

AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Estonia and the World at the Dawn of 2014 Report of a New Year's Listening Post



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

Theme 1: Human and the technical systems = a technical device to lift a person's self-esteem

As the use of technical devices such as e-documents and e-services grows wider in the Estonian society, so grows the individual's worry over managing with those devices and services.

Learning to use these new technical systems and services is cumbersome, unpleasant and the systems feel untrustable. On the other hand, the environment and society forces the individual to learning new things all the time. It forces the individual to be attached and trust in technical devices, because there is no alternative. The face-to-face contact lessens.

It is hard to trust a technical device, because one does not fully understand it. Getting professional help for using technical devices is hard, expensive and often brings shame.

On the other hand, a broken phone or computer or ID-card reader forces individuals to cooperate and ask for a friend's or a friend's child's help. Asking and getting help brings people together. As a phone gets broken, the link to other people goes away. When one is not reachable, comes a sense of panic, a worry that someone will

need me now that I am unreachable. Surviving and coping without phones is hard, as phones carry contacts of other people in them.

Everybody had experience dealing with broken devices. When the phone was forgotten and left home, a sense of panic and lost-mindedness ensued. When the computer stops functioning, it makes them helpless. The electronic prescription should be at the pharmacy's data, but if it isn't, one is forced to call to many places to find out what's wrong. Using the e-service to get something done felt sometimes very hard. However, there was experience on asking for help in need, and getting that help. Losing a phone brought about people helping each other. Receiving the help sometimes felt relieving, good and sometimes troublesome.

Hypothesis 1.

Technical devices such as a phone or a computer have merged into the human's natural abilities. They have become part of people. A technical device breaking causes distress and highly tests our abilities to function with uncertainty and mental pain. We experience panic and worry, when our phones stop working. Afterwards we may notice that it also creates new survival action and cooperation with others. Evolution makes sure that humans will still be okay and able to protect themselves from a catastrophe.

Hypothesis 2

An individual wants to be reachable. An individual wants, that they are called and told about things. An individual wishes to be part of a larger community. This is how they can feel valuable. If, for example, their phone breaks or gets lost, and the link between other people is diminished, they will start to feel as if they are being isolated from that larger community. They feel that they are missing out on something. The feeling of terror and worry is a physical feeling.

Theme 2: Moving, traveling, transportation, buses, trains and airplanes in different countries

- The free bus transportation system in Tallin was experienced as both good and "bad". What was good was that it was free, and the bad part was that the roads and the infrastructure is in bad shape. The buses are old, and it's windy inside them. On the other hand it is good that one can go anywhere, especially young people often visit the town. The brand new train and the future of railway was very pleasant. Travelling has increased, and young people are travelling abroad to work.

- The yards in front of apartment buildings are being privatized and it's hard to visit relatives. Cars will have to be left too far away from the

visited building. Before, the car could be left in front of the building, but now it's prohibited and an external firm will fine immediately. This has increased discomfort and may have also decreased visiting.

Hypothesis 1

People crave for comfort. It's important that cars can be parked near destinations. It's arduous to walk and to do all physical things. Physical walking is not a natural way to move, instead a car, a train or an airplane is. Workout is done more at the gym, not with daily activities.

Theme 3 : Environment penetrates the individual

We have learned to need certain things. We think that without them, we cannot live. Women's handbags get larger and larger, and the interior of those handbags has also changed much, if compared to ten years ago. We carry with us and need things much more than before

- A woman doing her hair takes 5-7 different products: shampoo, conditioner, serum, volume mousse, hairspray, etc. The gym bag is filled with all sorts of equipment when going to the gym to exercise and to the shower afterwards. We have many cosmetics things, because everyone else has too, and more is constantly introduced.

- New food ingredients are constantly coming to the market. For example, a chocolate bar doesn't just have a single taste ingredient, but many. (e.g. chocolate-strawberry-ginger)

- Work keeps the mind occupied from personal things, and the personal things are forgotten. Thinking about work takes much energy, which leaves little energy at home to clean or make food for the children. Going out to eat is increasingly popular, as well as ready-to-eat meals.

Hypothesis 1

We are collectively creating new needs for ourselves constantly. After that, we start to pursue them. We are getting distanced from basic human needs and we cope by constantly buying new things to feel happy. Maltreated basic needs however always "remind" us in the background. The basic need to be accepted into a group. The basic need to be beautiful/visible. That is why we buy things and use assortments of hair products.

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