

AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Bulgaria 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.

Participants associated with and identified several social roles providing an important experience

- Of a nanny of a boy, approaching adolescence in a family of three generations.
The grand parents are experienced as powerful, manipulative and intruding. The participant has to struggle to keep her independence from the grand-mother in the family. Parents travel abroad often and in their absence grand-parents take over the upbringing of the child. The boy whom she is taking care of already resists and exhibits signs of distress from the pressure over him to perform and to deliver expected results. The participant feels guilty at the idea of not being able to meet the needs of the boy for independence.
- Of a mother of two children whose role interferes with that of a former wife of the father of her first child. The child exhibits psycho-somatic symptoms and the severe anxiety problems of his father burden the young boy with loyalty conflicts and feelings of guilt and shame. As a mother she decided recently to sever contacts of his son with his father (her former husband), although she knows this will not last for long.
- Of a wife limited in her relationships with her husband by the motherhood of two and the pregnancy with a third child.
- Of a psychotherapist in the process of her training.
Disappointed and angry by the lack of concern she witnesses in some of her mentors – the authorities, she trusts, in the field.
“At times I feel not at my place in the training process. There

are many delays and obstacles before my graduation due to lack of concern from the trainers I have depend on”.

- Of an educator in a centre for children with learning disabilities. He describes his and a colleague of him struggles with a school teacher in a particular case. The school teacher failed to recognize a case as a case of learning disability. Instead she wanted to label the pupil as lazy and threatened to put him a grade that would jeopardize his later school career and job opportunities. ‘How dare you teaching me!? I have grandchildren at your age.’
- Of a member in a big Facebook group of educational professionals with quite rigid rules for the topics allowed. This rigidity and authoritarian leadership turned against itself when one of this group’s administrators started to expel others administrators on her own will. This has been experienced as a sign of hope after some period of increasing pressure over free speech and deliberation in this particular social and public space.
- In public space a debate over some historical myths concerning medieval Othoman period of Bulgaria century history erupted. Historians and laymen openly challenged the myth of the so called Turkish yolk (1394-1878) period of Bulgarian history.

Part 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim is to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

Themes identified

- Relationships with authority figures implies possible debate, and conflicts around ethics
- The problem with the power and control and the struggles for space, voice, and stake
- The weak and vulnerable and the problems with the protection of their rights
- Relationships with the past – the historical past and the knowledge of the older generations
- Some big institutions resist change and learning

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.

Analysis

Hypothesis 1

The 'vertical' relation with authority as seniority and power and dependency dominates over horizontal relations with peers as an additional source of knowledge and authority.

There is a risk for the authority figures seem to abuse with their power and to promote dependency to them.

Hypothesis 2

This relational pattern creates particular social relationships that leave behind many emotionally deprived social 'outcasts'. These citizens harbor deeply ambivalent feelings about their situation that are not been allowed space and form for communication and attendance from their closest relatives and society.

This ambivalence may take different forms. There is, for example, an epidemics of cheats who target lonely elderly people and take money from them on the false claims about medical emergencies concerning their grown children. Despite the widespread information about these many lonely elderly people still 'forget' and 'ignore' it and donate strikingly big amounts of money to the cheaters.

Hypothesis 3

The combination of deprivation by abandonment and power over deprived leads to a vulnerable existential condition of quazi-institutionalization.

De-institutionalization of social relations in Bulgaria is high on the current social agenda alongside with the ambivalent mixture of fear and hope, broken attachments and vulnerability within citizens and their group lives.

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