"Switzerland 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

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles. This part was concerned with what might be called 'the stuff of people's everyday lives' that related to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

This was a lively session which commenced with a statement of feeling fraudulent about being involved in the Listening Post as a member lived in France and yet worked in Switzerland. It seemed that this theme of belonging, of choosing where to belong or where not to belong played a major role in the subsequent discussions. The group also recognized that it represents a significant yet privileged part of Swiss society; the international, multi-lingual professional who is able to choose where to live and what to do. There was a concern for the more local people whose ways of life are perhaps being eroded by globalization and whose choices are far more restricted due to several factors including limited transportable skills (yet strong craftsmanship), languages spoken, financial situation and their strong roots to a very local area. These local people make up a significant part of the Swiss way of life.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. Several themes had dominated the earlier discussion and there was striking consensus on the identification of these themes.

1. **Belonging/Identity** - A major pre-occupation was of seeking a sense of belonging and of forging an identity for people who live a different lifestyle from the norm within their home country or for people who live outside their country of origin, who work, live or study in a second or third language and who have mixed-nationality or mixed race marriages.

2. **Multiculturalism/Migration** - The group and Switzerland were seen to represent a mélange of races, nationalities, languages, religions, political ideologies, interests which has been the result of migration to the "safe haven" that Switzerland has represented for years.

3. **The Swiss Way of Life - "A Country of Choice".** There were frequent references to Switzerland as a country of choice due to the beauty of its natural environment, its security, its low taxes and the mix of well preserved traditions,

crafts and specialized local knowledge combined with thriving international trade and a strong presence. Switzerland seems to be, in the words of one participant, a "small paradise" offering the best mix of an old, slower traditional way of life and the modern, international business environment. There was considerable attraction to Switzerland because it has a clear identity with easily identifiable symbols & traditions yet firmly based in the modern world of business and knowledge.

4. **Global-Local/City-Country Dichotomy** - A dichotomy is clearly present in Switzerland in the differences in lifestyle between global and local and even city and country. In many ways the existence of both side by side was seen as part of what makes Switzerland unique and charming yet there was also a concern that the ways of life in these different worlds could create splits in society. There was also discussion of the creation of regions as pragmatic solutions to issues as diverse as schooling and water supply. These regions could supersede national or regional boundaries whilst enabling individual members to maintain their identity.

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. The analysis has been distilled into the following 3 inter-related hypotheses.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis:
There was a notion that the traditional family unit, made up of people who had known each other's families for generations, is disappearing and that the group represents a "new type" of family which has to forge its sense of belonging through the creation of a patchwork of traditions taken from different countries, cultures and languages and through recognizing the loss of one shared solid cultural tradition for all members of a family, which gives a sense of belonging and perhaps imprisonment. In many ways there was a feeling of being a "bridge generation" between a more traditional way of life that we grew up with (both parents from the same country, area, school) to an exciting but perhaps unsettling world for our children whose nationalities are mixed and whose sense of home and roots is much more fragile, divided or transient. The underlying feeling seemed to oscillate between hope and fear - Hope that this future generation could have it all - or Fear that they could end up belonging no where through a lack of strong enough connections.

Hypothesis:
Due to the ease of international travel and a thirst for adventure, people are able to form relationships with partners from other walks of life (nationality, background etc) resulting in many mixed marriages in which more than one language and set of cultural traditions is the norm. This results in an on-going search and negotiation for a new sense of identity and belonging in order to be able to incorporate "the other", especially when

people choose to live in a "neutral" country or area that does not represent home for either partner.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis:
Multiculturalism provides the feeling of abundance and of choice e.g. of which parts of a culture, language etc to embrace and which to reject. However, a concern is that "multiculturalism" may describe an elite international group whilst the shadow is left to the "migrants" who have a less privileged life and a lack of choice, creating an "us and them" society. A concern was voiced of whether the immigrants of the next generation will integrate into society in the way previous generations have - perhaps unconsciously voicing the desire to maintain the status quo. A related concern was how much newcomers and people of mixed backgrounds will give back to Switzerland through involvement with local organizations or whether they are here simply to reap the benefits? For example, seeking a passport can be seen as either an acquisitive scheme or as a symbol of choosing to live and belong in Switzerland. Additionally, it was suggested that the differences represented in both multiculturalism and migration can be held together most effectively in the face of a threat. Perhaps in the face of a stable Europe, there becomes a fantasized need for a common enemy.

Hypothesis:
Switzerland is a mix of different languages (4 official national languages), cultures, religions and peoples who come together to establish a new life and stick together for security. This has resulted in Switzerland developing its identity as a neutral country which operates through a pragmatic and peaceful approach, in which even minorities and migrants can find their voice. Community is built in this diversity through listening to alternate positions and different voices. A concern about whether the next generation will integrate into society articulates a real challenge to the current delicate balance and the potential of being overwhelmed and loosing a way of life.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis:
Switzerland is seen as a country of choice by many, perhaps in an idealized way, splitting off the negative parts to the countries left by those who have chosen to relocate here. Rituals, traditions and well preserved local crafts build a sense of community despite major differences in lifestyle, language, national origins and economic means. A part of the discussion seemed to recognize that there is a delicate eco- social - system in place which is preserved through foreigners trying to integrate sufficiently into the country (related to the theme of belonging). This in turn enriches society through adding interesting differences and cultural aspects without bringing "too much" difference that would disturb irreparably the balance. The global-local and city-country dichotomies represent the differences currently present in society which have the potential to split. Thus, whilst the different lifestyles co-exist peacefully, they are seen to be very charming, yet they also seem to carry the dark side of potential fissures in society. Part of Switzerland's identity and allure as a country of choice is it's multi-lingual heritage. Language builds identity very strongly, from the symbolic "Mother tongue" that is passed on in families, to accents which differentiate city and country dwellers, educated and less educated peoples, to different languages and the ease with which people can move

between them providing an unspoken yet clear delineation of hierarchy in a social system. Thus the fact that Switzerland embraces 4 official languages plus English sets a strong foundation for difference to be visible, (audible!) and accepted setting the stage also for the need to find a common or shared language, whether in concrete terms or symbolically. Perhaps this ability to seek compromise and find a shared solution has contributed to Switzerland's role as home to many international NGO's with key peace-keeping roles world-wide.

Hypothesis:
Because Switzerland is multi-cultural and multi-lingual at the very micro level, in marriages and families, there is a need to find pragmatic solutions through dialogue and compromise, which creates an equitable system and good quality of life resulting in a desirable environment attracting businesses, creating a virtuous cycle of inclusion. There is a strong desire to protect this delicate balance, perhaps at the risk of keeping others out.

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