



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 2 the participants were invited to identify in small groups, the major themes which emerged during part one. When brought together, some themes seemed to overlap in certain areas. The sum of the identified themes is described bellow as follows:

- a. Resistance to change and resistance to taking responsibility for oneself;
- b. The impact of the economic crisis on the Portuguese people;
- c. The appearance of new paradigms regarding how people buy things;
- d. The difference between entrepreneurship in our parents generation and entrepreneurship nowadays;
- e. The big demographic crisis;
- f. Lack of hope regarding the future of the country;
- g. The rise of emigration;
- h. The way in which the local and central government are organized

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, 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 and Hypothesis 1

Analysis: During the Listening Post the first theme to emerge regarded how in other countries the persons seem to be very hopeful, even when faced with several difficulties. In Portugal, on the other hand, everyone seems to be feeling hopeless with the continuous impacts, on everyday life, of the economic crisis, although there still isn't present a generalized feeling that we must take responsibility, as a society, for the impact the crisis had on our country. It was mentioned, by some participants that it seems that in Portugal we never face up to our responsibilities and we never seem to know how to move on from facing the difficult moments and how to keep getting back up after a failure.

There was a also a discussion regarding the lack of capacity for entrepreneurship present in the Portuguese society and how, even today there is still a view that the Government should give

incentives and financial support to every business as opposed to a view of taking responsibility for one's own business. It was referred by a participant how some years ago there were more persons trying to open up businesses and shops and taking risks, and how nowadays that capacity for initiative seems to have faded away even though opening a business can be much more planned and thought about than some decades ago. Furthermore the new generation of individuals that might be interested in starting up a small business, all seem to think about immigrating to other countries instead of opening up a business. They feel unwelcomed and uncared for in Portugal. This feeling was stressed by the fact that every participant mentioned how in the past few years they know of more persons that immigrated to other countries.

It was also referred the general impression that some years ago it was easy to start a life as an independent worker in several fields such as architecture or law. Nowadays not only harder but the employment market is very violent and competitive, but there is a huge lack of jobs and the unemployment numbers keep rising, and it seems that the country just lost vitality. There are no jobs, there are less persons driving cars or walking on the public transports, the streets have fewer persons. This also seems to have had an impact on the way people shop. Not long ago the individuals would buy what pleased them on the supermarket shelves while today we are much more rational in the way we buy products. But this lack of vitality and lack of jobs seems to contribute to a general feeling that the country is stuck, its not moving forward.

It was further addressed how the organization of the government seems to be very inefficient and complicated. The example was given of public schools whose building is dependent on the council authority, which also places the non-teaching staff, but the teachers are placed by the central government and accountable to an intermediate regional delegation of the ministry of education. In practice, this confusion regarding public institutions is present in every field regarding how the country is organized. It was also mentioned that it seems to have as a result that no one is accountable when problems appear.

Hypothesis: The present feelings of hopelessness prevent us from taking risks, being entrepreneurs and trying to be responsible for our own future. As such capacities are impaired, we hold back from taking action and feeling that our own individual efforts can make a change and that we, as individuals, can make a difference. Such holding back adds to our sense of hopelessness and this transforms into a vicious cycle that seems to be spreading throughout the Portuguese society with disastrous social and economic consequences.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: The discussion continued on the previous topics regarding individual's responsibility and the lack of hope present in the Portuguese society, but it also diverged into a different path that led to the purpose of a different hypothesis. It was argued during the discussion that there was an implicit social promise that was made after the Portuguese revolution in 1974 which ended with a long dictatorship, that from this day forward the Government would take care of everyone. Such promise brought with it the implicit notion that as long as everyone behaved properly than they would collect its benefits. And this idea of being well-behaved was equated as not causing any problems or protest. Such informal agreement seems present not only by the lack of protest against increasingly harder financial cuts, but also in the idea transmitted by successive governments throughout the years that we are Europe's 'good student', a metaphor that is very much present in Society and criticized by some while being supported by others.

Hypothesis: Because at the present moment the government seems incapable of taking care of everyone's problems (unemployment, health, etc.), sue promise fails at the same time as it leaves the individuals unable to take the responsibility in their own hands, which increases the feelings of hopelessness.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis: A further concern of the participants that was addressed was the huge demographic crisis that Portugal is facing at the present moment. For the past decades the number of births has been

continuously dropping and in 2012 there was almost 10% less births than in the previous year which had already been an all-time low. Such fact was mentioned as something very worrying and a participant commented on his fears that the future of the Portuguese population might be endangered. It was also mentioned how besides the demographic crisis, there is also a huge increase of immigration of young people who find it increasingly hard to find work in Portugal. Furthermore, Portugal used to be a country that received several immigrants for the past years, and now they are also leaving and return towards to their home countries, which seem to account to the perception that Portugal is a country with grim prospects. Thus there seems to be an increasing risk that Portugal becomes a very aged country, which is worrying for the participants. It was also mentioned how this is also a worry regarding their own retirement, since retirements are paid for by the social security discounts of the present working generation.

Furthermore, the generation that is now at the time of having children seem to see the prospects of having children differently from the previous generation, which still lived during the dictatorship. It was referred how this generation has access to several commodities that were not present, such as being able to travel, to have holidays away from Portugal, to have cars and to be able to have bigger houses and other commodities that were non-existent such as cable TV, mobile phones and computers. Furthermore it was mentioned how such commodities and life style seem to play a role at the time of deciding whether or not to have more than 1 children and, it seems that increasingly more are individuals deciding to have only one child in order to be able to continue supporting the life style acquired. Furthermore the decision to have children is increasingly taken later in life, after one is thirty, and delayed in favour of settling in a career, buying a car and being able to buy the house one aspires to.

Hypothesis: The present generation made more travels abroad than any other generation, has better commodities and better quality of life. Having children in this context is a threat to such commodities. Because children are increasingly seen by individuals as a threat to one's financial welfare, as being in a competition with the the maintenance of a desired quality of life, the decision to have them is adjourned by individuals usually after the 30's. And in such cases, usually only having one child in order to try to maintain their quality of life standards, thus the demographic rate decreases abruptly.

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