"Serbia and the World at the Dawn of 2008"

Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

After a short explanation about the meaning, the tasks and the time bounderies of the workshop, participants were asked to share free associations and reflect together about their experiences in various social roles connected with the actual social situation in Serbia and the wider world. Everybody introduced him(her)self to others with few words.

The first reflections started around the expression of various feelings of people in the situation of 'transition' of the country. '*The Cunami of Globalisation*' did not change the basic structure of humanity, but the quality of communications were seen as very much disturbed. "People do not look to each other, there are even no visual affairs between students", said a lady, writer and faculty-professor for sociology of culture, "to much focus on success, and even students are in states of high anxiety of being loosers, so that approaching the others is a problem....There is a new symbolic universe. Peolple wish contact, but afraid of being seen as loosers. It is a product of transition". There appeared an association, that it might be a wider probem, also in many other countries. In this context the apolitical trend was mentioned, together with giving up of real social integrations in a way of 'who cares'. The sindrom of *drunk millioners with gold diggers,* actual now in Serbia, is thought to be a wider social sindrom, well known to create the value sistem for love relationships in many social environments, for example, lifestyle of film and other stars in America, and similar phenomena are understood as an expression of global popularisation of falsehood.

After that the issue of Serbia being a "cloak of Europe" was mentioned by a younger participant, sculptor working, also, as a professor at the Academy of Art, with her clear resistence to accept that as a methaphor containing truth, but complex projections. Then a lady, expert in urbanism, pointed out the lack of choice as the main psycho-social problem: "In these last years we had lost the opportunities for choice, for multi-culturality, for good education, which we had previously, and as a defence there are the perverse self-satisfied attitudes, people isolated in self-sufficient positions, unfortunately often people in power. I find these so difficult to change!" A student of philosophy raised the question: "What is *transition* in fact? We are talking about the time without ideology, isn't it another ideology coming from power structurs?"

Further there were discussions about the uncritical acceptance of everything coming from the west without caring enough about our authentical needs, sexuality taking the place of real love and love loosing its innocence, time of imposed stereotypes of various

kinds and the time of so many dilemmas. Three kinds of communication frames were talked about:

1. isolation and alienation,

2. relationships with struggle for power and domination, also, often addiction, and

3. real contact as an exchange of human closeness and love.

The fight for real contact is seen as something somehow breaking up through all other aspects we were talking about, making also, very concrete life dilemmas. The tiredness of the nation, unorganised, lost in moral and identity confusion...Dilemmas everywhere are found understandable among others whether turning back to old value systems or searching for new ones. Many times were mentioned materialism, negativism and the loss of spiritual, moral values, love and responsibility for one-selves. At the end of this part a lady previously working as a financial director in a large agency talked very openly about her *personal transition:* "After raising my children and giving them enough support, I decided to leave that kind of mental space loaded only with money issues and started a club restaurant, where I am giving my best to make an atmosphere, where people may feel good-enough to make contacts between each others. The alienation around us, makes me personally so sad...Most of my friends were surprised, but I feel much better".

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

The group was asked to separate into three smaller working groups to try to identify the major themes that had emerged spontaneously during part one. Then a spokesman from each shared them with the whole group and we clustered them in three main themes:

a. Transition, positive and negative aspects, with the comparison of Serbia with wider world

b. Alienation and how to find the way out

c. Loss of traditional values

d. Dilemmas in borderline situation (problems of personal and national identity)

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part the participants continued to work on the main themes identified in part one and two, but going deeper into the underlying dynamics encountered an interesting ambivalence in the group.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis: There was a further discussion about many negative social phenomena, mystifying of false wellness, bad taste, falsehood in general, over-popularisation of football players and stars instead of real human, scientific and intelectual qualities. It appeared that somehow the focus was again around the human alienation. It was seen as something coming from various sources, from the external as well from the internal ones (out of the country, out of the individual as well inside the country, inside the family and the individual). Classical human values are being distroyed, "there is no God, whatever kind of God, even no Devil, so everything is allowed!" For a long time there is a flud of

films with killings and suicides, nihilism all around and the human soul suffering for a long time in a conflict how and where to find real food. Imposition of those tendencies through media happens not only in Serbia, but all around the world. So many stereotypes, as if obedient people should be created. For most people it is more comfortable not to let strike the eyes of others, not take responsibility and make effort for change, but let it be.

Then the group analysed the fertility of the ground for such processes to grow well and everybody agreed, that without the inner ground for that, it would not be productive. It is not a one way causal process, but a complex interaction. Personal examples were given.

Hypothesis: The negative process of nihilism, human alienation is not just in Serbia, but also, wider in the world, so coming from outside in many ways, but the main factors for those to grow are the fertile inner ground (in ourselves, in our family, in our environment). So, the focus of the responsibility is seen to be in ourselves.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: The student of philosophy pointed out: "Isn't it strange that just a week before the presidential elections in Serbia for this whole time nobody did mention politics, not with a single word!?" It was obvious for everybody, and the group started to think about the meaning of that experience. It was seen as a mirror of some social processes of denial of politics. In many countries people are loosing interest for politics, when it is obvious that citizens do not have much impact onto the reality of global politics. A new kind of hidden totalitarism is on the scene. Some saw it as a kind of political attitude to be apolitical, because "no presidential candidate I can see as my choice" and the flud of crazy politics is distoying everything. On the other side politics, although not mentioned directly, was understood to be present in the discussion in other ways, in many verbalised attitudes, as well placed in the uncounscious (personal and group). Part of the denial might be the result of too high expectations from the whole society previously involved in political changes, in process of transition from socialism to 'free' market capitalism. There were, also, ideas that escaping direct political disscussion in the group, was an escape from too much conflict in the group. As if there was a group anxiety that opening up to those conflicts, would mean opening the door for high destructiveness to come in, ruining any chance for communication.

Hypothesis: Denial of politics as a phenomena of this particular group experience might be a kind of social mirroring of pseudo-apolitical position of a part of citizenship, as a refusal to be part of the hypocrisy and as a defence against intrusion of the negativism into your own personal and family mental space.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis: There was an agreement in the group about the fact that during the group process two opposite forces were struggling between each other: on one side the forces of despair, hopelessness and helplessness, in one word they were named depression, and on the other side there were efforts of finding the way out, meaningful activities as a shield and a contribution to common sence and progress, and the real human contact, which were named hope. We could observe the flux between the two tendencies, but thinking together about that was quit difficult. As if there were just small islands of thinking in a large sea of desintegration and destructivness of the capacity or of the good will to work together. An example of a thinking island was: "Between depression

and hope, I choose depression, because of the need for hypocrisy to be uncovered enough, to become clear enough, the bottom to be reached...", "even as if there is a need here this experiment to be sabotaged". In a period of about half an hour the work group was very weak and the basic assumption groups very strong (fastly changing the kind). There were important thoughts raised, but just as fragments without any cohesive thinking process. The actual delicate political moment, also, with the news from that day about Germany and USA promptly forcing Kosovo to be independent country, and the new blockade of the integration with EU. "If Serbia is put into the exclusivity of an invalid position, than we are acting-out this exclusivity deeper and deeper! And let it be like that!!!". Another idea was: "When there is diversity and multiplicity of thought, just particles of truth like at this moment here in the group, than confusion and high anxiety maybe find radicalism as a defensive solution", but the group did not take this idea further. The anti-working-group processes became stronger: "We do not want to make any conclusions and hypothesis here". It continued with sarcastic jokes, laughter..."We do not want to help you in those tasks!" The attacks on the leaders position were obvious. I said that I might be seen here as a representative of the Big Brother, which found agreement from a majority of the group. "Who knows, maybe the Serbian culture in isolation, has its useful side making a shelter towards the Cunami of Globalization". When the atacks on the convener and on the work group were verbalized, they could be observed and talked about more freely; it was a turning point towards more interest about the meaning of it on various complex psycho-social levels.

Convener: Marina Mojovic