

**"Ireland and the World
at the Dawn of 2004"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on 14th January
Franciscan Friary,
Merchant's Quay
Dublin



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. SHARING 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. This part was concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that related to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants. Since all participants had taken part in the Irish group relations conference, there was a general feeling of being saturated with ideas about role since the conference. Participants spoke about the range of competing roles they find themselves taking up: role as caregiver, mother, wife, daughter, professional, student, friend. There is a wish to take up roles, but this requires personal commitment and sacrifice. In the taking on of so many roles all the time, there is a struggle to find space for the self and a sense of sacrificing the self to the role. There is evidence of people learning to be quiet and still, in reaction to the frantic pace of post-modern Ireland. This is an effort to keep a balance between 'being' and 'being busy'.

In middle age, bodies stop working, we need a range of supports allow a multiplicity of roles, find ourselves dependent on technologies of different kinds. We experience duality and ambivalence in relation to technology: the potential and risk of camera phones is a powerful example.

In this busy time, participants experience a call for direction and leadership in organisational life and an opportunity to offer this. At this time, it doesn't feel like a struggle to take up leadership. In taking up new roles, it is a comfort that others have done this and the possibility of tapping into collective wisdom. Members described the process of access support around taking up different roles and contrasted this with the experience of people who find themselves isolated, alienated and alone in taking up roles.

Ireland has just taken up the Presidency of the EU and participants spoke of the difficulty of taking up a role as citizen, when much of the public activity of the government is experienced as alien, superficial and orchestrated. The published list of events of the Presidency are all big, high-powered events - there are no events for ordinary people. It is difficult to hold the connection between the individual citizen and the enormous scale of the European dimension.

One participant spoke of the experience of having his home broken into and, in contrast, participants spoke of the experience of both celebration and grief at a community level. A member spoke of the difficulty of 're-dimensioning' the institutional part of himself.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. On this occasion, themes were difficult to name but can be drawn together as the following three interrelated statements:

- Does remoteness and disconnection offer freedom or displacement?
- Aging
- Dependency and inter-dependence
- Managing role - multi, hijacking, different /competing roles
Complexity - roles have never been as complex as they are now
- Individualism - duality - callous 'me-ness' Vs space for the self
Role of individual space and the part that that has to play in managing role - space becoming more precious, almost sacred
- Connections and community
- Kindness and hostility of strangers
- Words - hard to talk -
Being colonised - government using the language of community and partnership
How do we link to the wider world? What is the responsibility to know, listen, be aware,
informed - not to lose that link
- Overwhelmingness - National Drugs Strategy almost coming to a halt;
Presidency of EU dominates and local institutions are not able to hold
Question about where the attention goes and where it does not go?

Hypotheses

Expectations of EU presidency - Ireland being asked to sort out large, difficult EU issues at a time when it's own leaders' popularity is at an all time low.

Need to reclaim sacred space, to be able to discover the self before I can have relationships with institutions

Need for time out to come to self-awareness and hold the practice of self-awareness - what kind of society would we have if people were doing that?

Intense public criticism of all institutions - the church, politicians, police, health authorities - no authority is good enough. Many tribunals are an attempt to cleanse ourselves. But some holding back - we don't want to destroy ourselves? Now not wanting to hear any more - the capacity to tolerate evidence of corruption and ineffectiveness is

absolutely at its limit. Some sense that if we don't stop now, there will be a rupture which will be irreparable. Need to develop the capacity to hold both good and bad.

The place of quiet is also the place of the demon.

There is a flight into fundamentalism.

Commodification of everything - gifts which have historical significance are being sold off, everything has a price - typical of modern Ireland.

Duty of care and burden of care - something happens to care when it is 'strategised' and the cost is to the person in need. Professionalising of care for each other.

Traded care for efficiency. Where is the love in education? How is the affective level acknowledged?

Huge sense of force leading young people to stillness. Need to give them an experience that they can't name but they can associate to, when they need it.

Ireland used to export difference. Now we have to accommodate it here and carry all sorts of differences which used to be played out in the streets of Camden.

The importance of people who are connectors in a society breaking down.

'Belonging' is no longer associated with place. Individuals have to locate themselves on the continuum which can be described as displacement - belonging, or as freedom - constraint. The basis on which people experience exclusion appears to have changed, the outing of individuals has been replaced with the outing of institutions. No change in the capacity to tolerate difference.

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