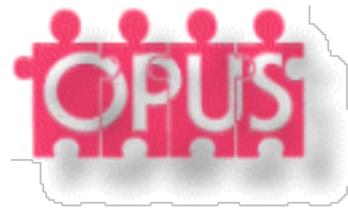


## AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

### Argentina 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 part 1 of the Listening Post the members were invited to share their experiences and preoccupations in a variety of social roles that they occupy in their everyday life. This part was also of usefulness in 'breaking the ice' between the members of the whole group, as the event was an unknown experience for all members involved. A dynamic atmosphere soon developed and most members shared several of their everyday social thoughts and concerns.

#### Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

The aim of part 2 was to collectively identify the major themes of Part 1. The group was temporarily broken up in four, smaller sub-groups and subsequently these sub-groups later reported their identifiable topics to the original large group. Among the themes brought back by each of the smaller sub-groups, three predominant clusters emerged:

1. The first cluster of themes was mainly concerned with **insecurity** and **state corruption** – the former was mostly associated with the recent, suspicious death of a public prosecutor who was in the process of bringing a legal case against public officials (as high as the president herself) and has caused a significant stir in the Argentine public life. The members also connected feelings of insecurity and high crime rates to growing, visible poverty in the form of the ever-expanding sandy towns in and around the city of Buenos Aires. Thinking about the responsibilities of the political class in the state of things, the members oscillated between disillusionment ("they [politicians] are a Mafia") and anger and resignation ("they can all go to hell" [this was also one of the most widespread slogans during the 2001 financial crisis]). Regarding state corruption, the members reported an ambivalent view of corruption where, on one hand, it can give rise to an unfair state apparatus and suspicions of clandestine state-sponsored operations while, on the other hand, there were also reports of members being benefited from connections to state and religious officials who are in a position to influence individual affairs.
2. The second theme revolved around **concerns for the future** and

**the lack of hope** and was mostly within the context of the perceived degradation of values and public education. Members working with young people reported observing an increasing number of young people addicted to drugs and lacking access to any education opportunities. This was also connected with a widespread preoccupation in the Argentine society, particularly during the last two years or so, with the question of drug trafficking and drug production: i.e. a large portion of society is growing increasingly convinced that the country has been slowly transforming into a drug producing nation (“where are we failing?”). The members were concerned that such a development will bring an increased level of violence and addiction to society. At a moment of desperation, members wished for divine intervention hoping that maybe the relatively new Argentine Pope could come to the rescue and mediate in the search for possible solutions to halt local drug production and the state corruption associated with it.

3. The last discussion themes were about **individualism** and the experience of living in a **toxic social and political** environment. The connections to these themes had mostly to do with a perceived lack of social solidarity (not giving money to street beggars because they might ask for more) and the isolation these types of attitudes give rise to. Furthermore, the members discussed another type of isolation which comes from the current social and political environment which is evident in:
  - a) the absence of any real interchange of opinions and ideas
  - b) the manifest anger towards politicians with incidences of public humiliation of such figures (“a normal person wouldn't last very long in this kind of job”)
  - c) the failure of the political class to provide a good-enough social and political vision (“the necessity to believe”).

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

In this part of the Listening Post members were working with the data gathered from Parts I and II, with the aim to collectively identify the underlying dynamics – conscious and unconscious – that may be predominant at the time of the group meeting. As well as developing hypotheses as why they might be occurring at the moment. As such at this point the members are working with their ‘psychological’ or ‘internal’ world.

This part proved the most challenging and tiring for all group members. But all were committed in making their best effort, through an engaging discussion, to make sense of this experience. In this last part the group agreed on two main hypotheses that bear significant relation to each other:

## **Analysis and Hypothesis 1**

**Analysis:** The recent death of a state prosecutor has been stirring up long-held anxieties in the national psyche having to do with the “dark state” or “state-sponsored terrorism” and the accompanying uncertainty of who is on whose side (state vs. citizens). This deep-held trauma in Argentine society, largely dating from the horrific practices of the last military regime, was also evident in the members reporting feelings of physical discomfort when reflecting on the highly-suspicious death of the above official. In the face of such discomfort the members appeared to be split between sadness or the feeling of being let down and depreciation on the importance of the State for everyday people (they are a Mafia vs. they should all go). This type of divide was also expressed in the members' ambivalence on the usefulness of a corrupt state for citizens with the right kind of connections in contrast to how a corrupt state actually contributes to the growing problem of uneven wealth distribution and the perpetuation of extreme poverty.

**Hypothesis:** A long history of corruption in the country's ruling classes and a violent political past has left deep divisions in society, often unresolved. The recent death of a public judiciary official has made citizens more conscious of these underlying anxieties (of division) and more aware of their participation in the prolongation of the corrupt state which is perceived at the same as, on one hand, convenient and, on the other, socially destructive. The resulting polarised political and social environment where blame is appropriated on the “other side” serves to defend against the working through of these anxieties and to perpetuate state corruption and its vicissitudes (abject poverty, crime, social violence).

## **Analysis and Hypothesis 2**

**Analysis:** The rising level of drug delinquency and the current debate on the state of Argentina as a potential drug-producing nation is a much contested subject in current Argentine society. The group reported a growing sense of isolation and lack of access to education, particularly so, for young people who are caught in the vicious circle of drug dependency. This was connected to rising individualism in society and the fear in reaching out to vulnerable groups who were also perceived as capable of abusing any help on offer. Individualism was also associated to the current state of political debate in the country which seems to be hopelessly stuck in a repetitive circle of recriminations and counter-recriminations and rigid “us” vs. “them” mentality. The lack of any real interchange (of ideas and opinions) and the failure of the political class to provide a sufficient social vision (“the necessity to believe”), at times, led the group to even wish for divine intervention in addressing these dilemmas.

**Hypothesis:** A rigid, toxic and polarised political environment which stifles collaborative thought and work appears to leaving citizens feeling increasingly isolated and disconnected from their social surroundings (lack of social solidarity). The physical and social exclusion of marginalised groups using a, perceived as, locally-made toxic substance, seems to be a further representation of this social conflict. Society appears to be unprepared to face the emotional impact of such shifts and has adopted a mentality of dependency wishing for political visions of salvation and divine intervention. This only serves as to prolong further the current political climate as well as a sense of individual isolation and social exclusion.

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