

**"Finland and the World
at the Dawn of 2012"**
Report of a Listening Post held
on 9th 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 lives,' that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

In the sharing of current experiences, the participants wondered about people's part in agreeing to the continued growth and consumption of the global economy. The fact that it has not been possible to find means with which to control this absurdity or make our own decisions about our own lives because the 'world' thrusts itself upon us; attempts to not watch the news on TV; the pressure to keep everything current by updating our own profile on Facebook day and night; the compulsion to increase and control efficiency. Have we been born to be obedient consumers?

Concern was also expressed about the fact that there is no place or space for expressing our feelings. Feelings are outsourced, and they are muzzled by consuming the products of the psychic industry. Much was spoken about insulating feelings from reality, the need for silence, the difficulty to rest, loneliness, 'happiness business', the guilt of taking what is due, the restriction of norms: "What can we speak about?", "madness in paradise".

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

The identity crisis

Analysis: The fast changes occurring in society and the acceleration of life's rhythm has led to individuals being always in a hurry and to a feeling of detachment, 'the need to be somewhere other than where we are'. We feel that society, 'other people's needs and demands', invade our personal lives. There is not enough time or space for our own needs, rest, relaxation, or working through our own experiences. In the need to continually hurry, our functioning and rationality seize all of our attention, while our feelings are pushed aside. Efficiency and economic growth have become re-enforced slogans that obligate us.

The way we experience our work affects the way we spend our free time. The earlier-used slogan 'demanding work requires demanding pastimes' seems to have found a new form, 'crazy work requires crazy pastimes'. Modern men and women use their freetime 'consuming', rather than finding ways to relax and refresh themselves.

On the other hand, even though efficiency is continually increasing and material goods and commodities are being produced in greater amounts, there does not seem to be an increase in general well-being; it is just the opposite. Most of what is produced proves to be without value or even damaging, when examined critically. Nevertheless, there is no stopping or changing direction.

Even though technology is developing and the exchange of information is becoming easier, the communication between people depends too much on superficial discourse because of the need to hurry. At the least, experiences for which it is difficult to find words remain unexpressed. In this manner, people remain alone with their experiences without finding the means to bring forth their needs and feelings, and they are in danger of remaining alone, losing themselves, as well as both their individual identity and their humanity in general.

Hypothesis: Society is continuously changing in a direction in which individuals are becoming more dependent on others in many ways. For example, the descriptive concept of one's domination over one's own life as being 'self-sufficient' is dead in today's society. This type of cultural change indicates a severe change in identity. Even though people have more technical implements, freedom of choice, and possibilities to 'fulfil' themselves than ever before, their own influence in determining their own identities has decreased. The external 'world' determines identities in a form that creates a strange feeling in the individual. The contact with one's real self and one's own values and experienced feelings becomes weaker. We do not find any meaning in life.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

The individual's lack of trust

Analysis: Cultural development has resulted in the world becoming small so that events all over the world are at the fingertips of everyone. When the sensation-seeking media focuses especially on news describing threats and crises, the picture of the whole world is in danger of being distorted as being more threatening than it is in actuality. The good hides behind the bad. Other people behind this type of news seem bad, scary, cold, or feelingless in the watchers' eyes. They form a 'world' in which individuals are not differentiated as individuals. The people important to a person dwindle to a few close ones with whom there is still an emotional connection. These people are held onto, and, in weak moments, they are looked to for safety. However, they are not reflectors of identity just because they are 'on the same side', defending against the evil world. Sufficient criticism is missing. A broader community would be needed as a reflecting surface of identity for a critical dialogue to take place. In this situation, it would be possible to find one's own reference group, a group with which one could identify. A culture that would hold an authentic, conversational dialogue is, however, difficult to find, for example, in today's work organisations. Work communities and groups have been replaced by networks in which each individual forms a loop as a result of his or her work.

On the other hand, the strength of this new culture is the unstoppable flow of information. It is easy to form connections in almost any corner of the world. Local cultures are in the hands of change along with experiencing new influences. In their place, new cultures are being born that are being built on virtual bases; these cultures replace the old village and tribal cultures. If needed, they also form a counterforce to those in power. There are no self-evident authorities.

Hypothesis: The deficit of identity or a lack of true human identity and trust can be considered counterparts that feed each other. When people have lost contact with themselves, they do not know how to approach or trust others. When people cannot establish contact with others, they cannot let others close to them. Interaction remains superficial. Language and intelligent communication becomes disproportionately emphasised at the price of sensory and experiential discourse. Sensory experiences are, however, the ones that remind people of their biological roots, that people are, nevertheless, part of nature, depending on the abilities and possibilities that have thus far been granted them in the progression of biological evolution. This fact should be taken into consideration. If one looks at the contradiction between biological evolution and its extension to future cultural evolution, there is an enormous difference in the pace of the change. Natural selection in biological development demands millions of years, while cultural change can happen in a matter of weeks or months. It seems that, too often, we forget that, even though cultures change, people's inherent needs remain the same.

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