx of refugees. These transformations have destabilized people's basic feelings of safety, and everything is happening too fast. This rebirth has been accompanied by the breaking of familiar and safe boundaries. The new seems strange, frightening, and unpredictable. We should be willing to sometimes come up with solutions and make impetuous decisions on the basis of random information. It is difficult to predict future trends and the way our decisions influence the future. The changes are surprising both our citizens and our government ministers.

The change is so great that it shakes our citizens' identity and brings the following question to the surface: *Who are we?* How can *Finnishness* be defined when citizens are divided? There is nothing wise, nor even is there an institution where one can go to ask. Not even the does the establishment have an answer.

Earlier customs function, but cultural values and moral concepts no longer apply in these new and unpredictable situations. Therefore, the states, the EU Schengen Agreement, and even our own mental capacity have become confused with respect to these issues. We live more or less in limbo, in a time of re-organisation and quests. There is much that is strange and unbearable. This state of instability is also the foundation for new ways of thinking. Through the use of the human brain it is possible to formulate all of this into an organised and understandable form. The situation challenges us to ask: How does this relate to me? What can I endure, how should things be changed, and how should I revise my actions? Where can I find support for my new redefined internal values? I must climb the tree of knowledge alone, and there harvest the answers to new questions.

**Convener:** Maija-Leena Setälä

**Consultants:** Kaija Karjalainen, Jaana Kuivalainen, Marianne Tensing