

AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Greece and the World at the Dawn of 2016 Report of a New Year's Listening Post



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they 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': 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. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following 4 interrelated themes:

Theme 1: Hope and hopelessness

A member of the group referred to her stay at the island of Paros. There was a sense of depression in the atmosphere there. A restaurant owner had said to her that each year, the island used to begin to be lively from at least one week before the Christmas/ New Year celebrations. This year, people did not return to the restaurants and coffee shops even after the celebrations. The same applied to the local people. Another member agreed that the same thing had happened in Andros. In Athens this situation is apparent every day. But this trend now becomes visible at the islands too. Another member suggested that this might have been a coincidence related to the recent protestations, the property taxes that needed to be paid and the strikes. There was a lot going on. This period was seen as yet another critical point for the political situation in Greece. The discussion moved to thinking about how prepared Greek people were to make a change, to move away from the consumerism mentality and to engage with what is possible to do in the current conditions. The member of the group talked about how important it was for Greek people to engage with their mind, their intellect, their body, art, family and culture. Another member of the group described the depression and disappointment of Greek people, which prevents them from seeing light in these possibilities in their lives. She acknowledged that her point of view might sound very critical of

the Greek citizens: in her view, there seemed to be a prevailing low-middle class mentality that was leading Greek people to seek for easy solutions. However, easy solutions did not exist. Young people are also disappointed and although there are some encouraging indications in some important initiatives pursued by some groups (i.e. for supporting the immigrants), people's main efforts evolve around individual interests. We continue to not be able to act collectively in the present moment, despite being at the verge of the cliff. This was linked to the educational system that had not prepared young people to work together and to go behind a common goal without their name appearing anywhere. Parents were also contributing to this mentality by encouraging their offspring to only take care of themselves. Another member wondered whether there still was some hope that the crisis would last for four years and that then we would return to how things used to be. Somebody responded to this with the observation that there seemed to be a sense that people realise that this crisis will not just end for life to continue as before. She expressed optimism for the future.

A different member raised the issue of fear. There seemed to be fear that renders people unable to listen and to express who they are, to help and to act. She believed that there was a deeper mistrust of structures. On top of that we are used to what should not be happening. The most serious issues that are going on in Greece at the moment no longer appear as such. The drowning of immigrants has become the last new to be presented and after its announcement the music signifying the end of the emission starts right away.

Theme 2: Omnipotence in the face of helplessness

This discussion gave rise to the idea that we want a solution, that although we feel our hands are tight we are ready. Another member added that we need an external stimuli, a god from the machine (deus ex machina). But this Deus ex machina will only arrive if we accept that we reached the bottom; an impasse. Euripides had invented Deus ex machina after a sense of a great fall in the plot of his tragedies.

Another member highlighted that she thought the Greek society was still at a childhood-adolescence stage and that the crisis was an opportunity for the Greek society to mature. We are still looking up for the parents to tell us what to do and then we protest. Many other nations have achieved independence. We can also do it and take responsibility. She added how furious she was with the government, but at the same time she said that the government came out of our society's womb. We have responsibility not so much because we voted for them, but more so because we have created them. We see our face in the mirror when we look at Tsipras she suggested, adding that

she didn't like what she saw. Someone stressed that when it came to voting, one voted the least bad, one voted while disagreeing. This was inevitable. The political system is the mirror of the society and politics is the art of the tangible. The communist party invites us to go to a different world, which only exists in the sphere of fantasy. The Golden Dawn invites us to return to the old times. And we are part of a globalised world. Parties need to offer realistic solutions if they want to be the least bad. We need to face dilemmas of everyday life.

The discussion highlighted the importance of taking small humble steps and to respect our field and those we serve instead of wanting to be an expert from the start. One needs to accept to be inferior and learn, to acknowledge their lack of experience. This evoked the idea that people resorted to starting their own company because there was nowhere else they could be employed. There was not a company with 200 lawyers and therefore a lawyer needed to start their own business after they qualified. The group aimed at clarifying where the responsibility for this problem lied. There was an idea that the problem lied with the family culture and individuals, but also with the lack of a system that controls professionals. There were different views in relation to whether control by a system should be needed or whether individuals should be responsible for their attitude. The first view was that people should not need someone to control them in order for quality to be endured. The other view was that this actually was the responsibility of the structure of the economy; 70% of the Greek economy appeared to rely on the services produced by self-employed professionals. There was an attempt to link this individual-structure problem to the class system in Greece, where the middle class is small arithmetically; still it should be defining how the system worked.

Theme 3: Corruption, bureaucracy and resistance to change: each society's struggle

A member of the group suggested that they did not trust the movement "All Together We Can". It seemed to him that these movements were employing strategies to appeal to the emotion. This movement was collaborating with the church. This member of the group expressed the opinion that the movement was not reliable. He rather preferred to help somebody who would move him, at an individual level; for example someone in the streets, or initiatives lead by parents in schools to support members of the community. He regarded this as a more honest, direct and authentic way of helping others. Non for profit organisations were often representatives of political interests. They sound good in theory but for instance Green Peace has been seen at times as serving the financial interests of green companies. Another member of the group commented that we tend to be suspicious with all that we see happening around us. The issue of lack of trust was mentioned once more. Even good initiatives become

undermined by the Greek system. If one takes the initiative to take donations to prisons in order to help, they may be turned away with the excuse that there is no space for them to be stored and those taking the initiative may be invited to return a month later. Bureaucracy puts people off and deters them from engaging. The topic of bureaucracy was taken up by another member who reminded the group of the issue of computerisation of the banks. A group of retired volunteers had been mobilised through their association: they appealed to the most senior and experienced members of the association, inviting them to offer their services voluntarily to the state in order to help with the task of computerising the Bank's data. They submitted their proposal with the time that these highly specialised professionals had offered in order to contribute to the state's efforts. However, they were turned down. Another member of the group wondered whether there was a law preventing such initiatives for good reasons. For instance there could be a law preventing influences by people who were not civil servants. The first member suggested that the system was organised in a way that prevented flexibility. Bureaucracy mobilised action from the citizens, which was then turned down. And this in turn was raising mistrust in citizens. It was mentioned that this was how we had began to form as a nation in 1821 with the clientele relationship between citizens and those in power. And when we create systems to fight corruption i.e. the recruitment of educationalist through assessment, we blame this system. We introduced interviews for more accurate assessment of professionals and we mistrust interviews. How else can one hire somebody without an interview? a member of the group wondered. However, there is no control and the corruption prevails, which makes it impossible for things to work effectively. The same member, gave an example of how she had wanted to offer free maths classes to her students. But she was worried that she would be fiercely attacked and accused for corruption by her colleagues who are not prepared to do the same but also from private, after school institutions, which provide these services. This discussion reminded of the Russian film "the Idiot". This film captured how a corrupted system worked. Its roots reminded of Cappadocia. Another member of the group talked about how corruption was a global phenomenon, which each society tries to confront. Whether the crisis will bring catharsis is to be seen. It depends on whether people want it it to. The Greek debt situation and dependency on external powers had started in Greece since 1821. Kolokotronis was in the Russian party, debts were not reaching their destination, Greek people were looking for a leader outside the boundaries of Greece. The revolution was not successful as those who supported the Turks had dominated. Kapodistrias was murdered and this was seen at the time as an important duty to Greece. Tsipras looks young and omnipotent. But no God will come to rescue us. Such a god does not exist. Our society needs to deal with its murderousness, corruption, aggression. We need to encourage autonomy, work with others and enable the next generation to deal with the problem better

than the previous one. She continued by saying that in the past she used to hope for someone with vision. More recently she believes that the society will allow this person to emerge. Each of us should focus on their work and collaborate better with each, whether in the role of a citizen or government. There needs to be an effort for all people to co-exist. There is no other way.

Theme 4: The problem of coming together in the micro level

A member of the group who had lived and worked in the UK for some years before returning to Greece commented that the difficulty to learn how to work together was not only a characteristic of the Greek education system. Rather, it was a difficulty in the Greek professional arena. There is no collective way of how we work as professions. Everybody tends to open their own office quickly, straight after graduating, and as a result there are no big organisations of professionals, where they come together and build a common know how. There is a fear that if one shows what they know to someone else, this person will then become a threat. The professional knowledge is kept hidden. She expressed relief that she had learned how to work in the UK and did not need to wait for someone to show to her. There is a fear that if I show to you what I know, you will steal it from me. And there is some truth in this. This line of thought was followed by another member who was impressed by a cook, Petratzakis. This cook's attitude was to be open and share every single secret of his recipes. Most other cooks hide them.

Another member suggested that although Greek people are a clever nation, we have learned to analyse in depth but not to synthesise. We analyse the ingredients of the recipe, but we do not know how to combine them, in what proportions, what temperature so that we make a nutritious and tasty dessert. Everybody knew what was happening, whose fault this was, but no one did anything for things to change. The big starts from the small. The fact that you are an excellent engineer of the most prestigious University of Athens does not mean that you can construct a factory based on nuclear energy. The fact that one is an excellent graduate of medicine does not mean that you they ready to perform heart operations. At the same time this does not mean that they never will be able to do it. A different member contrasted the experience of learning in the Greek educational system with her recent experience of Spanish lessons. During the lessons, students needed to do group work. She was surprised that one needed to work with whoever happened to sit nearby, no matter who these people were. In this way, everybody had to engage with thinking about when one needed to compromise and when to be assertive.

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 have been predominant at the time; and, developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at the 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 shaped into 2 contradictive hypotheses, which depict possibly the oscillation of Greek people between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions as part of a process of mourning of a way of living.

Analysis 1

Greek people had needed to engage with an abrupt transition from one way of living to another. As they realise that there is no way back to the lifestyle they used to have there is a tendency towards depression and despair. There is no going back solution, but at the same time there does not seem to be a realistic solution in the near future. This reality can feel as a punishment. When the guilt feels too big and acquires a paranoid quality of persecution members of the Greek society enter a mode of blaming, mistrusting and accusing others, to remove from their shoulders a responsibility, which feels too heavy to bear. This anxiety and guilt leads to conflicts and black and white thinking. On the other hand, when the guilt is absorbed and the blame of oneself becomes unrealistic members of society enter a mode of despair, helplessness and hopelessness. In both states, the solution appears to be a Deus ex machina either with the characteristics of a fight leader or with the characteristics of a rescuer. This seeking of a messiah takes members of the society to endless circles of magical thinking based optimism and harsh disillusioned pessimism.

Hypothesis 1

Because of the realisation that the Greek problem will take a long time to resolve, members of the society experience the situation as unfair and too harsh on them. They project responsibility to other structures, for instance to the eurozone, inviting them to discipline the Greek situation which feels out of control, while at the same time they identify with a rescuing hero who will fight against this punishment or will rescue them from it with an unpredictable solution. This oscillation leaves members of the society in a state of mistrust with extreme fluctuations between feelings of hope and despair.

Analysis 2

Alongside the above situation there begins to emerge a different, more

hopeful one. The tensions in the political system have not killed the opposing fronts. Although there is an effort to undermine the different point of view, something was preserved that has kept the government in power, despite his failures. This public tragedy that members of the Greek society had been following closely with strong emotional involvement, allowed for some integration of the extremes to take place. There is a marked shift of Greek citizens in terms of their hopes for the future and getting out of the situation Greece is currently in. They have taken some distance from the position of blaming and this allows them to have more realistic expectations from themselves and from others. This makes it possible for realistic hope to emerge but also for opportunities to be used more constructively.

Hypothesis 2

Because of the dynamic processes witnessed in the political scene, involving conflict between parties, ideologies, hopes and fears members of the society have become disillusioned and disappointed. They have begun to feel more able to hold back from taking sides and to own their conflicting feelings about the different aspects of the Greek problem inside them and to integrate them. This has resulted in members of the society having more realistic expectations from the political system from themselves and from others, which makes it possible for people to co-exist easier and to collaborate better.

Convenor: Evangelia Laimou