**"Finland and the World
at the Dawn of 2011"**
**Report of a Listening Post held
on 12th January in Järvenpää**

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.

The experiences of the participants produced a strong picture of modern men and women's helplessness, impotence, and inability to realize their own indispensable and essential needs and ideals amongst the massive organisations, intricate data transfer, and individual and remote political decisions of society.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes:

Theme1. *Apprehension about being cared for — am I able to take care of myself and can I trust that I will be taken care of*

The seminar brought forth stories of people's fear of the helplessness, lack of knowledge, weakness, and loneliness that comes with ageing. What if I can't cope; will I know how to make contacts in the quickly changing and faceless virtual system. Who will listen to me; who can I talk to about my feelings? What will happen to me; who will take care of me? Will I merely become refuse; where will the refuse end up? Fear and anxiety about the future were topics of the discussion as no one seemed to know who will take care of us or take the responsibility of caring. Children have parents, but who is the elderly's 'father/mother' — a faceless system? And can that faceless system be trusted?

The age of the Internet has meant a decrease in personal face-to-face interaction, which has been replaced by networking communication in which words are the only means of conveying anything since bodily language no longer counts. When genuine contact with others becomes difficult, people feel that they are alone. Interaction becomes ostensible, vapid, and superficial.

Theme 2. *Alienated language games — virtual reality operates through rational words and pictures; interactive expression of experiences and emotions withers away*

Because the same words have different meanings to different persons, the circulation of information on the Internet also means the circulation of meanings so that they too are transformed in the flow between cultures. When language concerning experiences and emotions decreases, the 'language games' derived from the abstract rational world replace it, intermix, and take over the information channels. This world, in which individuals end up as a result of these language games, seems foreign to life.

The Internet and social media have radically changed people's lives. Accordingly (nearly) all information is available to, and freely usable by, (nearly) everyone. Data on world events are updated in real time. Through the possibilities offered by these elements, the Internet both enthrals and absorbs. It offers many new possibilities. But it also creates risks, risks that must be faced only after an extended delay, because they are not easy to recognize. The risks seem to touch people's crucial basic needs, needs that were earlier thought to be self-evident: a) the need to trust that life was predictable, b) the need to be able to make one's own choices and obtain relevant information on the basis of one's own choices, c) the need to obtain sufficient time to 'digest' and process information, and d) the need to obtain care and protection when one's own resources are not enough. The participants described typical emotional situations using the terms anxiety, alienation, impotence, vexation, unhappiness. More favourable emotional states were brought forth only after joint experiences were shared.

Theme 3. *People's helplessness in making choices that affect themselves and in trusting their own ability to guide their own lives*

Although information is available without limits, people have difficulty finding what they need in order to make choices. In order to live, they must nevertheless continually choose: if they want to eat clean food, they are only able to ensure this themselves to a minimum degree. They must trust others (faceless persons) to make the decisions. They are at the 'mercy' of strangers.

Under our current conditions, people can no longer trust that they can draw trustworthy conclusions about the path the future will take directly on the basis of their earlier experiences. As a basis for choices, knowledge of the past simply does not have the same value that it did earlier, when there was a linear procession to the developments underway. People should be able to find the choices they need to build their future from the information at hand. Even with the abundant amount of information available, part of it is difficult to retrieve (for example, data on the cleanliness of food). Too, the fact that there is so much data makes it necessary to stop and analyse it. However, there is no time for such introspection in today's hectic lifestyle. People are forced into an impossible situation: they must make quick decisions without being able to predict the results.

People experience helplessness when they realize that they are not capable of making decisions that they trust to produce something good. It is both a humiliating and scary experience, especially for adults who have trusted that they can manage their own lives: they must trust decisions already made by others.

There are no longer any autocratic gurus. When realizing that others are in the same situation, that others have no better knowledge with which to control their lives than they do, people must face the fact that they can no longer trust themselves, nor can they place their trust in others. Especially when the experience of the moment at hand can differ from person to person! If people 'ride the crest of a wave', they can

experience incomparable moments, but, at the same time, not necessarily notice that others close by in danger of drowning as the same wave sweeps over them.

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.

Hypothesis 1
Life today seems to show significant risks of people experiencing internal changes that affect their ability to make contact with others. At the same time, and in the same direction, external factors are also affecting them, for instance, when personal contacts with the service sector are substituted by technical equipment and holistic systems. When external and internal factors reinforce each other, people are not able to respond to others' emergencies, even though they, in principle, want to.

People are in danger of becoming alienated from each other and, at the same time, from their own humanity. At the point when they feel that danger, they are overtaken by terror.

Hypothesis 2
In the turbulent process of change in society, keeping up 'no matter what the cost' is understandable as there is an internal demand to protect oneself from experiencing the dread of remaining alone, of psychological death. On the whole, in order to be in contact with others, people cannot afford to do anything other than choose whether or not they will participate. If they do not believe or their personal resources are not sufficient to permit them to remain outside, they must approve the means and terms that make some sort of connections possible.

In staying up with the times, people are in danger of becoming blind to what they genuinely are and to the effect the outside world has on them. And in order to have verbal contact with others, they must use the language that others use. Society's malaise, and people's experienced distance between others, of defencelessness, and of being at the mercy of various 'forces', is creating a psychological split that even further complicates their understanding of themselves, as well as their understanding of collaboration at the level of society.

Hypothesis 3
People attempt to protect themselves from guilt and the terror it brings with it by refusing. When people are continually conscious, on some level, that, through their choices, deeds, and lack of action, they are also maintaining a society that produces suffering and distress to others, they can, by refusing to acknowledge it, relieve themselves of the guilt.

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