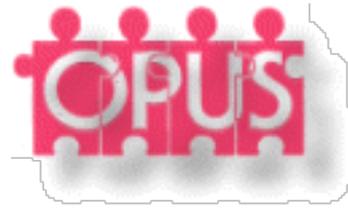


AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Germany (Berlin) and the World
at the Dawn of 2015
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.

The participants exchanged impressions and experiences in their various social roles.

Expressed was consternation about the Islamic terror in Paris, Africa and Syria, about declining values in the middle class and in the PEGIDA protesters, about often experienced exclusion of people with a migration background, about parents overburdened with jobs and the rearing of children, about social Freezing, overexploitation of natural resources and bullying. However, the joy about children and grandchildren and new life was also expressed.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

The group identified key issues that can be subsumed under three headlines:

Splitting, exclusion, decline of values, loss of tolerance to diversity

The own experience of exclusion was expressed. This was connected with the experience that differences are not perceived as valuable, but worthless. This perception, in turn, is experienced as threatening and insulting. Differences appear negative and not as an enrichment. But it was also mentioned that we witness the exclusion of others – e. g. PEGIDA against foreigners, the EU against refugees.

Astonishment was expressed, that many of the PEGIDA protesters come

from the middle class, therefore they are able to reflect, but obviously not capable or willing to. To reflect would mean not repressing the own prejudices and reservations, but instead questioning, trying to understand and changing. In addition, a loss of values was seen and a spreading dynamic of exclusion and splitting in society. It was questioned, whether and how these processes can be made aware and stopped.

Destruction, helplessness, exploitation of the earth, violence as a way out and hope for new development

Various experiences of violence were reported. The terror in Paris and the terror of IS were perceived as a threat. The idea came up that destruction can be an expression of hope for development and rescue. Reported was then an incident of violence at school. A boy was beaten during the World Cup by his classmates in a residential suburb, because he wore a T-shirt with the name of a foreign footballer. Astonishment was expressed not only about the unbridled fury of the classmates but also the lack of ability to perceive the violence as such by the teacher. This was seen as a denial of reality. Denial was also found in connection with the waste of natural resources.

Protecting Democracy, not to be discouraged, protecting a friendly neighborhood and natural resources

This topic includes experiences of solidarity against the terror in France, the linking of arms with one another in a large group of people to demonstrate for freedom and tolerance; the joy over the natural environment and over children, including the burden of bringing them up and contrary to the popular belief that parenting is an overload. Social Freezing was understood as an expression of a delusion of feasibility and a denial of the conflict between job and parenthood.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, 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. The resulting analysis has been distilled into the following two interrelated hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Because of destruction and terror we are confronted with

fear and threat, sometimes connected with hope for rescue and change. We are reminded that the destruction can lead to the creation of new developments. Curiosity and exchange are means to work against fear and threat.

The group found that destruction and terror cause uncertainty and fear. Terror is disastrous. Associated with destruction is sometimes but the creation of new developments. This is the case in art or in the course of the personality development during adolescence.

The experience of terror and destruction leads to a reflection of proved values. So we learn again that democracy has proved to be well-functioning. France is reminded of the values of its revolution "liberty, equality, fraternity".

Hypothesis 2: Because we search for a friendly design of the nearby environment we create exclusion, which is perceived by others as unfriendly or is neglecting overall perspectives. This leads to splitting processes in society. In order to address this, we need the courage of the individual and the strength of the group.

The design of a nearby friendly environment can mean a preservation of a grown context as well as the creation of a new one. As an example served a private Kindergarten, which is founded newly in a district. Excepted are only certain children, whereas others had to stay out.

It is observed that much energy is spent designing the nearby environment, but the usage of resources in the world and its future is not considered. This self-sufficiency must be made conscious in order to overcome it. Maintaining the near does not exclude attention towards the whole.

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