



The Netherlands at the dawn of 2018

Report of a Listening Post held in Amsterdam on 30 September 2017

On 30 September 2017 the annual citizenship work day was organized in the heart of Amsterdam on Leidseplein. Twenty people attended, including two convenors, three facilitators and a scribe. It was another day of sharing experiences, listening, musing and, by means of everyone's contribution, finding solidarity in the role of citizen. In my function as scribe I began writing the report on 6 October, the day the Dutch citizen heard of the death of Amsterdam's mayor Eberhard van der Laan.

Following a brief introduction and check in with the participants, an hour and fifteen minutes were spent sharing our recent experiences about citizenship in the large group. Many different events were mentioned, and nearly everyone joined in.

LP plenum

At the start a lot of episodes, including small ones, were mentioned that had occurred in the morning on the way to the Listening Post; what was experienced from home to here and how that, for them, was related to how we deal with each other as citizens. For example, someone's need to readjust train travel because the trains to Amsterdam were not running and to find an alternative form of transportation called to mind the idea continually more distance is felt in reaching a destination, that more preparation is required. Someone else felt very much alone on the train to Amsterdam. Contact is no longer necessary: you buy the train ticket from a machine, your coffee from a machine, you check in using an automated system and on the train it seems as if there is no contact with one another, but contact with the mobile. What does citizenship mean if you do not need to enter into a relationship with one another? Someone from North Amsterdam who came on the bike had an interesting experience involving 'shared space'. Where, regardless of the type of transportation, people use the same space and therefore have to watch out for each other. This was also experienced in Rome where space was not specifically delineated but on the

street everyone was able to move because it seemed that each other's needs were able to be anticipated. While currently here in the Netherlands there is an excess of marking lanes and boundaries.

It took a relatively long time before politics was brought up in the conversation. There were brief conversations about Catalonia and the Brexit and what it meant to no longer be living in the EU. Our passivity as citizens concerning the formation of the Dutch cabinet was also felt. Is voting enough to fulfil your role as citizen? In addition, briefly discussed were climate change, Trump, male intimidation and inequality. Who are today's visible strong women?

There was also confusion, when do you participate? Do you have a role as citizen even when you make choices about your own isolation and do not want to participate? What does the role of citizen actually mean? There are so many other roles that are more pressing than citizenship. To what degree do I take on the role of citizen? And is it also possible that it is NOT big and consuming? Is it enough that just being a little nice to my surroundings makes me a good citizen? A desire for attention and a desire for solutions were mentioned.

Theme development

In the discussion leading up to the themes, a number of subjects were mentioned in response to the LP discussion:

- Why did major political events get mentioned so late?
- Inside and outside the lines "shared space"
- "We learn nothing"
- Withdrawal vs loneliness, such as the city 'lonely Lochem'
- To shield and to protect
- People oriented
- Small vs large/ localisation vs globalisation
- Distance: far away – close by
- Influence – who decides??
- Resistance
- What is wrong – interpretation and what do you need to do?

The group ultimately chose three themes that were often compilations of the above-mentioned topics, as it was felt there was overlap among the topics. The three themes that were corroborated on in the afternoon:

1. We – Alone "Lonely Lochem"
2. Learning/Action and Must/Want

3. Frameworks and boundaries, what if they disappear? Who decides what?

The participants divided themselves among the three groups. The number of participants for each group all including a facilitator were seven for We-Alone, five for Learning/Action and Must/Want, and six for Frameworks and boundaries.

Final Plenum

After having worked in the small groups (including the 'visiting') we gathered together in the plenum, where all three groups presented their results and hypotheses.

We-Alone 'Lonely Lochem'

Hypothesis: It seems that we have so tightly regulated ourselves that a desire has arisen for more space and freedom for taking or not taking responsibility oneself.

Theme conclusions:

During the afternoon session there was a lot of focus on and concern about the other two groups coming from this group, which is fitting for the theme that is also concerned with loneliness. Intentionally alone? versus no one calling you anymore.

There is a desire to join in a community, but when you do you also pay a price (you give something up of yourself). There is a desire for keeping a grip on things and for understanding. In order to become established rules and organisations were needed, but too many rules paralyses one's own responsibility. It continues to be one's own choice whether to influence matters that are important or of interest. This can also provoke withdrawal, leading people to not be engaged or less actively engaged in a community. It lacks reciprocity and there is too much coming from personal interest.

Learning/Action and Must/Want

Hypothesis: The tremendous amount of fragmentation and stimuli is leading to paralysation and the absence of the impulse to tackle something together. If it moves you personally then action also happens sooner.

Theme conclusions:

If people have to do a lot then they are also not going to want to do it -> paralysation. However, this pattern aside, people should also be able to make their own personal choices. That raises questions such as 'What do I really want? Do I want it myself or have I inherited it?' Concerning taking action, the starting point is that one must take responsibility for oneself. Then potential supporters could be found to come along. Is everyone capable of this or do development, education and social class also play a role?

Citizenship is collective, done with each other! You also need to be able to see everyone. What role does money play? If you do something in connection with your work, could that also be about your role as citizen? Do something for others – in itself a benefit.

There is a desire and there are interests!

Frameworks and boundaries

Hypothesis: There is a shared desire for voluntary reciprocity that is felt alone. It is fuelled by institutions, regulations, information technology, school systems and health care systems.

Theme conclusions:

Why then do we have these rules? These institutions have a self-interest; without the rules they have no reason to exist and it reduces conflict because we no longer need to enter into the relationship with one another.

So...what does that mean for the role of citizen??

Overarching remarks

The hypotheses show that there was a great need for connection.

The question, 'Which confrontation have we avoided?' still remains and a number of ideas about it were bypassed. The major political issues including foreign political issues were pretty much set aside. There was also a great desire to be working and the day's setup was not or barely challenged, as if we were careful not to mention differences out of a need for connection.

In several groups a connection was made with Italy, as a sort of utopia where there is space to be without rules and frameworks, where conflict is allowed and where people can live side by side without problems because there is insight into the needs of others.