AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY

Finland and the World at the Dawn of 2017
Report of an OPUS Listening Post®
held in Helsinki on 13 January 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.

The discussion began with a question phrased in the words of a song: "Do we have to, if we don't want to". Do we build walls internally and repeat them at intervals, or do we begin to do otherwise? The participants intensively and emotionally discussed such topics as inexplicable fears, for instance, about the Soviet Union and Trump's election to the presidency in the USA, the predominance of digitalization, and the humaneness of animals.

Theme 1. Unpredictable use of power – powerlessness and the fear of losing autonomy

What do we do in this world, which has become "crazy"? I feel powerless and a fear of losing my autonomy. I don't understand the logic of the digital world, but, nevertheless, day by day, someone knows more and more about it than I do and has Orwellian control over my everyday life. When I update my computer, files disappear, and I end up paying large sums of money to my subscription company for an "expert" to return them from the depths of my laptop. I feel like I am being controlled by a digital tyrant.

People are continuously in the midst of an enormous amount of global information. TV, newspapers, and other sources produce more or less current objective data. It is difficult to know and choose what is essential and significant and what is fabrication, hearsay, or imagined. It seems that we should know, but a great deal of the information does not mean a thing. Global happenings (e.g., Trump, the Soviet Union), which we have no control over, produce fear and feelings of impotence.

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Somewhere decisions are made about what matters, building walls, seizing areas, what is right or wrong. We are not able to achieve contact, but the feeling that arises interferes with sleep and the body's condition. In the participants' dreams, they were held prisoner, were lost in underground tunnels, and hastened to turn their backs on the public.

Are threats and fear the real causes, or is it only due to the imagination? We do not know whether or not the earth's climate changes have already passed the point at which anything can be done to save it?

Not only countries and political parties, but also individuals, are the object of Orwellian hacking, monitoring, and surveillance. What is happening to me as a person?

Theme 2. Feelings of fear and menace – the building of boundaries and their infringement: what basic human condition are we relinquishing?

Talk about animals made everyone feel good; one person said that she had a feeling of safety. In the animal metaphor, people and animals (horses, cats, dogs) were interacting – they "understood" feelings and thoughts. In the interaction with animals, people were able to talk about everything and feel a degree of tenderness and love that they were not even able to experience with their loved ones. Using these metaphors, we were able to bring up the lost connection that we, as humans, have with nature, our biological essence, and our interaction with others. Bodily contact, face-to-face existence, the sight of facial expressions and gestures, and the sharing of feelings are basic characteristics that, without them, we are not human and we do not feel well. As new technology has develops, we are losing this connection between individuals. In its place we have the filling out of forms on the Internet, once we have entered the proper password. How much do we invest in animals when we talk of animal care, animal rights? We offer animals tenderness, which then makes us feel good. People's need to give and receive love is fundamental and is based on their social nature. Face-to-face meetings create trust between people.

Is it necessary to honour traditions; is it necessary to do that which is always done – the dilemma of traditions and new issues? On one hand, we want to honour our parents and, above all else, that which has been achieved, but, on the other, we want to create something new, to structure matters in our own way, to make discoveries, to be curious. We also talked about how we can refuse to be responsible for supporting the problems of the broad system.

The experience of nations in this post-transnational world is that traditional systems, such as the church, state, community, health care, political parties and interest groups, are out-dated and cannot support their citizens in today's chaos. Where are the faces of power? Today's political solutions force people into excessive independent initiative. Can we believe in our own survival, our own ability to fend for ourselves and support ourselves, and our own abilities and skills? It takes energy and the ability to dare to adopt new ways, to understand what was earlier not understandable, and then change. In one small town, one resident began to talk to a friend about holding a celebration in honour of Finland's 100th anniversary. People

began to be enthused about this idea, and now such a celebration will be held throughout Finland when the time comes.

Theme 3. The limits of new activities

What, in this crazy world, supports my own internal queries, the setting of values, and their interpretation; what is my responsibility? What things can I do that further my and others participation in the building of our future society. My body tells me that new ways of acting should be sought.

In one dream, a Finnish taxi, whose driver proves to be Russian, drives underground and captures the dreamer. There are also other people there who have dangerous contagious diseases. The dreamer tries to escape but is once again captured. She does not escape by fleeing, but, when she starts to use her Russian language skill and starts to speak Russian, she is freed. In another dream, a mother was having breakfast with her children in a hotel when a disco started to the beat of "Let's Go Locomotion". The mother ran out to an armoured vehicle in the yard, where she felt safe and peaceful. She drove the vehicle a short distance forwards and backwards, and did not go anywhere. One dreamer had to make a speech with her back to the audience and using unfamiliar material. She refused, turned around, and spoke in her own words, making contact with the audience. The dreams began to have chaotic conditions, with confusion, nightmare-like surroundings, feelings of lost existence. In each dream, there was a turning point: the dreamer was saved when she began to use a new type of action.

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.

Hypothesis 1:

Global happenings, the digitalization of systems, the re-organization of basic services, the handling of refugees, emigration, the building of walls, the undermining of traditions, the enormous amount of immediately available data, and the like create confusion, exasperation , and vagueness, in addition to feelings of obscurity and fear. At the same time, it should be noted that taking into use one's own new strengths and skills, as well as changes in attitudes, the best help is found in asking for and giving forgiveness. Our own choices, desires, decisions, and new types of functioning, as well as constructive interaction, offer possibilities to span the rifts caused by our own existence. The answers to nonspecific questions can be found in everyone's own "rucksack". People just have to dare to join, to encourage themselves to act in the direction from which they have become alienated, for example, to offer strengthening love to others, to speak to and converse with others about matters.

According to complex systems theory, change requires systems/individuals/society to swing away from the traditional equilibrium. One alternative is to return to the old and stagnate or to fall into the abyss of chaos. Experimentally, changes occur chaotically. New visions are needed: new types of support, frameworks and balance to bridge the gap between stability and change. Currently, attempts are being made to do so; earlier means of surviving no longer work. The welfare state is disfunctioning – what can be used to open up new possibilities? But has democracy changed for the most part into dictatorship?

In the philosophy of history, it is asked about what directs the happenings of the world, to what direction, or is anything being directed anywhere? In psychodynamic theory, love represents a constructive life force; hate destroys. These are tense relations to each other. Are words of hate winning at the moment?

Hypothesis 2

Globally, the current trend is to think that handling issues face-to-face between people is too expensive. Universally, scientific work and investment are directed towards developing digitalization, artificial intelligence, machine intelligence, robots, humanlike robots, and androids. These then handle daily affairs, customer service, and even health and welfare services. According to these researchers, this type of development follows a long time span of technological singularity. This development changes the world so drastically that we are still not able to understand what type of world will be the result. Individually, people have no way to control or affect this type of development. People cannot accept losing their natural interaction with others. The world needs to wake up and understand just how much humans are psychological, biological, and social creatures, and then combine knowledge about the human condition with the currently accelerating technological development.

Convener: Maija-Leena Setälä

Consultants: Marianne Tensing, Timo Totro