**"Italy and the World
at the Dawn of 2004"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on Wednesday 28th January
Associazone "Comunità Progetto Sud"
Lamezia Terme

Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. SHARING PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES.

After a brief presentation of the theories, concepts, experiences and organisation that are beyond the methodology of the Listening Post, the convenor introduced the programme and gave brief indication of how the programme and its parts are linked to the theory and what each part required from the Members.

Members were then invited to identify, to explore and to share, from their different societal roles, their preoccupations and the dawn of 2004.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAIN THEMES

The members were invited to form trios and to identify the main themes emerged in Part 1. The trios reported back lists of themes that, in some cases, were the simple repetition of the individual preoccupation presented in the previous part.

Trying to put into statements the material presented it could be said that:

a) there is an increasing sense of insecurity linked to a perceived uncertain world. The gap between the extremes of individuals' life - like wealth and poverty - seem to be reduced. People can move from wealth (as stable and comfort zone) to poverty (a zone of deprivation and uncertainty) in a very short period of time. This process of deprivation includes the deterioration of the quantity and quality of relations.

b) our experience of societal boundaries is less clear. Politics (a very important aspect of Italian society) doesn't show much differentiation. Political parties and politician look similar. It seems that there are no longer stable point of reference, as was put "there are no longer reliable 'translator' and 'summariser' of the social reality". There is a sort of difficulty in recognising clear identities. This generates two different but linked processes: implosion (an example is the individualism as an extreme defence against the impossibility to hold a fragmented world) and explosion (an example is the increasing reports of extreme family violence. In recent months the Italian press reported several cases of murder and suicide within, apparently, 'very normal' family that shocked Italian public opinion). Uncertainty is taking the place of social cohesion and - as was put it - "there are no longer significant difference among social groups, in this way society can become a place of nightmares".

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

The Members were invited to analyse the key themes and to attempt the formulation of hypothesis trying to make sense of why such themes. A definition of what is hypothesis was read. The Convenor declared a change in his role.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis: It is now more evident than in the past that we live in an interdependent world. What happens far away from us influence our lives. The example of the nuclear plant of Chernobyl was quoted to remember how our day per day life can be effected by events we have no control over. This makes our lives more vulnerable and uncertain, more spaces and places for helping us thinking and making sense of what is going on are required. The nature of this kind of thinking is not speculative but a way of making sense of our reality that can help our actions in society. Paradoxically an increased interdependency seems to produce an inability in creating meaningful relations. As example is the reduction of public welfare, the threat to civil rights and the reappearing of old way of beneficence.

Hypothesis: The fragmentation and weakening of traditional sources of identity and authority leave us stranded between a lost sense of security and an unknown future. This is a very difficult position to hold and we fear of loosing our identity as members of a community. The fear is dehumanisation as result of weakened and meaningless relations. No social institution is immune from such process; the violence in the family is an example.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: It seems more difficult to identify what makes us similar and what makes us different, who is 'like me' and who isn't. This process is very evident at local level, however at national and global level we can differentiate from leaders (e.g. Mr Berlusconi and Mr Bush) whose actions we do not approve, but this is a reactive process. Identifying the enemy outside means that we re-act rather than act on a global level, but we are unable to engage in meaningful relations in our close environment. It seems so difficult to be a good enough citizen and a good enough parent. We have a responsibility with the next generation both in terms of what we make of our world and how we help the next generations to make sense of it. There are signs that changes and transformation can take place. Individuals and groups are expressing the wish to move towards new places and some enthusiasm can be recognised (e.g. the no global movements), but this is just the expression of a wish.

Hypothesis: The crisis of social institution and the increasing transformation of politics in an activity perceived as a way of protecting the strongest and not promoting the collective welfare leave people with a new form of responsibility. The traditional containers do not longer hold the complexity and the uncertainty of our present world, our cultural frameworks are no longer adequate to help us make sense of the current situation and influence change. New approaches and new way of thinking are required to channel the emerging energies and enthusiasm for change. This call on our ability to move from the old to the new and to accept that rather than a sharper sight we should accept that a more impressionistic way of looking at the reality could help us containing the fuzziness of our environment.

CONVENOR: Antonio Sama