**"Portugal and the World
at the Dawn of 2009"**
Report of a Listening Post
held in January

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.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In part 2 the participants were invited to identify in small groups, the major themes, which emerged in part one. This was not an easy task and many of the themes brought by the group overlapped. They can be described as follows:

- *Insecurity caused by social exclusion*
- *Global economic crisis and difficulties*
- *Political participation and association*
- *The consequences of spreading computer technology*
- *Education and the mistrust among parents and students*
- *National identity and a discussion about how we affirm ourselves*
- *Legitimacy of social institutions / crisis of institutional credibility*
- *Inter-cultural diversity and homogenization/globalization*
- *Invisibility and unawareness of some social realities*
- *Splitting between institutional problems and new codes of communication*

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

Analysis: In the Listening Post, the first theme to appear regards problematic neighbourhoods and difficult children in schools. In fact, one of the participants expressed his astonishment when visiting a family, due to his professional role, who lived

in a poor suburb, in the outskirts of Lisbon. In this visit he was confronted with cars being dismantled in broad day light in the middle of the street and with sign of bullet holes in the buildings. He felt quite insecure, especially when entering the building and seeing that the doors were armoured. Another participant refers to the general sense of insecurity present in Portuguese society. Children hit professors in schools nowadays, as seen in newspapers, which seems quite different from our own recollections of school life and naughtiness. The middle class has a sense of wanting to be safe in secure condos, kept away from this society. But in a way there is an unknowingness regarding these social realities by the middle class, which only sees it through its consequences reported by the media.

Also there is a sense of different ways of assuming a social role. In fact, some of these persons may not be interested in the political issues debate, as we understand them, but in fact they know a lot more about the functioning of social institutions than the majority of the middle class. There is a huge knowledge regarding the working of local councils and its regulations, which has a very pragmatic quality. They may not be interested in the minister's speech, but they play a citizen role, even though not the one we would like them to play.

There is also a difference felt among the new generations between the ones that will be able to master computer technology and the ones that will not. It seemed that there is a general fear of novelty or of what is unfamiliar. It was mentioned that the new generations have new ways of relating to each other, namely through computer technology. The new generations have new ways of communicating that feel unfamiliar to our generation, namely that they have contacts in the facebook network.

But also in terms of community movements and political participation, the reality is changing. There is a real association of people on the web, even though it is different from others ways of being active in the community.

Hypothesis: The general feeling that the world is a global village is amplified by the media. This increases the sense of insecurity and fear in individuals, when confronted with difference. This difference is present at various levels, from social background to different language codes, to different societal roles and different generations.

<u>Analysis and Hypothesis 2</u>

Analysis: The participants are worried with the global economic crisis and its consequences. Some referred a concern regarding China and the fact that rising economies are growing due to their huge internal markets. An estimated consequence is that Europe and USA will have a high price to pay as a consequence of the crisis.

Other participants refer a concern with rising unemployment numbers. There is a huge unemployment in the young people who finish their university degrees, who were designated as generation 500 Euros (based on an estimate of their average income). This reality is quite different from our parent's one, where one would have a job for life.

Hypothesis: The economic crisis made us come out of our comfort zone and known reality. This move, which would not happen in ordinary circumstances, increases our feeling of insecurity when we are confronted with difference and the unknown.

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