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**Encouraging The Reflective Citizen**

## **Italy and the World at the Dawn of 2012**

**Report 1 of a Listening Post held  
in Rome in January**

### **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.

The meeting opened with the conveners introducing the LP task, assumptions and methodology in both English and Italian, and inviting the members to share their experiences and concerns. After a short pause, an Italian woman opened the discussion, followed by others, all expressing concerns primarily about Italy's new economic measures, moral and existential processes and relations, and their personal experiences relating to past, present, and foreseeable future. In the first part of the LP the dynamic seemed to involve individual monologues, although in its content each monologue related to the others. It was difficult to keep the time boundary during all three parts of the process, if each participant was to speak at least once. The second and third parts were more lively, with members relating engaging each other directly, exploring and analyzing their themes, and adding insightful metaphors and thoughts.

### **Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

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

#### **Theme 1: 'Roma Caput Mundi' or Roma 'Mondo Caput?'**

"I am concerned about the image of Italy" opened the first member to speak, an Italian, a sentiment echoed by the others. The metaphor used was of the recent Italian cruise ship disaster off the shore of Tuscany, wherein the passengers were left to their fate while the Italian captain abandoned ship before seeing to his passengers' safety.

This ship metaphor was repeated regarding Italy's leadership and the collective vs. individual existence in society. "It feels like it is now the end of an era" said another member. The members held a somehow shameful image of the present and contrasted it to imagined former glories of Italy. They expressed concerns about the present, noting that they saw it as superficial, misleading, the danger of loss of dignity, breakdown of civilization, a state of war. "Coming back to Rome after thirty years," said the non-Italian member, "it feels the past is much more here." People spoke of a sensation of a gap between the former reality and the current situation, about the too-rapid advances in technology, and the contrast between the poor and hungry of Africa and the abundance of Europe. They contrasted perhaps idealized the more natural, basic

physical life as in the Sahara desert with the current, modern, technologically centered Italy.

This feeling of a 'gap', and the concerns about 'the image' were the undercurrents pushing two principal topics: movement and adaptation, and the danger of elimination. The economic crisis in Europe that is threatening Italy has resulted in recent dramatic changes in government policy meant to liberalize the Italian economy, arousing deep fears about the loss of jobs, of property, of one's dignity, and the economic 'elimination' of groups, especially the middle class. The fears are that the economic reforms will result in fixing the crisis but at the expense the very foundation of Italy, the middle class that carries the image of Rome as the 'Caput Mundi'. These changes also threaten distinct and necessary boundaries that exist in the mind of the members of the group between social groups, between the poor and the middle class, between Africa and Italy. The sensation of the nomad as challenging borders, related by the Tuareg member, involves the challenge of losing one's clear familiar boundaries of social identity, connected to the privileged image of Rome as the Head of the World.

## **Theme 2: 'Costa Concordia' or the Cost of concordia:**

### **The individual and the collective**

The tragic sinking of the cruise ship Costa Concordia last week off the western coast of Italy became a significant metaphor in the group, which saw in the disaster a representation of the fragility and high cost of the collective. The ship, owned by an American-British corporation, built in Italy, named to express the wish for harmony, unity and peace, went down because of what seemed as an unprofessional, unskilful manoeuvre of its captain, who then abandoned the passengers to their fate. The concerns expressed by the group were of the absence of a collective vision. Economic dynamics in Italy rely heavily on family connections. People cannot relate to the State as being part of them, so the State's attempt to encourage collective effort through taxation is met with 'recycling' – i.e. money laundering – which is how the individual diverts money from the State. In the members' experiences, the war, the current financial reforms, the collective, all conspire to force the individual to look out only for himself.

The way to survive for an Italian Jewish family in WWII, the experience brought by a member was to depend entirely on the internal resources and the strength of the family. Those losing their jobs these days turn back to their family. In order to survive, to gain 'equality of dignity' one cannot trust the collective, but the individual. In this sense, although there exists the wish for a harmonious collective, the cost of achieving it seen as endangering the individual, his or her identity, wellbeing even life. To recover from the economic crisis there is a need for a collective vision, but for the members this collective act might create some hydraulic like massive turbulences. The concern is that this process will result in the elimination of some groups, especially the middle class, sacrificed for the good of the collective – too high a price to pay.

This year Italy celebrated its 150th anniversary of unification. Nevertheless, the reality expressed by the members of the LP is one of a fragmented, individual way of being and acting in the shared social space, lacking a collective vision, trust or engagement – the only way, they believe, to survive the cost of Concordia.

## **Theme 3: Il Capitano or The coast Guard Officer, Representations of Leadership**

The members expressed concerns, distrust and unease about political leaders. "Are they really our representatives and our representation?" Using expressions like 'partial lies',

participants noted that political leaders avoiding the fundamental, structural problems and just acting superficially. Doubting the current leadership, members again used the cruise ship metaphor where the Italian captain was seen as unskilled, unprofessional, superficial and cowardly. They contrasted his behaviour with that of a Coast Guard captain who famously cursed the captain of the Concordia and ordered him to go back to the ship. These two 'models' of leadership, the coward, superficial or aggressive, embodied also by the infamous ex Prime Minister Berlusconi and his more sober replacement Monti, were rejected by the members who expressed feelings of distrust and even distance while being unwilling to relate to either of them as their representative and representation. The central and most potent trusted authority mentioned was the wise father, who saved his family during WWII. In the collective conscious mind of the individuals in the group, there was no representation of a collective, wise, caring Father, responsible, skilful, and courageous, who has the welfare of the collective in mind.

The experience of missing authority was seen as the participants raised their concerns about youth. Members expressed disappointment about the young who are not interested in nor invested in the future, in building their homes, finding jobs. Youth was perceived as out of reach and it was difficult to find channels to them. The young non-Italian member was told directly that all vitality and creativity were with him, and he was one who also stated clearly that he would not stay in Italy since his commitment is elsewhere. With new technology complicated and not easy to use even when available, taking over parts of our lives, members expressed feelings of frustration, loss of control and competence in themselves, while attributing these sentiments also to their leaders, they shared the incapacity to fulfil authority roles as parents to their children.

#### **Theme 4: 'Accanimento Terapeutico'**

The metaphor of the body of an old person being kept alive artificially reflected the concerns about image, the experience of gap between old and young, between new technology and the natural order, and the fear that movement is dangerous. In this embrace of the past, existing technology is put in the service of the past to try and maintain an image that is no longer real. This metaphor that was mentioned more than once in the room, underscoring the strong concern that it will be impossible for Italy to adapt to a modern collective economy, that a united Europe is equally impossible, and even the most modern means are used only to try and artificially maintain a way of life that belongs in the past.

### **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.

During this part of the LP the members were quite eager to talk, and especially to relate to each other. They were sharing the themes that emerged from the smaller groups during the second part of the LP, but went deeper to explore those themes and connect them with their feelings and those of others. During this portion a new language was introduced, Spanish, out of the desire of an Italian and Belgian members to cross the

language/ national barrier and to connect-communicate directly. The members felt energized, more spontaneous and at this portion ended on a hopeful note.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 1**

#### *The gap between the glory and the ruins – the dynamics of the economic crisis*

The LP took place in the office of one of the members, an old building in a Gothic, middle age neighbourhood of Rome. Four of the ten participants of the LP meet every week for Social Dreaming Matrix sessions at this same location. Managing and containing the gap in the setting between two different group experiences taking place in the same setting was challenging. Some of the participants revisited each other's unconscious every week in this same setting, while others had met for this first and only time. This gap was challenged by the LP, and resonated with the primary Hypothesis.

'Gap' was mentioned repeatedly, with experiences and metaphors. It was followed by the expressed sense of despair, helplessness and even feelings of persecution. Although the economic crisis was hardly mentioned by name, the members felt burdened by a sense of an enforced paradigm privileging new ideas about a changed Italy and a more united Europe. These new economic reforms being taken by the new government in Italy with an eye to saving the collective, felt dangerous and potentially destructive to the people sitting in the room. The experience was of a split, with projections of 'bad', mistrust and danger connected to what was perceived as 'new', 'changed', and 'collective'. The members saw themselves as individual survivors, trying to save themselves from a treacherous enemy within their own society powerful enough to eliminate them. This same idea was seen by some members as positive, but also dangerous. For example, Africa was seen as natural, free of materialistic overdependence, with strong tribal alliances, youth and creativity – but also a place of hungry, poor children, where oil and uranium can be found – two most desirable natural resources used for energy and mass destruction. The sense of danger also evoked feelings of despair and helplessness, the end of an era with no much hope of a future.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 2**

#### *The Missing Authority*

The fantasy of the absence of a good enough authority was dominant in the members' social experiences. As parents, members were sad at having lost contact with their children, felt helpless as managers for being unable to help people keep their jobs, seeing themselves using artificial respiration to keep people not truly alive. Confronted with challenging and changing reality, leaders taking authority roles raised doubts among the members, and distrust. Political and economic leaders, the captain of the boat, even the Coast Guard officer – though holding distinctive qualities, were seen primarily in a negative light, as untrustworthy, unsatisfying, and even dangerous.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 3**

#### *The pairing of the European nations*

In Part three of the LP, coming back from working in three small groups, the feeling in the room changed to one of spontaneity and an eagerness to talk, share energy, and not rely only on the youngest member as in the first part. In feeling the desire to join and

understand, two members – a man and a woman, Italian and Belgian – discovered that they can use Spanish to better understand one another. The growing frustration with feeling in danger and dissatisfaction with helplessness and isolation prompted the members to search for ways to connect and change the reality in the room. Finally, the members voiced their fears and connected between the fragments of their experiences, old and new, past and present. The members in the third part of the LP could relate to each other and see also the creative potential in integration to regaining authority in their current lives.

**Conveners: Anat Hornung, Ziff and Franca Fubini**

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### **Report 2 of a Listening Post held in January**

#### **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.

The discussion developed in an active way, showing a passionate and fair participation. A difference from the precedent year was soon noticed: despite the seriousness of the preoccupations, it was possible to reflect about the conflicts in a lively manner, showing creative production of metaphors and a respectful confrontation of personal differences, instead of a chaotic one. A participant produced a metaphor that was presented more than once during the discussion, and gives the idea of the shared perceptions of the group: we still have a chance to think because: “we got rid of the dwarf (Berlusconi) sitting on our heads”, “the simulacrum-effect that colonised our imaginary has gone”. This perception, nevertheless, has produced a general pessimism regarding the beliefs, leading the group to the formulation of the question: ‘where are we going?’. What constituted the fertile ground for the discussion was precisely the oscillation between the recovery of hope and the anxiety for a future that looks very uncertain. As in other occasions of the northern Italy LP, right since phase 1 (the sharing of preoccupations and experiences) the proposed topics were analysed and studied in depth, and have produced hypotheses: in this report are exposed those that, according to the convenor, are the two main ones.

#### **Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

In Part Two the aim was collectively to identify the major themes emerging from Part One.

##### **Theme 1: change is inevitable: anguish vs hope**

The first topic is that of the change. The perception is that of an inevitable changing,

after a period of political chaos/ immobility. The idea of a new phase, now that the government has changed (we are out of the dump, we got rid of the dwarf/ midget) brings hopes and anguish at the same time. Other than the fears regarding the European and planetary trend of the economy (it is also reminded how an economic situation like the actual one has led to World War II) a big deal of attention was given to local matters. The change of government of the city – Milano – has brought new hopes but also new limitations, such as the ‘congestion charge’ that will be coming into effect in a few days within the city centre. The new limitations of the city centre are also metaphorically seen as an inevitable push towards a changing, as if the new traffic limitations were calling for new forms of mobility and movement. To move we need to accept new limits and look for new ways of transportation. Now we feel in the middle of the ford, between illusions and delusions, also afraid that nothing might change, as in the Gattopardo of Tomasi di Lampedusa.

There are generational differences in the perception of this changing: the youths tend to share less hope for the future, while the older people, even if expressing preoccupation regarding their sons and daughters, show also a greater sense of liberation (“we are finally free from a twenty years of Ligresti (a building societies tycoon) governing Milano”). The liberation persists even despite the memories of the past (World War II), the abyss, the violence of the social conflict and the fact that they are afraid not to be able to bear the fast change and to keep up facing new complexities.

### **Theme 2: individual/ collective, city/ countryside, fast/ slow**

The second topic is about a redefinition of the sense of community, between the search for new forms of coexistence and the risk of defensive opposition of the corporations.

On one side there is a perception of the persistence of privilege, of the caste, of corporate spirit, but also the idea of a redefinition of the sense of social belonging. The perception of the falling of the corporations, as for social aggregations providing identity, bonds, sense of belonging and protection (“It is the end of the middle class”), makes us think about the social demonstrations (like the strikes of the taxi drivers) as their defender; but on the other hand foresees the return to a natural status of identity, within the research for the roots of the past. The same falling of the corporations also leads to the perception of a new kind of social network, granted by internet communication. These themes are developed through the opposition between the province/ countryside and the city. On one side the roots, the simplicity of our basic needs, of the unexpected tastes and smells of *ossobuco* (marrowbone, a typical northern Italy dish, not so easy to find anymore), the nature and reality of the body, and on the other the idea of the city as complex, fragmented, virtual culture and multiplication; where every lived experience is immediately virtually replicated and posted on line. The province, in this representation, more than an idyllic shelter appears empty and depopulated, as a body without a mind.

The oversized and limitless virtual community expresses the necessity for everyone to be always connected, so much to promote a reflection on the need to detoxify from our dependences, including meaningless words, and purify from toxins accumulated in the body and the mind.

### **Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

In this part of the Listening Post 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**

The topic of the movement and the references to traffic and transportations are expressions of a perception of change of the local, Italian, and worldwide society. This social change, and the idea of an inevitable transformation, produces a confusing and disorienting sense and the activation of hope for the future, as if this could constitute an occasion for social renovation. Individuals have to face the need to redefine their sense of social belonging, and the relation among their own interests, bonds of belonging and a new sense of citizenship.

Because we are dancing on the eve of destruction, we have to oscillate to keep us in balance and a sense of possible renovation is also activated.

### **Hypothesis 2**

The second topic deals with the relations between complexity and simplicity, between virtual multiplication and natural essentiality, the city and the province. The hypothesis is that this topic might be the result of a sense of artificial multiplication (electronic, financial), producing an intoxicating effect, like pollution for the environment. This perception pushes the individuals to retire into a natural dimension, the desire to recover the bond with our body and our roots, opposing the natural simplicity of the countryside to the complexity of the city. On the other hand the lowered traffic in the city, and the regained possibility to use the bicycle or to take a walk in the city centre with a less frenetic, slower attitude seems to uncover the possibility to find a more natural dimension of life right at the heart of the city.

**Convener: Cristina Saottini**