**"Italy and the World
at the Dawn of 2006"**
Report of a Listening Post
held on 24th January

OPUS

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. There was an initial difficulty in starting the process, as the participants were concerned on what to do. Such concern had a relevant place in the whole event.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part Two the aim was collectively to identify the major themes emerging from Part One. Several themes were identified by the members and these have been distilled into three major themes, they are:

1. Lonelines
Participants referred several times to loneliness, to the difficulty and the added pain of being and living alone nowadays. Social and community fabrics are broken forever - or at the least they feel as if they will never be the same (the old way is over).

2. Violence and aggresion
The participants talked of the effects of loneliness and fragmentation as an increasing sense of insecurity. The safety of living spaces has been broken forever and this is what constitute the root of fragmentation. Violence and aggression is the way people react to the impossibility/inability to hold uncertainity.

3. Use and abuse of younger generations
There is a form of passive dependence, the new generation seems to be unable to think and build its own future as one participant said: "They look for something but they do not know what they are looking for", or "They leave their cities, but they do not know if they know wether they will come back".
The relationship parents/children is broken: the anxiety and the worries about the future are too large to share, the future is so worrying that it is unspeakable. There is a sense of guilt. How can we make sense of the current situation? Who are the leaders of tomorrow and how can we contribute to their education?
Young people are detached, they do not engage with what is going on. There is no understanding of what does a leader do and they will take their place in society.

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

Uncertainty and risk

Analysis:
The unknown is too large to embrace. It is like a big blak hole that attracts us towards disappearing, there is a force that we cannot controll and that does not allow us to envisage what is coming. We feel as if the future is not in our hands. The fear is unspeakable, we can only wisper it with our neighbours. It is this one of the reason of loniliness, we fear to being isolated both because the process of fragmentation and because if we are open and express our deepest fears people will isolate us. This happens at all levels of society, and it is particularly visible in the family and in the relation between parents and children.

Hypothesis:
The fear of fragmentation and disapperance are linked to the changing ethnic map of Italy. What if the new comers do not want passive help but want to be at the same level of citizenship? People are left with facing their deep fears and balancing them with their beliefes. The absence of societal (political and religious) institution that can help contain such anxieties makes the feeling of loneliness more painful.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Inhumanisation

Analysis:
The fear is producing processes of inhumanisation. People are less inclined to meet the others, if we are unable to make sense of what is our life and what we are facing it is easier to loose the boundaries between human and not human. We can witness increasing cases, described in all their details by a voyeuristic media, in our societies in which horrific crimes take places, where human life is worthless. We are left with the question where is humanity, where we can find the meaning of life. People are so worried that are no longer able to recognise the parameter of what human is.

Hypothesis:
We are looking for a new definition of what human is, one member quoted a series of film and books (among them the film "A Million Dollar Baby") in which paradoxically we find humanity re-definied in what seems apparantly inhumane. Euthanasia seems a humane act. Perhaps it is time to let the old life go.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

<u>Individual and group</u>

Analysis:
It is difficult for the individual to cope with the current situation. Uncertainty and inhumanisation are too large burdens to carry on one's shoulders. However we are still loooking for individual solutions, we cannot trust or cannot find any collective space or institution that we can trust in supporting us. We do not believe in our leader, and we cannot envisage how the leaders of the future will be educated, and when they will appear. Furthermore, there are no places or spaces where we can safely express our fears and worries. It seems that we cannot comunicate our important concerns, they are left inside us.

Hypothesis:
There is the need for a new process of awareness of our societal dynamics. If this task is left to the individual there is not much hope, it is the small group that can start a sort of renaissance. It is there that the original questions ("What to do" and "How to face the current situation") find a possible answer, or at the least are asked safely. It is a form of retreat from the open space of society, but it seems only apparent.