

AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Poland 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.

CIVIC AGITATION

A strong narrative is being presented to us, which paints the world as black and white, and we are supposed to pick a side. These causes civic anxieties, but also an incipient feeling of needing to participate in social life, take up the citizen's role. Anxiety stems from people feeling pushed to take a stand, which causes antagonisms, often within families and other social groups, where members suddenly find themselves having drastically different opinions. People feel left out and confused, not knowing what to think. On the other hand this state of affairs encourages self-reflection, to find out what is our actual standing on social matters.

For some this is an echo of an era long past, they find themselves remembering a reality that they used to live in, only now they are the ones required to stand up for themselves and what they believe in. This political turmoil is also being viewed as something positive – an opportunity to clear the air by engaging in a sort of social dialogue that isn't commonplace in our society. We are in a desperate need of learning how to conduct such dialogue, and how to arrive at a compromise. For many this is a wake-up call, a sign that they have virtually given up their democratic right to vote, and someone else just

came and took it.

FEELING THREATENED AND THE LOSS OF SAFE PLACES

New threats are emerging all around us, and we are uncertain how to respond to them. Europe used to be viewed as stable and safe, but now the safe places have suddenly lost their comforting nature. We are afraid of an armed conflict coming, we worry about terrorist attacks, we feel we are being put under scrutiny by the government. There is a polarization within society, which causes us to engage in an us vs. them mentality. After experiencing the conflict in the Ukraine some people feel uncertain about their future, and the world they raise their children in. Our social roles are being threatened, and the stability of society is called into question – if a war may break out so close by, who's to say it's not going to break out here? People are feeling disillusioned, that not much has to change in order for safe and stable environment to transform into a dangerous and unstable one.

The immigration issue is rising within groups of friends, some are surprised by how easy it is for their friends or acquaintances to judge reality, and also by how many fears towards others they really have. There is a persistent feeling of powerlessness in the face of threats that are too much for us to handle, but also in the face of ones we're incapable of even seeing or knowing about. People feel that fulfilling their roles as parents has become more challenging due to a lack of a safe and healthy environment to raise their children in.

THE FEELING OF POWERLESSNESS WHEN FACED WITH COMPLEXITY

Despite our individual autonomy there is a massive amount of things that we cannot influence, and we are starting to feel that individually we are too weak to tackle certain problems. On top of that we feel that effective teamwork is out of our grasp – a skill that our society doesn't possess yet. Because of the difficulty with taking part in meaningful social dialogue, people find it more and more easy to attach labels that help them organize and simplify reality. The fading away of dialogue is caused by the rise of modern technologies, experiencing social contact through a virtual medium lacks in reality. It is therefore becoming very easy to distance yourself from others, which causes people to feel alienated and abandoned by their friends. Especially because many social circles reduce their need for social contact - restricting it to platforms like Facebook seems to be enough for them. Relations with others become superficial. The rise of social media causes blurring of personal boundaries, we are being invited into other people's worlds. Many fear that Facebook is starting to dominate our lives. In the growing information clutter many people feel lost, they experience the need to shut down certain channels of communication, especially those providing them with a negative view

of the world. They don't understand what's happening in society, which makes acting in the role of a citizen a difficult task. Because of that there's a growing need for constructing detailed internal maps of the world around us.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVISATION

There is a rising desire (especially among men) to dissociate from comfortable and well-known structures, and move towards roles that govern more influence. People are starting to develop the courage to leave something that feels familiar but unsatisfying, and create something of their own. They feel the need to take risks in order to achieve self-realization. The objective of this migration is possession, heading towards powerful roles, like the role of a father, that give one the sense of agency. We feel the need to retreat into places that we can control because of the anxiety that stems from living in a world that is beyond our control.

The polarization of today's society has caused the opposing sides to become blind to each other's value. Gone are the wise people, who wield authority. People believe that the media had a hand in that, they fear that their experience of the world is being filtered by the media, and that's why they want to find new sources of information. They stopped believing that someone of the outside can solve their problems, and lost the illusion of stability in the world. This makes them feel an impulse to make the first step; it's a time of great self-awareness. On the other hand we fear that we lost our ability to make a meaningful impact, the problems that used to plague us, that we had dealt with, will plague our children.

There is a belief that we no longer experience our world emotionally, that because of absorbing it through smartphones, we started to experience it with our heads more than our bodies.

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

Because of guilt about refusing to act before, people feel the need to take a stand, and express radical opinions.

A lot of people feel guilty about letting things progress to the stage at which they are now. They feel that they've given up ground, that if they acted differently before, the world would be different today. Tensions are rising, because we lost our trust in the system. People feel powerless to change things on a national level, so they try to do it locally, where it is easier to rally around a common cause. We lack in basic knowledge about the state, and how it works.

Social agreements are being breached, and many people are becoming politically and socially active, because they feel that if they remain bystanders, they may lose things that are important to them. The world around them is changing, and they feel that it isn't changing for the better. With the authorities acting seemingly without care for the social norms, citizens are starting to show their outrage, and, often for the first time in their lives, taking a stand against what they believe to be an oppressive system.

Hypothesis 2

Because of the feeling of powerlessness, and the lack of influence over the reality, I retreat into something of mine, with a clear responsibility.

In a world that feels increasingly threatening and unstable, people feel that they are losing control both over their lives, and over the reality around them. This feeling is strengthened by the lack of ability to cooperate and communicate effectively, that our society suffers from. Because of that they retreat into places that allow them the agency they need, in order to feel safe – like the role of a father, or an entrepreneur, etc. They feel as if they can make their own space more authentic, than the outside world. They are afraid because they don't feel like they can rely on the system to protect them anymore; they have to make their own path. This withdrawal from things that are too complex to cope with is also connected with taking on new responsibilities.

Insecurity, lack of trust in the system, justice is perverse. Having in mind that our education system is based a lot on science questions, is formatted, fragmented, incomplete, reduced and castrating. Instead of valuing art, creativity, and individuality and most of all critical thinking. Thus, it drives to a ill and self-destructive society, full of prejudice, intolerance to what is different, tyranny, violence and misjudgements.

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