**"Italy and the World
at the Dawn of 2005"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on Wednesday 12th January

Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAIN THEMES

Putting into statements the material presented it could be said that:

a) there is a perception of increasing uncertainty in our society and this seems to lead to the request for more security. We are asking to reduce any risk to its minimum but at the same time we are destroying the 'joy of life'. This creates an ambivalence that seems to produce a great deal of rage that hasn't a specific target but move, "as a force without control" in and around all aspects of our life. Asking for more (wealth, security etc.) doesn't seem to lead to better, there is a tension between quantity and quality, between desire for independency and wish for security, between opportunity and fragility.

b) Several references were made to withdrawing from the open space of society, both as individuals (as one member said "being alone doesn't require negotiation and engagement") and as institutions such as school, church, Local Authorities etc. It seems that nobody and none is willing and prepared to share responsibility for the situation we are experiencing and for creating forms of engagement with the current societal processes. The societal fabric is perceived as torn and traditional relations (e.g. children/parents; young/adult) and institutions (schools, churches, NHS, government) seem unable to provide any shelter and security, so the wish for somebody taking responsibility is unmet.

c) One of the strategies institutions and organisations use for coping with fast and unpredictable changes is to look for more efficiency, to members it looks like a race to keep up with the increasing uncertainty. It is as if the increasing uncertainty should be matched by and increasing speed of activities and processes both as the individual is concerned as well as the organisation. The members described this process as a situation in which "there is too much silence or too much noise", both situations do not allow for thinking, listening and sense making to take place. Loneliness (withdraw) is then the outcome of the fear experienced as feeling in a void of sense making. The metaphor of being on a journey at sea was put forward to describe the experience of having left the security of a well known port and being in the middle of the ocean, not yet at the new destination that, incidentally, we do not know.

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: The Listening Post took place in the aftermath of the Asian Tsunami tragedy and this has contributed to increasing the sense of a reality out of our control. It is not only society (e.g. 9/11) but also the nature that are attacking us in a period of highly perceived vulnerability. When we are looking for more security we make experience of forces that destroy our wish. We are left with a devastating sense of hopeless, and it is then that we discover our human side (e.g. the race to rise more funding for helping the population of the areas effected by the tragedy).

Hypothesis: It seems that only tragedies are capable of creating a shared sense of humanity. It is as if when our existence is perceived under extreme threat that we can find the energy to mobilise action. We are capable collectively to engage, in a sort of way, with the reality only when we feel strong emotions under huge pressure. This however is still a defensive reaction in which responsibility is placed outside our domain.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: Members talked of how to regenerate and how "to give birth to new life", and this is part of a process in which past, present and future are rediscovered and rethought. The issue seems to be on how to conciliate tradition with innovation, how to cope with "not knowing how and when crossing the sea". Old identities are no longer capable of helping this process and we need to reformulate our identities in ways that are more appropriate with the current societal dynamics.

Hypothesis: We need a new paradigm that is centred, among others, on a new ability to be creative, but our creativity is blocked because acknowledging that we are experiencing fragmented times imply acknowledging that our identities are fragmented as well and we have to learn to manage the politics of identities, and such politics is inside our own minds before than projecting it in the external world. This is at the core on how to be a reflective citizen nowadays.

When such hypothesis of 'mirroring' between 'society in the mind' and 'society in reality' is brought forward the old way of copying is resisting by externalising the fragmentation and calling on the responsibility of traditional institutions. The use of 'ideological' identities seems to serve such purpose.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis: The individual wish to take more responsibility in the current situations seems to call in how to harvest hope, how we can build new sources fro hope. It is not enough to have hope but also to share hope, when old institutions seem not to provide containment new ones have to be built. However these new need transition stages in which the tiredness of holding ambivalence is acknowledged, creativity is encouraged and the new negotiation of identities is allowed.

Hypothesis: As a member said "creativity to me is the result of deep analysis and open space" and our societies have reduced the possibilities for reflective citizens to do so,

our organisations and institutions are running after changes rather than creating space for change. Changing everything several times in short period is not change, it is avoiding to create "deep analysis and open space".

The current situation seems to call for a further development of approaches such as this one.

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