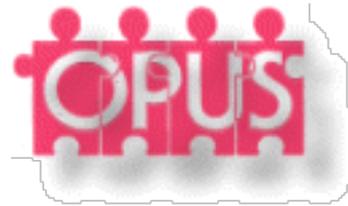


## AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

### Italy (South) 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, share and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work (employed, unemployed or retired), as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary 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': the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

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

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. Several themes were identified by the members and these have been distilled into five major themes. They are:

##### **Ethics, morality and responsibility**

The first concern is a lack of any form of ethics. From participant's point of view, it seems that people have lost their sense of limit, the value of 'being human', the basic values of civility; not even life and death are respected. We are experiencing the failure of the Western culture, the European part which was, and still is, seen as the enlightened holder of ideas for growth, development and wealth; but, unfortunately it was not able and it failed. The prevailing perception is a lack of a strong boundary between legality and illegality (what is legal and what is not). Participants emphasized these aspects in terms of individual and societal responsibility towards themselves and the others. We are spectators of a massification process of the human being which, in turn, produces a loss of values, a loss of the sense of forgiveness, a loss of the value of the common good.

Un(der)employment and precariousness: the new condition of youth  
The topic on the young adults precarious conditions emerged very often in the discussion, sometimes as obvious considerations, at other time as a parent's preoccupation in respect to the uncertainty for their children future. In this sense, compared with the generation of the post-war, the current generation of young people faces tougher conditions and restricted prospects across several spheres: limited opportunities to

face successful the transitions from education to employment and to establish independent living away from the parental home are just two examples.

Nowadays young people who are not in education are not in training or employment; someone described how transitions from school/university to the labour market are no longer stable, straightforward or predictable. The implications of the mismatch between high level skills and qualifications, such as graduates, and the job demands are very profound. The consequence is rising levels of Italian graduate unemployment or underemployment.

In this scenario, politics and local institutions seem to be unable to make real development programs for addressing this situations.

### **Lack of Vision**

The sense of insecurity and uncertainty about the future prevails. The general absence of a common vision is something that connects the members of the group and their different social roles (as parents, practitioners, teachers, retired, etc). Especially from the father and mother's speech there is a strong concern on the future of their children, they cannot see or predict how life will be for the new generation. Someone points out a lack of vision in the young people as well (in addition to political leader, religious leader and so on...): they have lost the "capacity to dream", that is the ability to create the unthinkable future through imagination and creativity. But, if there are not dreams is because there is nothing to dream, given the uncertain context and the insecurity that young people are experiencing everyday in every field or sector. The loss of common visions and the perceived insecurity, amplified by the crisis, require a new approach to change for changing mentality.

### **Lack of critical thinking/lack of opportunities for exchanging ideas**

One of the issues taken up by several participants and expressed in many ways is the lack of critical thinking, that is the inability of people to be rational and critical in their private e professional life. It seems that there is a kind of rejection about reflection, in giving time for breathing space and providing 'tools' for careful and critical considerations, and very often individual and social behaviours/reactions to situations are based on the "wave of emotions". Rational and creative thinking struggles to find a space for expression. Someone proposed a metaphor to give an idea of this: "replicant", in the Italian sense of just do something in a very automatic way with no reflection, with no understanding, with no creativity - we are a society which works "replicating" learnt models and processes that do not require any effort of thinking and challenges.

## Short memory

Discussion was about memory, which is important in our history as bridge between past and present. Emotions and impulses under surface and out of our awareness shape the direction and the intensity of our behaviour, and we act and decide with no rationality making bad decisions. Members talk about short memory and of the absence of knowledge transfer from the old to the new. It is felt a breakage with the "fathers" ('pater familias', religious leader etc) whose task was leading, finding and sharing and teaching the pure sense of life and of what is really important. This highlights the lack of a 'guide' (or more guides) as a knowledge holder and guardian. Since this figure is presumed to be a man, some women argued that we need both men and women - not only authoritative fathers.

The break with our history and the difficulty of knowledge transfer is explained with the lack of time and with the particular configuration of the real everyday life contexts that seem do not facilitate that relatedness possible only through storytelling.

## Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 and 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.

### Analysis and Hypothesis 1: Narration/Identity/De-construction

**Analysis:** Narrations support the construction of our identity, make sense of our diverse and multiple experiences and contribute to the social construction of our reality, as members of a group or society. Nevertheless, on the one hand storytelling connects people, through shared identities and through the way with which reality is perceived, interpreted and experienced; on the other hand it separates from someone/something (another group or society) specially when it is self-centred and self-referential. Referentiality produces a sort of "self-narrations" that construct and re-construct that same meanings that do not allow to take up alternative points of view and generate new processes.

**Hypothesis:** Because the prevailing attitude is being "replicant", then the risk is be blocked in the own story. This, in turn, prevents the learning

of new points of view, visions on the world, that can support the deep processes of reflection and change.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 2: Transition (transformation)/Vision**

**Analysis:** The current crisis is interpreted as a transition where new visions, new values and new behaviors are arising. It seems that there is not a full awareness about it, but only a perception (transition/transformation is felt but not by “touch”). Perception, by definition, does not provide codes, languages and cognitive tools for understanding and coping with the new forms and contents of the present age, and it does not push to consider alternative ways of thinking as explanation of the world functioning.

**Hypothesis:** Because this transition only affects personal and social perceptions, then “being in the world” is bewildered and uncertain. This implies that the uncertainty produced by the new, by the not-known, paralyzes people to old paradigms and theories about the world (which are well-known), which do not allow new visions building processes but ensure that people remain in their comfort zone.

### **Analysis and Hypothesis 3: Places and Spaces for reflection as foundation for learning**

**Analysis:** In a world characterized by crisis in its values and principles, there is a split between “producing thinking” and “doing”. Simple solutions, emerging from an “immediate doing” instead of processes of reflection, seem to be preferred. The tendency to ‘do’ is explained in terms of lack of time, but, at the same time, the latter is not the main cause of this attitude. It seems that people have lost the sense of the “discovery” of the self and the world around and do not authorize themselves to engaging in critical and continuous processes of reflection valuable to compare their theory in use and espoused theories - what they say to pursue and/or deal with and what they really pursue and/or do as a form of learning from experience.

**Hypothesis:** Because people are more concerned with “doing”, then the thought (in the sense of creative, deep and new thought which should be) will be shorter and focused on “private” issues, while the processes of reflection and questioning will be marginalized. In turn, this will not allow the observation and comprehension of the self and others within the society and, consequently, will cause the impoverishment of the self and the reduction of spaces for thinking.

Metaphor emerged from the final group discussion:

"If we tried to look at the globe, it would appear as a ball crushed on itself".

**Convenor: Marina Galati**