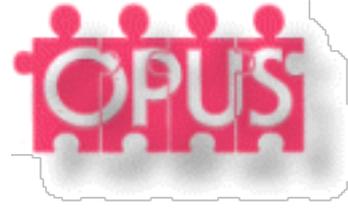


AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

**South Africa (Port Elizabeth) 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.

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

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. BREAKDOWN IN CONNECTIONS

Human connections seem to be under attack. Increasing diversity and complexity lead to disconnection, avoidance, loneliness and isolation. Flight responses lead to superficial and fake connections with 'faceless friends' on Facebook and having unknown people "liking" (boosing) one's competence on Linked-Inn. Groups follow televised court cases about intimate relationships of (now fallen) heroes with their loved ones which ended in murder (Pistorius / Divani). On a macro level, the country and its organisations unsuccessfully preach transformation.

National service providers (our national electricity company, airline, broadcaster, post-office, toll-roads) and employers (in mining) are unsuccessful in performing their primary task – they are actually breaking down because of poor management, prolonged strikes, greed, corruption and bankruptcy.

HYPOTHESIS 2. IDENTITY

Identity and its continuous transformation is an ingrained part of the South African discourse. The present identity is described as something fearful, vulnerable, in crises, elusive, in flux, in need of a rebirth and even waiting to be born. The inherent splits in society make connections very difficult between differences such as the past (Apartheid) and the present (new South Africa), first versus third world views on values and ethics - Ubuntu and individualism. Black people are allowed to criticise the (Black) government, but when Whites do that they fear being labelled as racists, losing face or 'losing your head'. Many organisations and leaders preach solutions – yet citizens seem fearful, angry, frustrated, reluctant, ambivalent, passive, avoidant and withdrawn. Real and honest conversations about identity seems to be an overwhelming task ('someone has to do the fighting – as long as it is not me').

HYPOTHESIS 3. POTENCY

Citizens yearn for renewed intimacy in their relationships towards fertile transformation. We often communicate our wish to invest emotional energy in our relationships across (especially race) differences. We have started to connect during large sporting events as legitimate spaces for us to touch, shout, sweat and reach climactic ecstasy together. Our discourse also entails adolescent and humoristic metaphors about courtship, foreplay, marriage and optimistic life-building (sexual) efforts to connect. Although the large events and the humour act as defences against the anxiety to be authentic in addressing the age old and fragmented racial groupings, we do realise that we need to de-colonise ourselves, start working pro-actively with our vulnerability and start experiencing our survival, potency, toughness and resilience.

Convener: Frans Cilliers.