

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

### Chile 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.*

#### **Theme 1: Corruption in society and citizen's outrage**

The past year 2015 was devastating for Chilean society, due to the numerous corrupt actions, worth millions of dollars, which were exposed to the public light evidencing the fragile moral foundation that regulates the community life of citizens.

Corruption occurred in an unusual synchronicity, one act after the other, in a continuum that led to wonder if there would ever be an end to such immoralities. Or, otherwise, whether said continuity was only the visible tip of the iceberg, which in its submerged part hid who knows how many other acts of corruption that are waiting their turn to surface onto the public sphere. These corruption occurrences were conspicuous because a large part of them involved members of the elite who leads the various levels of current and future activities of society: entrepreneurs, politicians, members of parliament, high level civil servants, even Ministers and, very indirectly, the Presidency of the Republic.

All corruption events have been mobilized by improper access to huge sums of money; to entrepreneurs entering into lasting business collusions in order to obtain juicy profits at the expense of the consumers'

pockets; members of parliament who resort to entrepreneurs to obtain funds for political campaigns, thus compromising to interests the dependence of the exercise of their duties; politicians who lend themselves to make financial tricks used to support election platforms of their respective parties; public authorities who, taking advantage of their positions, undertake businesses that allow superlative gains in the short term. Those who execute these acts of corruption have pluralistic roots. There are representatives of the whole political spectrum, of various social and economic origins, of people who profess a fervent Catholicism, and of lay (or secular) individuals.

In view of such corruption, both in volume and frequency, the citizens experience a great incredulity, as it is very difficult for them to accept the level of deception in which they have been living, and that was carried out with such impudence and under such silencing. It is very disappointing for people to learn who have been the executors of corruption because, for the most part, they have shown an image of great repute, very attached to ethical principles and an unquestionable commitment to Chile's development, to the citizen's well-being, and adhering to a Republican and Democratic spirit. The citizens view all those who are corrupt as impostors who maintain a clean public image that hides the whole set-up of a system intended to commit self-perpetuating frauds, thus implying secret codes and networks that are almost impregnable, and so avoid discovery.

Citizens consider corruption as acts of violent aggression to society, due to the fraudulent deception of the people and the economic and moral costs involved. This kind of abuse is difficult to describe, and causes great indignation, as well as impotence, since it is not clear what may be done with opportunism, in order to obtain some sort of compensation to repair the abuse and to punish those responsible and guilty of these acts.

### **Hypothesis 1**

“Corruption is a very violent action against society, because citizens suffer the perplexity of the fraudulent and impostor deception from their leaders, in whom directly or indirectly, they have put their trust in the assumed righteousness of their work. Vis-a-vis the deceptions and lies, citizens are able to get in touch with a collective indignation that, however, causes confusion regarding its timely, constructive channeling, aimed at the impostors. This outrage, however, recognizes the existence of a moral reserve in the citizens, of a huge majority of working people who are honest, committed and supportive in believing that Chile may become an honorable society of a dignified quality. Corruption is not all-encompassing, it has limits and is confined to some “white collar” actors who are powerful and have no scruples in committing crimes deceiving society”.

## **Theme 2: The collapse of institutions and their losses.**

Closely linked to the previous topic, citizens perceive and experience what they call the collapse of the institutions that are supposed to provide the framework, sustenance and meaning to life within society and to individual existence. This collapse conveys the feeling of emptiness that vanishes the ideals of being part of a society that has aimed to strengthen democracy, to progressive economic development, to provide solidary well-being, to emphasize the merit of work and education for a more satisfactory life with fewer hardships and suffering.

This collapse refers to the fact that institutions, in their various expressions – political, economic, educational, social, cultural, and juridical, among others, consider a regulatory order that has little coherence with the problems and challenges that most people have to face in their daily reality. In this lack of coherence, institutions reveal themselves as ineffective, superfluous and detached from the people's needs. This failure leads to a lack of belief in official speeches, in the leaders responsible for acting according to programmes and achieving results in their understanding, designs and execution, because they have been set forth with haste and thoughtlessness, so that, as soon as they are set in motion, they reveal insurmountable collisions with facts and circumstances of actual reality. In addition, there is the paralysis of political negotiations that hinder the progress of improvements and new institutional arrangements, which often take a temporal cadence that causes tension due to the urgency with which people need the projects to be finalized.

At the people's subjective existential level, the collapse implies stress and suffering because, when institutional referents become uncertain, individuals lose the framework of ideals, values, objectives and goals that convey transcendental meaning to existence. Citizens do not know in what to believe or who they can believe in, the timeframes to give meaning to life are shortened, become brief, ephemeral, focused on the closest and more reliable relationships, but not far beyond those boundaries, because to do so is to enter the institutional territory, whose reliability is uncertain. It is a fact, however, that citizens must inevitably participate in institutions, working in them means becoming involved in a disciplinary compliance of very demanding duties that overwhelms and confuses with respect to the meaning of what is being done. Vis-à-vis the mistrust caused by institutions, citizens contemplate innovative initiatives of collective empowerment to carry out autonomous actions as alternatives to the ineffectiveness and restrictions of the established regulatory schemes. The use of information technologies constitutes a useful resource for citizens to collectively empower themselves in order to articulate solidary

initiatives against certain events that require swift solutions. However, in certain circumstances, these empowerment initiatives lend themselves for citizens to incur in excesses, as is the case when they exercise justice by themselves with respect to individuals identified committing crimes and who are subjected to collective, severe and very violent punishments mobilized by the febrile wrath of a lynching. Those empowerments are recorded in cellular technology, providing testimony that citizens' initiative may be more effective than institutions that, with their parsimony and rituals, are very slow and provide delayed responses. On the other hand, citizens' empowerment is also displayed in the creation of popular supermarkets and pharmacies that are presented as alternatives so that people may have access to meeting their needs, dodging the abuses guided by the wish for profit that is common in the institutionalized markets.

## **Hypothesis 2**

“For the citizens, the collapse of institutions implies the experience of loss, because the functionality of psychological, social and cultural referents that give sense to life in society, in politics, the economy, in work and family, becomes hazy and ambiguous. The experience of loss also involves the subjectivity of individuals, who experience the confusion of not knowing what to believe in and who to believe, particularly because there is a lack of leaders who are reliable, truthful and respectful of the human condition. The losses resulting from the collapse are offset by the decision to maintain close relations with those who are emotionally closer and reliable, and in the collective solidary empowerment that may allow innovations with “alternative popular arrangements” that overcome the functional weakening of institutions”.

## **Theme 3: Resistance to changes in society and citizen's complicity**

Chilean society is profiled as stagnant in a status quo, without achieving the political impulses that will perform the various reforms needed to allow institutions' progress and greater well-being for the people. The main focus of stagnation is the undecided and oscillating actions of the Government, who in its programme promised projects for changes of great magnitude, which have been too complex or impossible to perform due to limited resources, since they require sophisticated and careful preparations and, furthermore, require political agreements with the opposition and other stakeholders. For the Government, this has meant that its agenda of changes in education, health, labour, constitutional reform and taxes, among others, has been unfinished.

Citizens' reaction to the ineffectiveness of changes, is one of dissatisfaction and disappointment, not only with the Government, but

also with political institutions in general, because they have proved to be parsimonious, making decisions without much prior thought, careless, indifferent to and distant from the feelings and needs of the people. The leadership to conduct these reforms is precarious, thus raising serious questions regarding the capacities of the political elite to lead the country in circumstances requiring urgent solutions.

Citizens judge that the nation is confined (like a cyst) in a political system that has the appearance of a democratic regime, but which is essentially articulated by a framework of conservative principles and actors that stop, slow down or annul the initiatives of profound changes in society. The apparently democratic regime contemplates a network of illegitimate (factual/de facto) powers: the large entrepreneurships, aristocratic sectors, politicking and the Catholic Church, among others, who synchronize agreements to approve or disapprove the course of changes. For citizens, this network of "de facto" powers, has somehow interfered in at least three projects of great importance to them: the law on therapeutic abortion, legalization of the use of marijuana, and amendments to labour laws that would make the relations between workers and employers more egalitarian.

The great dilemma of this mock democracy for Chilean society is that citizens feel powerless to alter the trend towards conservatism and open channels for renewal and change. The ritual of participating in the election of politicians exhausts the citizens' capacity to control and correct what they do or do not do once having been elected. In these circumstances, what occurs most frequently is that a distance of lack of communication is established between politicians and the voters, which instigates the interests of the formers and the latter to follow divergent paths.

A critical reflection is present in the citizens, that shows how there is an ambivalent stance that implies supporting the occurrence of changes in society but also an unconscious resistance to effectively carrying out those transformations. People are enthusiastic about progress in society, but at the time of assuming the risks implied by change, a hesitant conservative disposition emerges with respect to the transformations, their speed, and the destabilizing effects they might have. Generational differences seem to be determinants in relation to conservative inclinations or of support to changes; the older citizens, particularly if they suffered the rigors of the Military Dictatorship, are prone to resistance, while the younger citizens have the emotional vigor to face, cope and engage in the natural upheavals and uncertainties of the momentum for changes. In these ambivalences, senior citizens tend to pass on to the younger generations the energy and responsibility for changes in society. In this respect, it may be seen that how the citizenship, in their resistance against change, encapsulates the political participation of new generations in only a

few young members of parliament who represent new currents of thought and projects that will bring progress to society.

### **Hypothesis 3**

“Stagnation of society in its economic, social and political development causes anxiety and uneasiness in citizens because essential reforms aiming at the improvement of institutions that would allow solving the needs of the people, remain unfulfilled. Citizens are upset because they consider that those unfulfilled reforms are related to a powerful resistance to change operating in society that slows down, delays or dilutes the implementation of projects. In particular, people perceive that resistance has operated within the Government by the lack of coordination shown in establishing a realistic agenda of changes and in creating political and technical conditions that will guarantee their successful implementation. However, citizens believe that resistance has a more extensive presence enabling conservative stances in various factual actors in society. Resistance is also observed in the general citizenship by the anxieties aroused by change with its uncertainties and destabilizing effects. The younger generations are considered to have better capabilities and tolerance to lead and face change, while the older people seem to opt for withdrawing in what is known and is less threatening”.

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