AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY

Chile and the World at the Dawn of 2017
Report of an OPUS Listening Post®
held in Santiago on 2 February 2017

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS & 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, 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 collectively was to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

Theme 1: Loss of trust, insecurities, defenselessness and uncertainty.   .

During 2016, the loss of faith in public and private authorities continued and increased among Chilean citizens, as did their trust in institutions and social relations in general. This loss is a decline that has been dragging for several years, reaching extreme levels in 2016. Deterioration of confidence refers to the disappointment and lack of belief experienced by individuals with respect to government authorities, politicians, entrepreneurs, trade unionists, and religious leaders who show ineptitudes and/or corruptions that invade the public sphere, generating collective feelings of unease, disrepute, crisis and chaos. The sense of a shared order is dispelled, destabilized and fractured by the multiple acts of moral violence that transgress values, norms, structures and roles assumed to be the upholders of a democratic and respectful coexistence oriented towards the common good.

In this context, citizens experience insecurity, lack of protection, and uncertainty that cause them fear as they do not know what to trust, who to trust, in addition to being unclear as to how to proceed to generate and maintain such trust or faith. The government's unfulfilled promises of implementing transformations to activate the economy, increase employment, reform education, reform labor laws and create a new constitution, are sources of despair and frustration. The collusions between government authorities, parliamentarians and entrepreneurs, bring into question the legitimacy of the democratic political system.   Within the citizens and the society, an atmosphere of suspicion and persecution is generated, where the "others",

individuals, groups and organizations, act with a mentality of gaining advantages for private purposes, so it is necessary to be alert in order to look after and defend one's own interests. Reaching collaboration is a complex matter in the various spheres of social life, particularly in labor relations between entrepreneurs and workers. Under these circumstances, aggressive practices emerge aimed at the more vulnerable groups, like women, immigrants and indigenous peoples.

The year 2016 was the time of revealing the fragile identity of Chilean society, in its images of a successful, progressive, developing society and in its chauvinistic qualification as being the "Latin American Jaguar". Being exposed to this fragility raises the question of what is the actual substance of society. Among the citizens there is unease because the identity suggests mediocrity, improvisation and little problem-solving capacity to find a solution to the problems and challenges that afflict them.

The citizens yearn for an authority that can bring order, clarity and entrepreneurial action to correct the discomfort existing in Chile. There is a yearning for an authority that can give an abrupt turn that will correct the sense of anomie, that the directionality to make progress, to bring well-being to the individual and collective life of Chileans, is being lost. In this phantasy there are echoes of the dictatorial authoritarianism. In this respect, it is suggestive that, according to a recent public opinion poll, the institutions that at present provide more confidence to the citizenship are the Civil Police, the Uniformed Police and the Armed Forces.

Theme 2: individualism, indifference, ignoring others and their vulnerabilities.

Within the framework of the recently addressed topic, people in the Listening Post (LP) posit individualism, focusing on oneself, as a marked trait present in the attitudes and behaviors of citizens while participating in society. This individualism assumes that in the citizens there is at work a drawing back from and indifference towards social reality with its complex diversity of human types, their needs, problems, circumstances and queries of solidary and civic commitment. LP attendants make reference to experiences of how this ignoring of and indifference towards "the other or others" is more or less conscious, which implies selectivity towards who is excluded. Sometimes, this ignoring is deliberate, individuals avoid contact with others because they feel that they "contaminate" personal welfare, or the encounters are uninteresting, banal and ritualistic, without adding value except in the pragmatic and instrumental sense that those relations may provide. However, in the citizens there is also a bearing in mind to set limits to such ignoring, by deliberately including and taking care of their relations with "some others" who have an important significance for their personal identity.

This ignoring of and indifference towards social reality is closely related to the vulnerability attributed to "a certain other or others", their problems, sorrows, sufferings and discomforts. That vulnerability prevents from including, acknowledging and developing a compassionate and welcoming approach with the other, because vulnerability is threatening. The reaction of those who are vulnerable is feared, not knowing if there will be a rejection or acceptance, but above all, there is fear of the moral commitment acquired with "the other or others" at the time of recognizing

their frailties and the need to take a stance and responsibility when facing the situation. This considers risks that may be very burdensome for personal interests.

Individualism and its associates: ignoring of others and indifference, become established with the strongly rooted neoliberal and mercantilist model in society and in the management of public and private organizations with the praise of the statement that the individual is responsible for his achievements and wellbeing, encouraging selfishness and devaluating solidarity and concern for others. In the citizens there is a certain discernment about the hardship and poverty that individualism brings to human life in the willingness to leave out the intersubjective connections with others at the current time, as well as the to the extent that individualism ignores the historic legacy of the past where the past existence of many others have influences in the present and will continue to do so in the future.

Theme 3: Cynicism, thought and personal authority

LP participants consider that in society there is a collective cynicism, widely shared, which gives the appearance that institutions work with an efficiency and control similar to a "Swiss watch", which assumes a sense of a stable social order capable of solving problems. This appearance considers that citizens join, inadvertently, a dramatic set up of drills and simulations that induces their participation in a fake assessment of those institutions.

To citizens, the society in 2016 showed abundant evidences of flaws in the functioning of institutions in their difficulty to implement urgent social transformations in the spheres of the economy, education, work and politics; these obstacles were furthered by the ineptitude of leaders in their conduction of institutions and the permissiveness allowing the occurrence of acts of corruption and very notorious crises with serious consequences. However, in contrast with the evidence of institutional inefficiency in the leaders, citizens also experience the establishment within themselves of an attitude of complacency, of laissez faire, in the misleading belief that institutions eventually work and that responsible leaders do their job.

The cynicism that takes place at the broadest level of society, is also manifest in the citizens' daily experiences in their participation in all kinds of institutions, as community members, at work, within the family, in marriage, in politics, in friendships. It is baffling for citizens to realize how they are wrapped up by cynicism, actively contributing to its practice and expansion. Citizens acknowledge their fear to raise their voices, to show discrepancies with institutional values and regulations, with the way authorities act, and to set forth proposals to correct problems and injustices. That fear inhibits citizens from reflecting and critically and constructively acting on social relations that compromise participation in institutions. This fear makes individuals to submissively join conventionalisms, because in this way they avoid the risks of penalties that may have unexpected consequences for their lives.

Citizens consider that social cynicism is inevitable insofar as participating in society involves taking up roles where the actors must discern their performances, which require being convincing and effective. Notwithstanding, there is also the fact that in the reflective interpretation of roles there is a moral skeleton that leads to paying

attention to the values and principles in play with the cynicism in the interpretation of roles. It seems that in post-industrial societies, the dilemma of cynicism in the performance of roles is extremely ambiguous, which may encourage individuals to go to extremes in their social cynicism avoiding the grey zones of institutional realities.

Theme 4: Citizenship's empowerment, hope and despair.

An encouraging aspect of 2016 was the many times citizens showed their empowerment, which brought to the surface many visions, voices and actions that traditionally do not have a space nor are they acknowledged in society's institutional framework.

Social movements emerged with a certain capacity to face neoliberalism and the "wild" capitalism in their overwhelming power to control and cause disruptive effects in individuals' and communities' lives in Chile.

Vis-à-vis the hegemony of capitalist power centers inclined to the slogan that "there are no alternatives" and force an individual adaptation according to the signs of the times and to be prepared to absorb in any way possible the collateral damages of globalization, social movements have raised the citizenships' hope that political coordination can resist and fight capitalism. With this hope, it is possible to shake off conformist, passive and accommodating postures of individualism, with the opening up of emancipatory possibilities of new identities and associations that will renew society's social fabrics.

Notable actions of social movements in Chile were the various massive summons to citizens to go out on the streets and protest for the protection of the community's interests, in particular, with the purpose of deposing the private pension system, supporting the right to abortion, putting an end to men's violence towards women; and in acknowledging the right of individuals to their sexual inclinations. In the political sphere, movements were significant in influencing the recent Municipal elections so that individuals could show their dissent with and punishment of the government, the political class and the neoliberal model, through the act of abstaining from participating in the elections process. Empowerment was also manifest in socio-economic entrepreneurial acts, through which men and women seek autonomy in employment, avoiding the submission to disciplinary systems of public or private organizations.

Citizens' enthusiasm with empowerment and social movements had its limits and even disappointments. Social movements, through their offers of various actions generated a great number of promises that were difficult to meet, and this resulted in a weakening of the trust and credibility of the citizens' bases. The intensive use of information technologies saturates the citizenship, confusing the issue of which initiatives they should support. Furthermore, empowerment demands persistent wills, energies and resources, and the results are modest, without achieving substantive solutions to the struggles and resistances it arises. The great majority of people have an "adolescent" mentality in their expectations of empowerment actions; they want immediate solutions, and lack the capacity to accept that changes take time and require progressive and intermittent actions. Socio-economic ventures, from the citizens' perspective, are not a panacea either, the people who

carry them out must make tremendous efforts and assume great costs to sustain them, without any certainty that they will achieve satisfactory results.

The great merit of empowerment was the creation of a certain social conscience with respect to the genuine and vital interests of the people, as well as the activation of a political capacity to influence society. This means the start-up of incipient emancipatory acts that mark strong differences with the leadership of the political class that is so dissociated from the thinking and feeling of ordinary people. Chileans' experience of the defeat of Pinochet's Military Dictatorship may be a political legacy inserted in the collective memory to strengthen the citizenships' empowerment.

PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In Part 3, the participants 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, participants 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:

The fear affecting citizens is associated with the perplexity caused by the lack of confidence in leaderships and institutions that regulate relations in society, in the repeated signs of ineptitude and corruption. This lack of trust destabilizes and questions the validity of cultural patterns that generally convey valid meanings to collective and individual identity, and which, on the contrary, cause feelings of insecurity, defenselessness and uncertainty in society. Citizens experience situations of "failed dependency", which disconcerts them because of the difficulty to understand what is happening, the uncertainty of not knowing how to act and the absence of reliable and accurate directionality by the authorities. Citizens are immobilized and disabled by the anxiety originated by the lack of confidence, and this triggers in them primitive defenses, projection, splitting and rationalization, which relieve them of their own shortcomings and make others responsible for their inabilities and faults. The demand by the citizens for a "competent" authority that will end the anomie in which they live in their individual subjectivity, is particularly relevant, as this cancels the challenge and risks of using their personal authority in coordination with the personal authority of other citizens in order to avoid the lack of confidence.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2.

Individualism, with its indifference and avoidance of others and their vulnerabilities, responds to defenses that protect against rooted anxieties in the context of the social diversity brought by globalization and its changes in society. Faced with this diversity, people build up boundaries that withdraw them from contact with others who, in their human diversity, are a threat to identity. The rejection and indifference towards strangers allows having a certain amount of control that prevents confusion

and the risks of opening up to new relationships with unforeseen consequences. Individualism is also a defense against finding out that every human relationship requires establishing interdependence with others, that individual subjectivity grows and develops in the interactions with other individuals, groups and the society. Through this defense, individualism also attempts to deny the existence of vulnerability that is common to the human condition in its gregarious nature. To accept interdependence and vulnerability assumes that in social interactions, individuals are exposed to the risks of experiencing losses, with their corresponding pain and suffering.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3:

Complacent and simulated cynicism of citizens with respect to institutions and their functioning in society is socially induced through the activation of basic assumptions that massively homogenize individuals' behaviors and emotions. Among these basic assumptions is that of dependence under which massive aggregates of citizens collude in showing and acting, simulating positive valuations of institutional life. These collusions are social defenses that protect against the anxieties that avoid contact with the institutions' reality that shows tremendous inefficiencies and citizens' discomfort. Defenses hinder individuals' thoughts and the possibility of creatively facing the problems and challenges posed by society. These obstructions make it impossible for citizens to have the courage to put into practice their personal authority.

Analysis and Hypothesis 4:

The empowerment developed by citizens refer to the efforts for great changes at the level of society and its institutions. This empowerment generates ambiguous experiences of hope and despair regarding the capacity to resist and change the neoliberal socio-economic system. That ambiguity considers that empowerment and its projects for change are surrounded by complex oscillations between the work group mentality and the mentality of basic assumptions that take root in society. In empowerments, reflective leadership stimulates and creates the conditions for collaboration between people that is required in innovative projects. However, such leadership has its limits, because in the citizenship's mass emerge the vicissitudes of non-reflective behavior of the basic assumptions specially activated by the anxieties associated to attempted changes in society. The development of empowerments demands a very complex leadership work, how to create enough hope in people so that changes may move forward, and also how to constructively contain people's despair in order to keep alive the innovating spirit.

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