



AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY

Greece and the World at the Dawn of 2017
Report of an OPUS Listening Post®
held in January 2017

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS & 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, 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 collectively was to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

Theme 1. Globalisation and nation

A member of the group observed that children are not taught geography and history in the way they were taught before. The emphasis is not any longer on information about the country's borders, counties and nor on important events that have happened in the Greek history. The emphasis is now on Europe. In the spirit of globalisation the national issues are ignored. Another member added that the countryside is ignored too. The attention goes to big cities, which are targeted by extremists. Greece is safe because it is not an influential country and has not been involved in wars.

There was a lengthy discussion around the issues of immigration and refugees. Two different views were presented in relation to the risks of inviting immigrants in one's home. A member wondered whether Greek people were racists and xenophobes. The NGOs appear to help, however it seems that they exploit the situation to make money in illegal ways. There was concern about the decision of certain countries to close their borders. A member suggested that refugees were flying to Istanbul from Morocco in a 50 euros flight. From there they were coming to the Greek islands and gathering in certain areas to be transferred to Germany or other developed countries: 1.000.000 refugees in one year only. Extremists moved to Europe in this way too. As a country we said yes! Come! Hungary and the countries of Magreb did not do the same. We blame them for this, however, we did not seem to have a strategy around the issue. In Turkey there are 3.000.000 refugees. Now we have 60.000 refugees in the country and if the agreement breaks we will end up with

hundreds of thousands. It will be hard to sustain them. In other countries such as Syria or Jordan they are cared for in more organised ways, with schools etc. They want to go to the UK and other countries in Europe. We gave them the way. However, the refugees are now trapped here and the trafficking of refugees is growing fast. The NGOs work closely with the Turkish traffickers by informing them about vacancies in camps and get paid per head. The immigration issue has become a matter of life or death. The Greek government introduced a law in favour of prisoners. This law allowed a man who was imprisoned for murder to be free and travel to Germany, where he raped and murdered a German medical student who was volunteering. People are afraid; There is no control. But instead of putting the blame to those in power, people blame the cleaner from Albania, accusing her for taking a job that they would not necessarily take up themselves. Unfortunately there are people who create and strengthen radicalisation against immigrants. On the other hand, it was said that Greek people are hospitable and trying to help. A professor noted that in many schools 1/3 of students come from Albania and the state embraces them. The schools get filled up and job opportunities are created. Psychologists have jobs too.

At the same time it was highlighted that the refugee issue has caused problems because the state does not have an organised strategy towards immigration and towards the refugee situation. There is not even a clear difference between refugees and immigrants. They seem to have the same rights. People are looking for someone to blame and they choose the immigrant or the refugee. Similar problems exist elsewhere. However, the way of dealing with those has changed. The Brexit was partially the UK's response to this problem. Georgia on the other hand dealt with it in a similar way as Greece did. The Georgians started fighting with each other instead of fighting with Russians. People were then affected massively by globalisation. Georgians are pressed to leave their country by Russians. Foreigners come and push Georgian's away. The problem of war is serious there. It would be great if people could leave peacefully in their own countries. However, this is very hard.

Globalisation encourages efforts to lower the cost of services (lawyers, uber). There are a lot of positive things that came with globalisation. However, the mixing of people is massive. The capital moves from country to country and with it the people who are looking for work. And it would all be fine if there was some regulation around this. In Greece, these issues are addressed through a situation of anarchy. And nobody explains to people what is happening, why, what the plan is. Then there is ground for extreme responses. In the past, one needed to get permission from the state in order to invite someone from a different country to work for them. Now things are at the other extreme: uncontrollable. For instance there could be ways to regulate workforce and use foreign input for agricultural production, ensuring that the foreign workforce allowed in will have an occupation. And gradually we would be able to find more ways of dealing with this problem.

Theme 2. Difficulties in taking up responsibility and bringing the person in the role

There was a comment about the quality of life deteriorating. There is a lot of uncertainty, fluidity and instability. People feel insecure and scared. It is hard to make

plans for the future in these circumstances. There is distance between the teacher and the student. The teachers replace others or they are registered as unemployed. How can a teacher work in these conditions? They are moved from school to school. They lose their passion and do not care any more. Why invest in your work if you are going to be somewhere else the following year? They do not give their soul to children however. Apart from teachers, it seems that professionals in general have changed. We see less of dignity, morality, collaboration and humility. There is too much competition at the workplace. Each person is hiding behind a mask, shutting down and the person is lost from their role. Your problem is yours and if you are weak you are lost. It is such a harsh environment. You need to protect yourself, otherwise you will pay for it. And then of course children are exposed to that at home.

Despite the masks, this is a period where we can talk to each other with honesty. As children we were not able to tell our parents what was bothering us. Now children can say it to their parents. Another participant felt that what she sees happening between parents and children is not so much of a sharing, but rather a posing of unrealistic demands onto each other. Children are demanding and have no respect for adults. They treat them as equals. Parents also press their children a lot to perform and excel.

Theme 3. Crisis in the institutions of family and religion

There is a crisis in family life and a serious demographical problem. In the village, people do not get married easily and they avoid having children. We hear about abortions increasingly more. Children stay with their parents until their 30s, 40s. But the problems also exist within the family. As a child, I can't remember knowing what was bothering my mother. If my parents had an argument, I was not aware. Now children know everything! Also, parents speak about sacrifice. They sacrifice themselves for the children and burden them with those sacrifices. Another member added that the sacrifices seem to happen more on a material level. The parents sacrifice a lot on a material level. But they are not so involved with their children at an emotional level. Facebook and coffee. There is abundance in what they often provide, but little attention to their real needs. The children are more grumpy and nervous in our days. I am a professor in an area of Athens and I hear from my colleagues that 10 out of 25 children are in therapies or see psychiatrists. Often the parents turn against the teachers and the children seem to be increasingly spoilt, disoriented and lost. We observe that adolescents struggle to express themselves in simple sentences both in written but also orally. We lack being sociable. Do we give children the tablets to calm down instead of asking them how their day had been? Are their difficulties in communicating and expressing themselves relating to this?

In the past the roles between children and adults were clearer. Children were afraid of adults. But now we have the other extreme where children do not have much respect for adults. We buy children expensive shoes and sunglasses but ask them to be the best in class. It seems that behind what appears to be honesty, lie unrealistic demands between parents and children. We are in a transitional period from having a lot to having little. There is difficulty in making decisions and following them through. Conflict is in the DNA of Greek people. After the WWVs we had a civil war.

The tradition of the local priest giving his blessing to the school children at the beginning of the school year has ceased. The environment in the village is harsh. Individualism, gossip, no opportunities to seek help from a psychologist. People are suffering and each person is shutting down. I feel unwell lately. There is no help. We were saying that we would bring a cinema in the village but we did not manage to do it. We are suffocating from the lack of communication. You go out in the street and you do not see anyone. You hear that someone died at age 60. I say to myself. Oh, I am 65. Here there is only the church and two coffee places, one for the left wing and the other for the right wing people. None of them is for women. In the past, people were going to the church, but not any more. They are bored. They do not believe in it anymore. The priest is complaining about the residents. It is not his fault, it is ours. There is no religious feeling. Religious education has changed. Children can be exempt from religious education. The society and its government has decided this. I told the Head teacher said that the teacher's association should decide about this. But what can I do as a teacher? She was the Head teacher. Another religious celebration where students used to go to church has become a holiday and children do not go to school at all. We need to tell something to children about religion. All nations are preoccupied with the topic of religion. This is the supposed left wing ideology. But it is an extreme. There is a lot of confusion about how to deal with religious matters. We should close the school for Christmas. But my colleague is wondering whether this is right now that we have a lot of Muslim children in our schools. Religious celebrations have become a taboo. At the same time, what is happening in other countries? Do Muslim countries adapt their celebrations to the presence of Christians? There is religious radicalisation and fundamentalism there. Christians can be attacked in other countries. And it is not only extremists who take this position. The Quran says «by the word or by the sword». This is aggressive in itself. Another member pointed out that Christians have killed millions of people in the Crusades? Another member suggested that this had happened in the context of war. Religion was used as an excuse. Different cultures deal with religious fundamentalism differently. In France for instance religion is completely independent from Formal Education. It was discussed that although in Greece we do not have very intense conflict around religion, other countries do and are targets of terrorist attacks. Greece has not been influential in the world affairs and has not been involved in wars.

PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In Part 3, the participants 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, participants 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.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1. The risks in making decisions and taking action.

Analysis 1.

We put a lot of emphasis in our European identity in a number of areas of Greek everyday life, such as education, where there is little interest in the teaching of national characteristics in geography (borders, countries etc) and important national events in history. The mixing of population is huge and this creates difficulties in managing the immigration/refugee issue but also in people's sense of cohesion. The lack of strategy of the Greek government and good coordination with the rest of the European countries leaves Greek citizens trapped with a big problem. This is expressed in smaller problems of the everyday life, such as difficulties in managing the problem of religious celebrations in schools. Citizens feel insecure about their jobs, professional groups find it hard to make decisions etc. Greek citizens feel that because they do not play a big role in international conflicts they are safe. So on the one hand the lack of collaboration with Europe leaves them feel helpless, but on the other relieved that Greece will not be a target for terrorist attacks.

Hypothesis 1: Because there is difficulty in coordination for resolving complex issues both at a European but also at a National level, there is confusion and uncertainty in the Greek society. Citizens struggle to take on responsibility and handle complex issues in the micro level of their everyday life. Decisions entail the risk of radicalisation; of creating enemies and scapegoats. As a result, citizens are lead to passivity and to avoidance of taking up their role, making the decision that their role requires and materialising them.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2. The loss of a meaning in life

Analysis 2.

The institutions that in the past were creating values, some good and some less good, but also opportunities for socialisation, such as the institution of religion and that of family, do not have the same place in our society. Consumerism and technology have altered the way in which people communicate and try to fulfil their needs. At the same time the economic and social crisis in Greece have greatly affected relationships between people. Those factors contribute to citizens' experiences of loneliness, fear, frustration, uncertainty and competition. Now that the wealth is suddenly disappearing in Greece, people have lost their ways of making their lives happier (shopping, excursions, visits etc). Greek citizens are struggling to find meaning in their lives and are trying to cope by themselves, which in turn leads to depression and therefore difficulty to seek contact. This atmosphere impacts young people and children significantly. Youngsters lack quality attention from adults both at home and at school and feel increasingly pressed by the adults' expectations. As a result they develop a self-centred attitude to others and to life.

Hypothesis 2: Because of the financial and social crisis in Greece, the institutions that used to offer a sense of security to citizens have collapsed. At the same time citizens are becoming disillusioned about alternative values and anchors, such as consumerism, technology and the sudden wealth of Greece. As a result, citizens continue to experience a loss of a way of life and they seem to be unable to find an alternative way to replace the old

one. The loss of meaning in citizens' lives has lead citizens to feel isolated and unable to connect with each other and create together.

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