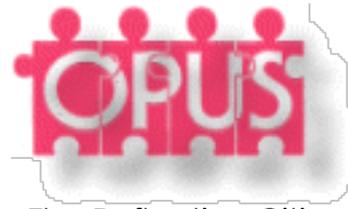


AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Bulgaria and the World at the Dawn of 2014 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 Two, the aim was collectively to identify the major themes emerging from Part One. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes:

Social roles and questions:

1. Of a NGO volunteer. To what extent are the current NGOs effective? How do they serve the interests of their beneficiaries?
2. Of a local citizen: 'I live on the avenue which is used by the National protest for more than 6 months. Although being supporter of the protests the participant feels slightly annoyed and ambivalent towards this particular form of direct action.'
3. Of a kindergarten psychologist/teacher: 'My duties are still unclear. The staff there asked me for some extra work beyond/below my psychological competences. I don't want to be bothered and don't want to interfere with the rest of the staff. It is below my professional self-respect. When shall I get my diploma at last?'
4. Of a gynaecologist and cognitive-behavioural therapist. How to integrate these two sets of competences and roles? The medical profession is one of domination, power and authority. The CB therapist – rather not. 'Ethics requires to separate with one of these two roles''. This generates some professional uncertainty.
5. Of a citizen in general (an 'abstract' one): 'I want to act, but I feel passive and voiceless. I am expecting my concrete form for my citizenship potential to emerge, to appear'.

6. Of a lawyer, human rights activist: 'Juridical director of Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. High level political activist. In a leadership position in relation to the society as a whole. Confronting the public institutions of power. Human rights are an agenda still not quite accepted, a kind of value with little weight within current Bulgarian society. Often I feel one against the rest of society. David against Goliath? 'Goliath is not just the state but the majority of people. We endanger the privileges of the powerful ones.'

Themes identified:

1. Emergence: the citizen's role and the therapist/psychologist. Worries about personal performance of these emergent social roles.
2. The State as a poor organiser of care. Many children still neglected in institutions. Personal involvement in these problems.
3. New professions emerge, connected with the individual right of self-determination.
4. Divisions and differences between: the 'new' and the 'old' people; generations; genders.
5. 'Alien' and 'local'. Who is alien (outside) and who is local (inside). The human rights activism is being experienced often as alien and accused of betrayal of national pride and local identity.
6. The tensions between the individual and the majority.
7. The problem of dialogue. How can the other be integrated? Schooling/education of gypsy children. Who is educating and what does education mean if not integration.
8. Poverty. Social exclusion. Differences and identities.
9. Destruction of some old and creation of some new connections. Social networks and social events.

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.

Analysis:

In fact all of the participants within the roles they have evoked could be grouped within the category of 'people of the social renovation'. Those people usually possess some new knowledge/skill and also have an idea about some social change, being it some professional

competence, some vision, values etc. Their roles are new to the social context they are part of. This generates tensions and conflicts and some specific emotional experience. Generally it can be organised within categories such as feeling endangered; being minority; frustration; confrontation with some more powerful, and sometimes – intrusive - Other as well as the feeling of inferiority (shame).

Hypothesis 1:

People 'of the new' experience themselves as 'change agents under siege'. Some of them mobilise their aggressiveness in order to survive and to thrive. Others feel disgusted from some unwanted proximity - ashamed or guilty. The inferiority and the impotence somehow accompany social renovation and make us ambivalent towards the change itself and towards ourselves as change agents.

Hypothesis 2:

Such a psycho-social dynamic can lead to some psycho-social splits that are being experienced as chaos or as potentially chaotic. This unlocks some new anxieties and needs. As a result of the existing psycho-social cleavages a desire for connection emerges but it is still latent (covered; defended) or transferred (projected) as responsibility to some authority figures.

Convenor: Rumen Petrov