



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post we were invited to identify, contribute, and explore our experience in our various social roles. This part of the evening was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to our social context.

Sharing of preoccupations and experiences

The participants' descriptions of their current experiences and feelings can be condensed into a few observations. Most of the participants came to the seminar directly from a couple of weeks of being off for the Christmas holidays. They spoke of slow weekdays and 'empty' space, as well as of the rush and the volume of the deluge of the unexpected difficulty and confusion when there was no time to make the change either physically or mentally.

Through the examination and expression of their physical conditions and feelings, the participants sought to understand and determine just how this world actually functions, since it does not function with one voice (unanimously), according to no one right model, or an 'either-or' ideal. They spoke of what irritates and angers them, as well as about what makes them powerless and what disables them. Happy topics, what produces good feelings, where a good feeling comes from, what is relaxing, and what is liberating were discussed as well, as were the turning points at which people realize the choices they make in relation to their own being.

It was interesting that the material shared by the participants could not be easily 'bundled' into themes and that transverse paths appeared. The initiated hypotheses also varied as well, some even being opposites or contradictory to others. Are we at a turning point or not, and, if there has been a turning point, what direction should we choose due to the changes that have occurred?

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was for us to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. The following represents some of these themes.

1. Individuals have been activated to take care of their own needs and have become aware of the need to listen to their own body.
2. We do not know how the world functions – new behaviours exist and live among diversity, fragmentation and parallel realities.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis: With their feelings clearly visible, the participants openly spoke of how irritated and angry they are about all the bidding and competition there is in today's world and about all the talk related to the subject, so that there are no other alternatives than to be involved and succeed in the competition or lose and be eliminated. They realized how they are drawn into a flood of information and an abundance of offers, both of which depress and cripple them, "messes with

their heads”, and sometimes even robs them of their memory. There was talk of experiencing guilty pleasure. One example was watching a frivolous TV series, which made them feel guilty but which somehow also brought them pleasure. The behaviour of schools of fish and flocks of birds was discussed in relation to humans: are they protected from predators or are they so dependent and sensitive to “what others say” that they do not dare stand out from others?

It was pointed out that, in addition to the ‘sink or swim’ alternatives, people have a third path, that of learning to dive. In this way, they take responsibility for their own choices and deeds. That direction requires them to have courage and strength in making their own decisions. As in one of the participant’s stories, in which the power steering of his car stopped working, driving straight ahead is easy, but when a turn must be made or the direction changed, there is almost not enough strength. In one dream that was shared with the participants, the dreamer withdrew from a competition and left relieved when the organizers were unable to handle the problematic situation in which the dreamer had become involved; the organizers simply gave out the rules, and said “read these”.

The participants also shared their experiences with situations that had produced happiness and feelings of well-being when they began to react differently. One mother told that, when she decided to accept her child’s playing and also Play Station use rather than forbidding the noise that ensued, she began to sleep peacefully “next to the noise”.

Hypothesis: In the new forms of everyday life, we are coming to the point at which it has become impossible for us to adjust our own needs, desires, and requirements to the diversity, fragmentation, and unfamiliar realities of the external world. The body’s memory does not lie; instead it leads us to the edge, threatening our essence (memory and thought do not function, it is impossible to sleep even though rest is needed, our interaction with others decreases). As the attempts of social systems, safety networks, and organizations to win only create more chaos, but do not approach humanity, we have begun to take care of ourselves by making our own individual choices and decisions.

In what direction will this turn of events lead? Will self-centeredness and indifference increase among some, or will group actions and effort spread to further mutual objectives? Will individual solutions and changes in everyday habits result in organizations and systems becoming more humane? Are these signs that the systems that have grown large can crumble and the emphasis shift to small groups, communities and the third sector?

Society and economic growth are undergoing a strong period of centralization and also ‘big is productive’ development. People seem to be bored with this trend, and development at the level of everyday life is headed in the opposite direction. For Finns, it is typical that difficulties are overcome using joint effort. Hopefully, the detected turning point is a signal that this strength will be used to fight the Euro crisis and solve national problems.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: The participants told of having lost their belief in broad worldwide explanations, such as the cold war, global warming, and the economy (€) as one message of truth. It was considered deceiving to value what is done by machine and information systems, rather than valuing and desiring what is done by people: that which is good for children, that which will produce mental well-being. The desire to shift the point of view towards ‘what I need, what I can offer’ rather than accepting the role of a passive spoke in the wheel of systems was discussed. Although there was no desire to consider the compulsory strength of the economy, the waste that the hardness and viciousness of organizational life creates in people as a physical being and as an emotional burden to be carried was contemplated. One of the participants told of how her feet began to hurt when, after a break, she returned to her own organization: “nor did I understand a word of what my former supervisors talked about”.

It was felt that people are on an incomprehensible edge, where it is difficult to see the significance of things: what do I appreciate, what do I need. Hope was found in the fact that people work

together and put forth effort to obtain a joint objective, and also in the fact that individuals can ‘change direction’ and do surprising deeds. One participant revealed a dream that reminded her of the beautiful river landscape of her childhood. Later the river had been dammed so that peat could be harvested. The villagers decided to apply for restoration of the river by the peat-harvesting company, the dream being one of the grounds for the application. The application was accepted. In another dream, there was a feeling of well-being when the villagers gathered together at the community centre to meet each other and to work on a project together.

A new type of communality and individuality was discussed. People take care of themselves while, at the same time, they act as members of many small groups and social media networks, as a part of international teams in worklife, as EU and world citizens, or as a “grandmother in Paris” as one participant pointed out.

Hypothesis: Our complex world has misled people into drifting along with the prevalent current so that they are becoming estranged from their own humanity and identity. Once people begin to listen to the sounds of their body (sleep when sleepy rather than waiting for the world to become quiet) and make room for their own needs, they begin to perceive that they can fend for themselves in this complex world. This achievement requires the courage to look the truth in the eye without flinching and fleeing from it. It requires being able to withstand ambivalence, anxiety, fear, and being uninformed. For this to happen, we need the feeling of safety that we can best get from others. This feeling of safety and hope stems from a mental closeness, the sharing of experiences, joint endeavours, and the ability to listen to each other. In addition, when our own individual choices and deeds begin to succeed, we live differently and do not become abandoned. We possibly wish for happy moments and of being able to grab hold of any glimpse of hope.

When we realize that we are living in a global reality, are “virtual world citizens”, we are reaching for humane essence. Notwithstanding individual and national differences, people have much in common, for example, the basic needs produced by our evolutionary development and the means with which we express these needs. These similarities offer us the possibility to meet each other’s needs.

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