**"Ireland and the World
at the Dawn of 2005"**
**Report of a Listening Post
held on 11th January**

Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. SHARING PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES.

Participants spoke about the OECD report that identifies Ireland as the best place to live and the Irish response 'if you really lived here you wouldn't say that'. A question about whether Ireland is new or old. The experience of lives being lived in parallel tracks was developed - reports from outside on Irish buoyancy and success, but a very different internal experience. The feeling that there are two worlds, existing side by side, not seeing each other. This reflection about detachment and separateness about each other's experience was seen as mirrored in Northern Ireland. The bewilderment of North America about how they are seen in the world was seen as another example of separation and disconnection from the realities of others.

There was significant reflection on the different experience of childhood and children in Ireland today: children are awoken in darkness, dropped off at childcare, collected in the dark. All this is part of the cost of affluence.

The idea of 'the citizen' is new here and there is confusion between citizenship and nationality. We have yet to come to terms with the opportunities to be an active citizen. The government is running behind people, instead of leading.

More acutely aware of being a citizen of the world and, at the same time, a sense of helplessness to take up this role. It feels like the ways of participating as a citizen are narrow and constrained - or do we ourselves narrow the concept of citizen to the political dimension? Being a citizen of the EU brings a raft of legislation which impacts on the potential influence of the individual (especially at work). We are wondering what is the connection between being an Irish citizen and being an EU citizen and asking 'citizens of where?'

The recent death of a child in rural Ireland and the huge community response to the missing and then dead child was commented on. Participants asked what the outpouring of community spirit and support actually meant. Does such an outpouring in times of adversity speak to the wish to take up the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, which finds mass expression as if there was no other avenue? In internet chat rooms there is a huge use of discussion in which people are talking and evidence of strong investment and feelings, but it doesn't come on to the political level. This was contrasted with a survey in which Irish people were asked what they were most proud of in the past year and there was nothing we were proud of other than sporting achievements. Linking this to the response to the OECD report, perhaps this is because we cannot hear anything good about ourselves. Perhaps we should be more appreciative

of what we have. Or perhaps the massive donations by the Irish to, for example, the tsunami fund is an expression of guilt about being affluent - we are trying to buy ourselves out of something. Perhaps we do have a problem believing good things about ourselves. In contrast, the English seem to have a sense of certainty about who they are. Who are we, as Irish people? Development is so fast, are we getting a chance to develop into Irishness? Is this the effect of having been colonised?

A sense of contradictions: we are the 4th richest country - how did that happen? Where are these rich people? Doesn't sit with our experience of life in Ireland, with a significant undertow of deprivation. The sense of citizenship in Ireland was compared with Switzerland, where you experience a real sense of citizenship. A participant reported returning from a visit to Switzerland feeling disappointed in herself as an Irish person. Another participant noted that the surveys and reports which give rise to such ranking and hierarchies in terms of happiness, quality of life, richness, all come from some theory or world view, not often disclosed. By what standards are we the 4th richest country in the world? Participants felt that James Joyce's phrase 'scrupulously mean' (meaning balanced) resonated with this theme.

Ireland was characterised as an adolescent society. In adolescence, the role is to reinvent oneself, to reject the past. Irish adolescents have a crisis of expectation, we look at young people and fear for them. However, there was a robustly hopeful reflection on the capacities, courage and emotional skills of young people, the support they offer each other, the strength of their friendships and their good analysis and understanding.

In exploring the resistance we have to a positive view of Ireland, participants posited an awareness that our wealth may be at the expense of others. We can't enjoy our wealth if others are so poor. Another explanation for the resistance could be that we don't believe this success and wealth is real, or that it's not really ours. Here again, the duality of experience is noted: the evidence of the success of the Irish in brokering major agreements (the EU constitution) and the very poor relationships Irish politicians have with the citizenship; the success and leadership of the ban on smoking and the tax on plastic bags and, at the same time, the very poor political leadership and courage.

Participants questioned what forces will dictate the formation of Irish citizens. Schools have become instruments for markets; we discuss knowledge 'economy' rather than knowledge 'society; Intel and Microsoft are enormous influences on the economy and also significant cultural and social forces.

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, there were a large number of themes, but they can be linked together as the following related statements:

1. Splitting, twin track, duality, paradox, contradiction
In many settings in Ireland, the perceived wisdom denies the reality of many citizens. There are two Irelands and each one is blind to the experience and the reality of the other. The failure to acknowledge the other means that the different experience is not included in thinking or analysis and is not reflected in the stories (surveys, reports) that we tell about our lives.

A sub theme within the overall theme of duality was the nature of leadership required or effective within a twin-track society.

2. Multiple new forces influencing identity
The many influences shaping who we are can be noted and notices, but it feels impossible to hold them up to real scrutiny. Some of these forces are global ones and there is an unease about how aware we are about the long term consequences of accepting - being greedy for - the benefits of these developments without having, or taking, time to consider what might be lost. There is concern about our eager compliance in reshaping ourselves - changing our identity - to suit global corporations. The speed at which these developments have happened and at which they change makes them even more difficult to grasp. There is a sense of young people being at ease with these forces, knowing the language of global phenomena, feeling confident of their place in this new world. Young people feel part of this world. The opportunities to take up the role of citizen are either limited or unclear and the relationship between identity and citizenship are confused. Holding both local and global perspectives in conceptualising citizenship is paradoxical.

3. Recognising/accepting other' version/views of us
There is now an uncertainty about who we - the Irish - are in the world and a sense of both looking for approval (e.g. being good, admired and compliant EU citizens) and of rejecting positive and affirming feedback on our success. We reject and distrust analyses that praise us or portray us as successful or ahead of other countries. In part, this is historical, as a colonised country we were not allowed to own our own success. In part, there is a fear of attack and envy if we claim greatness for ourselves. For our (middle-aged) generation, there is also a lack of practice and experience of thinking of ourselves as successful: the Celtic tiger is a relatively recent development. But there is also a wish to deny our achievements.

4. The concept of citizenship being new
The idea of 'the citizen' is new here and there is confusion between citizenship and nationality. We have yet to come to terms with the opportunities to be an active citizen. The leadership offering options, possibilities and challenges for citizen action and participation is absent. We are aware of being a citizen of the world and, at the same time, don't know how to take up this role. Being a citizen of the EU brings a raft of legislation which impacts on the potential influence of the individual (especially at work). We are wondering what is the connection between being an Irish citizen and being an EU citizen and asking 'citizens of where?'

5. Adolescence
In Ireland, we are growing up, coming to adulthood as citizens, but not yet quite there. In adolescence, the task is to reinvent oneself and to reject the past. Participants reported the reassurance of evidence of the capacities, courage and emotional skills of young people, the support they offer each other, the strength of their friendships and their good analysis and understanding. At the same time, there is evidence of being afraid to be the adult (so the EU can be the adult) - does this allow us to run amok and not take the consequences?

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

'In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, 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.'

It was difficult to stay with the task and hypothesising was tentative and fragmented. There was a return to elaborate the themes and to give more and more examples of the themes. This felt safer and less challenging than the work to discern the underlying meaning.

Analysis and hypothesis 1

Analysis: We doubt the veracity and the substance of success. We question if this new success has real roots that will last and also question what the cost of success will prove to be. There is a fear of being swamped, overwhelmed, that we will disappear in the face of overwhelming and uncontrollable forces. This includes the fear that we are clashing with the environment and that the particular experience - of women, of the old, of the poor, of rural life - will be overpowered by global influence. At a personal level, this is experienced as a fear about where I am, where I fit in this new reality. There is a sense of not knowing, of helplessness and of hopelessness.

Hypothesis: Loss of Trust and certainty
The old realities are gone and new and changed values, measures and priorities have replaced them. The new institutions and structures do not provide the containing function of past structures. Without this reliable containing function of societal structures, our internal anxieties increase and we experience external threats as out of control. Increased fear, mistrust and sense of helplessness results.

Analysis and hypothesis 2

Analysis: It is frightening for us to see young people take up their place in this changed world with such confidence and familiarity. We fear for them: that they are living a dream which will not last, that their confidence and pragmatism which help them to survive may also mean the loss of other values and that for at least some young people (especially young men), not being able to fit into this dream world leads to fatal outcomes. But we are also afraid for ourselves: that our world is shrinking, that time is running out, that we will be left behind. As middle-aged Ireland, we are afraid of aging and our own mortality, of having enough, of leaving something behind and of having a place in the new Ireland.

Hypothesis: Abandonment
World, societal and national upheavals have aroused fears of displacement and replacement. Our focus on and fears for the next generation reflect both our dependency on it to understand, cope with and survive these changes and our fear that they will fail in this task and so will not provide support and defence for our increasing vulnerability. This leads to a breakdown of internal defences and increased anxiety which is enacted in an increasingly fractured and disconnected society.

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