

**"Holland and the World  
at the Dawn of 2007"  
Report of a Listening Post  
held on 10th January**



**Encouraging The Reflective Citizen**

**Part 1. SHARING PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES.**

During this part of the Listening Post, the participants were invited to share the experiences they had in their various social roles: as an employee or as an employer, as a pensioner or as a member of a political or religious organization, as a neighbour or as a volunteer, as a member of a family or a community. This part mainly concentrates on "the events in everyday life", which are related to the social or external world of the participant.

**Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. It was not easy for the participants to come up with concrete themes. Nevertheless the following themes could be noted down.

1. There are frequent references to the feeling of despondency. Being confronted with 'big issues', such as Iraq, radicalization, terrorism, youth problems, slumbering religious conflicts; with seemingly conflicting, personal ideals, such as respect for personal dignity and openness of information; the impossibility of not being associated with the group you want to help and which receives criticism. The participants look upon the negative developments of the growth of the population, environmental problems and the impoverishment of parts of the population as irrevocable and, even worse, as uncontrollable. Using one's personal influence does not seem to be an option.
2. Initiatives for improvement are sought at a local, national and even global level. Issues can no longer be solved at a national level alone. The participants observe, however, a lack of a hopeful global perspective from great world leaders. Instead, personal interests and affinities seem to be these leaders' main guiding principle. At a local and national level there is the eye-opening conclusion of fallibility, and the loss of integrity of politicians;
3. Justice & interests was another theme. The food banks where poor people can receive 'surplus' food have also become an institution in the Netherlands now. In fact, it makes the difference between rich and poor poignantly visible, even though the experiences of the years of crisis around the war and the political statement "never again"! afterwards, is still firmly rooted in the national body of thoughts. Personal positioning in relation to this matter is under discussion.

### 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 not easy for the participants to work out hypotheses systematically into detail. Partly matters were repeated that had come up during the theme discussions, but gradually the following arose:

#### Analysis and hypothesis 1

**Analysis:** We live in a world where a lot of information is available, including information about all sorts of wrongs in the world. A primary reaction is to do something about that. However the possibilities to do so are felt to be insufficient. Some experience the despondency and sadness it evokes as unbearable and want to cut themselves off from the world. "I would rather withdraw from it all and concentrate on my family and friends" or "I reconcile myself to it, because it is hopeless anyway". The despondency of the parents is linked to the radicalization of the children who have a hard time finding their place in society. What "containment" can the parents offer the children?

Wherever structures are available at a local level to deal with problems, it leads to positive feelings, confidence and hope. "I simply go for it and take care of it". The participants observe that the blind faith in the makability of society and the individual responsibility to have to play an important role in it, feeds the impotence and despondency. "We have been dreaming for a long time!" A more realistic awareness of our personal limitations and the courage to face the imperfection of society, could help take modest yet real steps for improvement: "We really have to make do with the life we have here and now" and "peel off the impotence".

**Hypothesis:** A profoundly felt need to create a better world to live in for everyone is frustrated by relentless reports about failing human actions. This leads to despondency and impotence and the impulse to go into seclusion (flight) and an increase in the (emotional) distance between the elderly and the young. Laying the makability of society on the table; more sense of reality and a more coherent view of the problems of man and society, could help with making plans and lead to more perseverance in carrying them out..

#### Analysis and Hypothesis 2

**Analysis:** When looking at politics there is a deep disappointment towards the political leaders of our country. "I no longer feel represented by politicians; as things are going wrong in the world, I need more protection", someone says. "Politics stakes too much on individualism and uses people against one another, is too much party-focused and is keen on winning votes". The participants also think that our leaders fail globally. When looking at (local) reality there are also positive actions in society regarding integration, education, energy and the environment. Gradually more issues are put on the agenda concerning survival and living together and which are not just focused on economic gain,

which is a relief. The question is whether perspectives and initiatives should be developed locally or worldwide. Is it important that the world leaders discuss a unanimous view on global development or that the speaker at a memorial service for the 100,000 Dutch Jews that died during World War II, raises the matter of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? The participants observe a high degree of dependency on others to take initiatives or even develop the courage to think about something. "We need a father figure". There are people taking initiatives who are capable of integrated thinking and acting, who put a lot of energy into local or national government. There are many experts with sound ideas. To what extent do we support them, do we acknowledge their role? How can we restrict our generalizations when politics fails? To what degree do we abandon the people we have chosen to govern or to speak on behalf of us, when they do govern or speak on behalf of us? Projections are slightly withdrawn at the statement that "it is a matter of a spoilt society with spoilt children who neglect their role in democracy".

**Hypothesis:** When shaping individual life and life with others, a lot, if not everything, is expected of the democratically elected governors and politicians. This need of dependency is met insufficiently, which leads to anger and disappointment. Compensation appears to be sought in the superiority of one's own judgement and moral stands, rejection and an exaggerated critical attitude towards (elected) representatives. Appropriating one's own power and using one's own possibilities could, together with a facilitating, consistent and courageous government, offer a way out of this energy-consuming, unproductive deadlock.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 3.**

**Analysis:** The fact that poverty has become visible, like the institutionalization of the food banks in the Netherlands, evokes a lot of indignation and feelings of guilt. The participants are surprised that it has come this far. Besides poverty it is also clear that many young people, especially children from parents who were born abroad, have no position at all or a poor one on the job market. They threaten to lose the connection to society and to radicalize. Consequently, the young are in danger of being swallowed up into, often destructive, collectives that do offer them meaning, acknowledgement and respect, which evokes feelings of insecurity.

The participants feel incapable of imagining themselves in the position of the poor and/or radicalizing young. The question is raised to what extent people have an interest in current relations "when you are on the right side of the line". Impulses to change relations are restrained by the thought of having to give up some of the personal privileges. The problem of the connection of the young to society is also partly a matter of exclusion and disqualification. The avoidance of linking global, religious and economic issues, puts the pressure for change disproportionately with the 'problem groups'.

**Hypothesis:** Poverty and the lack of the underprivileged and (underprivileged) young people of connecting to society, is thought to be unfair and evokes anger and feelings of guilt in addition to a cry for action. (Unconscious) self-interest seems to serve the preservation of the relations in society. As this situation continues, personal risks of, and fears for exclusion and disqualification in this uncertain society are ignored or even denied.

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