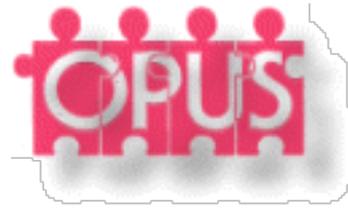


AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Italy (Rome) 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 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. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes:

The first person starts by speaking of the feeling of fatigue, the heaviness of living in Rome; there is a lack of investments into the services for the community and the quality of life has become painfully impoverished. There is suffering and uncertainty, resulting also from the recent terroristic attacks. Individually, one can find salvation only in pockets of beauty: family and friends.

The theme of 'the great delusion' follows: the fantasy that society could carry on growing and offering to its children a life without death nor pain - in fact out of touch with reality - leads to the feeling of vulnerability and extreme solitude, feeling attacked on many and diverse fronts.

The fatigue of living in a city - or nation - which has stopped growing and opening to the world outside is contrasted with images of the big march in Paris in response to the latest terroristic attack against 'freedom of press'. In the march, one can find germs of novelty, community, 'real people, real citizens'. Leaders marched as normal citizens.

Fatigue and lack of growth comes to the foreground once more as one member reflects on the big socio-political themes at stake. There is

the potential offered by numerous technological resources, but also the financial crisis, the extraordinary global demographic growth, the collapsing energetic resources, the climatic change and the endangered environment.

Rome is indeed stuck, like other cities in Italy and in Europe, inhabited by a culture of individualism and a poor professional attitude, as though what matters were just mere, and shortsighted, survival. No competence, nor love. Community, social network and desire to share is found in unexpected forms of aggregation offered by the arts and cultural events.

There is an appeal to memory, remembering the past and the historical milestones of the last seventy years of Italian life: the achievements in terms of civil rights and freedom for women. However in the present there is no hope. Parents and grandparents are the true social shock absorbers who allow the society to go on.

There are, however, also pockets of novelties/newness: the 'makers fair' (recycling IT material), youths living outside of the money market, developing solidarity, being responsible for changing an unsustainable social reality.

Garbage breaks into the conversation: the offence of seeing overflowing garbage at every corner, no recycling, dirt everywhere, metaphorical and real. Toxicity cannot be recycled. One can only try to resist at an individual level, by occupying 'sensitive spots'.

Immigrants working where Italians don't work anylonger and indeed Italians are unemployed; immigrants - Chinese, Moroccans, Muslims, Africans - smile; Italians don't.

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 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 resulting analysis has been distilled into the following two interrelated hypotheses:

Fatigue is attributed to the weight of managing complexities, which in the end reveal themselves to be useless beurocratic complications - actually experienced as sadistic attacks. Maybe fatigue underlies

anger and impotence, but the group prefers to speak of resignation and frustration; the strenuous efforts that people embark on don't pay back with any visible result; only interstitial survival is possible and can respond to a situation of impoverishment, both personal and professional.

Indeed only at an individual level people can fight useless bureaucracy, by initiating interstitial positive practices and by facilitating simplifications.

There is a voice pointing to the lack of vision of all this, lack of leaders, figures of authority. It is mostly denied and silenced.

It is a voice pointing to the outside world as well as to the internal one, a lonely voice against the general opinion that safety can only be found in small actions - however effective and useful. Leadership and vision are absent.

The past has left its heavy inheritance in the form of corrupt leadership (Craxi, Berlusconi, Mussolini...). If that is where we come from, future, vision and recognising one's internal leadership, can only be denied, hidden by a thick fog.

Indeed there are no parents : 'we are a terrifying - terrified and ungenerative- society of orphans'.

Germes of newness are 'out there' and far away: future babies who will be educated to become better citizens and leaders, the immigrants who smile - and work -, the march of Paris, 'where there are real people', because 'we are an aged group out of touch with the source of renewal.'

Theme 1: Society is too complex/complicated.

This was a thread which run throughout the whole of the first part from the very opening intervention. Life in Rome/present society is more and more complex/complicated. Everything has become more difficult; there is a substantial lack of investment resulting in inefficient services. The quality of life got worse, we are living in a city which has stopped growing, it is closed to novelties and to international influences, more like a village, rather than one of the capital cities of Europe.

Analysis 1:

It seems that a past way of life has regressed into something worse and out of control. Complexity as it is observed in the third part, is a heading which covers both the complexity of present life as well as the perception of useless and sadistic complications. The feeling that

society is closed to international influences as well as to novelties may well mirror internal feelings of closure and inadequacy.

Dealing with all this requires an increasing amount of energy: the feeling of fatigue is the result and it is a shared experience.

Only individual and interstitial initiatives are possible.

'Pockets of beauty', family and friends, spontaneous meetings offer a refuge. Individuals can take their own responsibility and fight useless bureaucracy by initiating interstitial positive practices and by facilitating simplicity.

Hypothesis 1

Life seems to have become too complex and out of control, mostly not intelligible. Feelings of impotence and frustration result from that, but are denied; therefore people experience the fatigue of living their circumstances and believe that the only way of surviving is to retreat into 'small pockets of beauty' i.e. family, friends and spontaneous social encounters.

Only individual initiatives can be taken which provide the feeling of being somehow in control in a too fast changing society.

Theme 2: Garbage

There is an excess of garbage, both emotional as well as material - Rome like Naples and other parts of Italy -; it is impossible to recycle the amount of toxicity produced by our daily life.

Overflowing bags next to the bins are everywhere as are the impoverished people who scavenge into the garbage looking for anything useful.

Analysis 2:

This seems to be the point of the iceberg of larger and terrifying global themes which in part 1 were just briefly named: the incapability of producing sustainable energetic resources, the excessive global demographic growth, the climatic change and the endangered environment.

The person who voices what the 'garbage' could be about, is rather ignored, a lonely voice amongst a group which seems to feel a great deal of uncertainty and insecurity, but cannot quite talk of what those feelings may reveal.

Garbage relates also to the corruption of power, in the form of blackmail and subjection. The Italian policies which determine the waste management are terrains of institutional conflicts where major industries, political power and mafia have collaborated and made money from the disposal of toxic waste and to the detriment of the health of people and territory.

Hypothesis 2:

the awareness of the catastrophic change in the world due to our unsustainable way of life is such that denial seems to be the response of the majority, destined to feel uncertainty and fear when facing the implications of what is happening.

Once again, the problem is too complex, and it seems that only small individual actions can be taken, such as differentiating garbage, separating paper from glasses and the like.

Or else small collective actions like the 'Makers' fair in Rome - the second biggest after California - which recycles IT materials.

Theme 3: The big delusion and the missing leadership.

In the first part people talked of the pain that this generation has to face, as they have been fed the big delusion that growth and evolution could be limitless. They were out of contact with the fact of life and with reality. ' We have failed our children – and our possible hope in the future – and we are destined now to live in fear, uncertainty and vulnerability'. The terroristic attacks in France are mentioned as an example of facing reality for what it is.

Reality is also awareness of time in the form of past, present and future as a way of keeping one's feet on the ground. Leadership and lack of vision are talked about, while feelings of hopelessness and despondency become tangible in the room.

'We are the children of how many generations of political leaders like Craxi, Berlusconi, Mussolini...

Analysis 3

A very difficult theme to unpack, as it seems to be even more terrifying than the previous ones. It is very hard to recognise that our society has lived out of touch with reality and that political leadership has led the country to disaster and to a big disillusion. It is not just due to the incompetence of the previous generation of leaders, but to the present one as well. Given the situation, there is no competence to produce future leaders, and vision cannot be explored.

In this way, personal authority, leadership and vision do not seem to have a place.

Indeed it is to such a dramatic scenario that the group responds by mostly denying the existence of the problem; some people observe that there is a culture of mere survival where individuals are shortsighted and incompetent, doing just the minimum required by one's duty without professionalism nor love.

It is not actually clear which produces which.

Hypothesis 3

As people consider themselves the product of generations of incompetent and corrupt leaders – destructive leadership – it is not possible to develop any vision. Nobody speaks of one's children, but only notice how they have been failed by the big delusion. Germs of newness are placed far away, too distant to have any real impact on feelings of hope and future vision. It is a rather paralysing situation where people feel closed in, isolated in their individuality, separated from their community and from the possibility to think together. At that point a culture of shortsighted survival emerges, where individual take care only of their immediate surroundings without competence nor love.

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