

AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Greece and the World at the Dawn of 2015 Report of a New Year's Listening Post



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES.

In this part the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they 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': 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. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following 3 interrelated themes:

Theme 1. Good village-bad village: the phenomenon of the unemployed child

There was discussion around the conversation between Kaminis and Boutaris where the search for identity becomes essential after the collapse of national boundaries that globalisation has caused. The remarkable return to the roots offers a more accessible life for many residents of Greek cities.

Anavra is a village whose infrastructure has been recognized by the EU as a model for sustainable development. This village appeared to be offering a vision in the Listening Post beyond conflict between political parties. The mayor worked out a way to bring together the village's inhabitants for the sake of the community's good. Even a cafe that opened could not be a successful business as people would not sit there; everybody was busy, working.

It was acknowledged that internal immigration was a trend even in families with young children; one parent would move to the country in order to explore different work opportunities. The need to find employment forced people to resort to this solution: "Whoever is looking for work is going to find it", said a member of the group. The dignity of working and the hope that one will gradually evolve

professionally is not taught to the youth who believe that one becomes successful without effort, magically.

However, another member suggested that the country lifestyle does not match everybody's taste and young people are trapped. They refuse to drive the truck for just 800 euros and although there are examples of people who volunteered and have finally managed to get the desired paid work, these are just exceptions of the rule of unemployment. The numbers of unemployed young people are unprecedented.

There were references to the low paid work, to the exploitation of the crisis for companies to make a profit, to the high educational status of unemployed youth and to the successful industries, i.e. tourism, that evade taxes. Young people are expected to accept dehumanising conditions without working towards a better future and building up their confidence as professionals and as valued citizens. People are terrified of taking up part-time work, even if it is what they have studied, and of giving up the expectation of full-time employment.

The above situation was compared to life in France where citizens even accept job opportunities far from where they live, with low salaries; they choose to commute and develop a different consumerist strategy to manage in a city where the cost of living is high. In Greece people started to notice the price of coffee and to choose the places with cheaper drinks only after the crisis had started.

The discussion evolved around the dichotomy: 'are they not finding work or do they not want to work?' and got stuck on this topic for most of the time with quick alterations of argument for or against either view.

Theme 2. How do we approach a shipwreck? The corruption of Greek society, the crisis and its impact on the youth

The Listening Post began with the reference to the shipwreck at the border of Greece, Albania and Italy. Hail and the wind speed that reached eight beaufort made access to her extremely difficult, while the oil the ship was carrying presented the crew and the people trapped on the ship with a fire hazard. Some boats that were supposed to enable escape from the ship were already destroyed. The incident raised a lot of anxiety and despair.

A member mentioned that a family that did not have 1000 Euros to send their child on a taxi to the private school had asked the grandmother whose pension had been dramatically reduced to pay. Dignity is lost. One cannot afford to eat meat for three months and they think this is a disaster. That cannot be a disaster. Nothing can happen to one only because they are not eating meat. Another

member suggested that this was very serious. The first member agreed. She said that this had a lot of pain attached to it and that it is a matter of dignity if one keeps their poverty to themselves. Tomorrow they will have money and they will be able to afford meat. It is not going to last forever. Those who are really hungry are keeping it to themselves. Dignity was lost after the civil war.

There was a question by a member: "what kind of families are going to emerge from the generation that has learned to find everything ready?" Those young people struggle to maintain their inheritance. They are the young people who have been raised with the 'value'; Make sure that You are OK. There were some people who went abroad to work and they are struggling. Some preferred to return as it is better to be the first in the village than the stranger abroad. Why struggle?

Greece acquired a lot of wealth without effort and the money went straightaway to consumption. We work a little, we are paid well, we start choosing expensive brands. There was a woman crying for her child's having been accepted by the University for librarians. This was seen as a failure by her, even though being a librarian is a very important occupation. We have lost the measure.

A young woman commented how the young generation has not learned to be responsible, self-conscious, dignified. Someone from the older generation suggested that these were not the qualities of the older generation either. She drew attention to the politicians. If it was just them we would just change leaders. But the 300 members of the Parliament are our mirror. They have come out of our houses and the neighbour's. They did not arrive from Mars. They are the creation of our society.

Another member of the older generation reminded the group about how if one reflected upon their actions in the past they would definitely find wrong-doings. She referred to the situation where monasteries were using citizens' health books in order to acquire medicine. People were thinking they were doing good by taking part in that, but they were not. We would not have even realised it. The responsibility of citizens is massive. The greatest revolution at the time of the crisis is for each one of us to change.

She says, with despair, how in Greece we always had a division between two parties, two sports teams. Now we are either for or against Tsipras. The left wing has forgotten what the law of analogy in politics was about. Their only problem is how to gain the majority of votes and form a government by themselves. However, if more parties collaborated to form a government it would be easier to control corruption.

Theme 3. Personal responsibility is a right for everyday practice but also for political participation

This theme began with a member of the older generation talking about her experience of being brought up in the country. The idea of a politician suggesting to young people that they go and work in the country would be too tough. She did not like working for the tobacco industry in the fields. She had learned, of course, that nothing survives unless you look after it. The land teaches you. But this is not enough. It is not an easy thing to tell the youth. Her dream was to escape from the country. Her parents had wanted her to become a tailor. But she had different plans.

The question of what is handed down from generation to generation became a heated topic. The choices of the previous generation entrap the younger one. A generation of parents are trying to protect their children due to their guilt about the crisis instead of supporting them so as to help them move on with their lives.

Another member of the older generation said that there is a war between the generations. The young generation will beat us up! We burnt their forests, we stole their beaches, now we are destroying their pensions. There was a strong tendency towards blaming. Whose fault is it? Another member of the older generation reminded the group of other factors that led us to poverty. It is not just our fault. The older generations had also suffered. Thousands of people died in the wars.

It is both the conditions that shape our actions but there is also personal responsibility. A member wondered about the remedy to that corruption disease. "Education", said a member of the younger generation. A wave of despair emerged again as members started to talk about the faults of the Greek educational system; teachers have never gone on strike to press for improvements to the quality of education. They were only going on strike to protest about their salaries. Another member agrees with this saying that her niece had needed to pay for private classes as the lessons at school were not good enough. The first member says that the lessons are happening and they are good. It is that teachers are not paid well. The person mentioning her niece talked about how she had two jobs; she was working and studying. Her schoolmates were accusing her of playing the good girl and increasing the competition.

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,

which may be predominant at the time. They then set about developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at the moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world; their collective ideas and ways of thinking, which both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them. The resulting analysis has been shaped into 2 interrelated hypotheses.

Analysis.

What emerged from the discussion was that Greece's history as an independent state was too short and marked with blood. The civil war had curved in people's minds, splitting; the left wing, the right wing. This national trauma has not been healed yet. When the crisis began Greek society divided into two parts; those full of optimism who will fight for their survival at an individualistic level and those full of pessimism who are paralysed and expect that the solution will be an external one. The old national trauma re-emerged and the destroyed rescue boats represent the conflicting parties that trigger despair.

Hypothesis 1:

In the face of despair due to the conviction that there cannot be a government that can put first the best interests of the Greek society, Greek citizens are devoting themselves to one of two courses. The first is to fight for survival, without expecting any help from Greece's leadership and hate those who do not do likewise. The second is to hope that the Tsipras-messiah will come to rescue them from the impasses they find themselves in and hate those who pull their sleeves up and immerse themselves in work, thus being the good siblings. This results in the further feeding of the political splitting, which stops citizens from supporting the effort of a Greek government to organise a plan around realistic expectations that require sacrifices but also fair demands.

Analysis.

Greek culture is greatly characterised by overprotection of the younger generation by the Greek mother who has taken on the titanic task of protecting the "kid" from any misfortune. The father-law is usually absent, which prevents the kid from taking responsibility, becoming an adult and owning their life and the right to make mistakes, and so they lose their way and struggle to find it. The hardship of historical Greek poverty was suddenly replaced by wealth and a number of opportunities. Parents tried to take advantage of these opportunities and to experience them through their offspring. When the country faced the crisis the older generation took all the blame, feeling tricked, and then misleading their children to be tricked, by the EU

money that now needs to be taken away.

Hypothesis 2.

Because of Greece's sudden wealth, in which the babies of the younger generation were born, a wish was created in the older generations (that became wealthier as adults) to repair their deprived childhood. They did this by re-living their own childhood through the princes and the princesses that they were bringing up; they worked hard in order to supply them with education, wealth, direction and protection from hardship. Hence, after the collapse of the "Greek wealth" myth the older generation has put on a self-punishing spectacle that the younger generation is witnessing. As a result the older generation is not passing on the torch to the younger generation with trust and faith that by inheriting their poverty and wealth that each generation passes onto the next, the young generation will manage to find their way, learn from history and even take Greece a step further.

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