



## **Hungary at the dawn of 2018**

### **Report of a Listening Post held in Corvinus University of Budapest 19<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

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#### **BACKGROUND**

Successful Listening Post events were organized in Hungary several times, these were conveyed by Sándor Takács. Our formal university professor, András Gelei has greatly supported us with organizing the venue, promoting the event among university employees and students.

The convenors' role was shared between Kinga Illyes and Tímea Agota Toth.

The programme was as follows:

- 2:30 - 2:40    Opening and introduction of participants
- 2:40 - 3:30    Part 1. Sharing of preoccupations and experiences
- 3:30 - 3:50    Part 2. Identification of major themes (10' individually, 10' sharing)
- 3:50 - 4:45    Part 3. Analysis and hypothesis formation in 2 groups
- 4:45 - 5:00    Sharing hypothesis, and closing thoughts from each participant

#### **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, 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.*

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.

In our case the composition of the group was somewhat heterogeneous in terms of age and profession, there were 4 university professors from different institutions, a university student, 3 consultants and a freelancer in tourism industry, altogether 9 people were participating including the convenors, who

have taken a participant-researcher role.

The sharing was lively and smooth, everybody has contributed to a certain extent. Some ideas were connected to each other, but there was no debate, or discussion of a specific topic

## **PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

*In Part 2, the aim collectively was to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.*

Every participant had 10 minutes to individually identify what were the 2-3 most important themes for them that emerged from Part 1, then they've shared these themes with the group.

The themes were as follows (in the order they were mentioned):

- Letting go - Attachment
- Processing
- The Decision (the book)
- Estrangement
- Radicalisation
- Sources of happiness
- War, surging relations, enmity (race-related and all other)
- Alienation (there is no time to process, I don't even have time to die)
- Silence - confusion (not meant as oppositions, just connected with hyphen)
- War - hope of awakening
- Estrangement-turning towards... (... each other/ourselves/to God)
- Becoming a man
- Hidden family taboos, unspoken truths
- Death, accompanying somebody towards the end of life
- Death (meant as the closeness of death urges to face reality)
- Respect, dignity
- Censorship - self-censorship
- Taking responsibility
- Victim
- Decision about living - letting go
- The Decision - processing traumas
- Life as a value - depreciation/devaluation of life
- Stable core (those we can lean on)
- Women (there is no men without women)

We have consolidated these topics into the following four major themes:

- Estrangement from oneself and others
- Death - the value of life

- Family taboos, victims, sexual roles
- War, taking responsibility

### **Theme 1 - Estrangement from oneself and others**

Estrangement and alienation between the members of society is happening partly due to the current political scene.

One of the participants shared a story about planning a one-day ski trip with family and friends. Compared to the fact, that it was supposed to be a day-trip a long e-mail conversation was going on for 5 days. The participant had a comment "by the way who has invented this stupid democracy?" in the e-mail thread, but before posting it she was considering the recipients' political orientation. The political scene infiltrates everyday life in the form of jokes.

Another member shared her experience about how she tries to ascertain when talking to someone if she can talk about certain (politics-related) topics.

This does not apply to conversations among close friends, where she experiences safety, she knows about everybody's political orientation, but there she sees strong combats, and coalitions emerging. She shared a story about a birthday party, where they have ended up going as a group and signing a petition against Budapest organizing Olympic games. She has shared her feeling that action is needed to make an impact, as friend of her said "there is not going to be a change until the Parliament is on fire, and until it is on fire because of us".

A university student shared that he finds it very important, that real relationship, connection could be established between people, and this happens rarely. It is simply about creating an opportunity for people to meet each other and connect. This is exactly what he is doing when organizing the event-series, where university students can meet and talk.

Everybody having a smartphone is part of the causes. Everybody is having their phones in hand, even our parents do. He had resisted for a long time not to have a smartphone but now he owns one too.

Another participant has highlighted the difference in ways of communication among generations. She cannot have a conversation with someone from the younger generation without the other party having a constant contact with his/her phone. In order to avoid this with her friends sometimes they all agree, that they leave the phones in a basket while being together.

Having smartphones changes the life in other ways too. When this participant was a child they were the first ones to have landline phone in the street. Everybody came to them to use the phone, and they all had to wait a long time to get an answer, or to call them back. Now the answer from the other party is there in 10 seconds.

It raises the question if there is real processing of experiences, feelings. It is easy to release concerns and feelings after telling/writing to friends what has happened to me and then receiving a few smileys and likes instantly. But is there a real processing? She finds this as a big set-back in the quality in awareness and processing feelings, and in the quality of relationships.

There is no silence in her life, this also contributes to the drop in quality of processing experiences. Sometimes when she is in silence it comes in her mind how come she doesn't have at least her earphones in? She has a feeling like the connection to silence is lost.

Her weapon about these social impacts are the people around her, who dedicate attention to each other. If she needs support they are there for her, quality time is important. She is spreading this idea.

One of the participants told us his story about his winter holiday with his family how he has feeded the fire, which kept warm the entire house. This made him recognize that he needs to pay more attention on his family.

He has managed to find the way back to himself, after he has meditated and reached a level of misery he realized that he needs to find the way back to himself, he has strengthened and he deals with himself.

## **Theme 2 - Death - the value of life**

The topics related to death were brought in by four participants. One of the participants shared that because of recent personal experience she was preoccupied by the topic of how can a daughter support her mother while she cares for the grandmother in the family. 'How can you accompany the dying in the process of death in a way that both the dying person and the caregiver are present with dignity? And how to accompany someone who is caring for a dying person?'.

Another participant shared that his friend and mentor had passed away. He was at a point to make the decision to either travel to another country for the funeral or to stay at home and spend time with his family. 'With whom should I be, the dead or the living? I try to meet the expectations in several areas of my life,

however I should spend time with those who are still here with me. The parents are also only able to talk about their own life while they're still here.' He also mentioned his struggle to find/create the space and time for meaningful conversations. 'I'm always planning to have them [deep conversations], but I should allocate time for them, so these are let slip away. I experience alienation from death, passing and also from myself. I also alienate myself through fidgeting with my phone.'

One participant mentioned her father's experience who works as a monumental mason. 'In the previous generations it was unimaginable for someone not to have savings for their own funeral. Today the tendency is to go for the cheapest and simplest solution, e.g. ash scattering ceremony. People even outsource the accompaniment of the dying for money; some time ago this was unthinkable.'

Another participant brought in her thoughts concerning the devaluation of life. 'The culture of keeping animals is extremely poor. I feel that these lives are not valued anymore. And it seems like it's not only the animals, but also the elderly and people in old people's homes.'

### **Theme 3 - Family taboos, victims, sexual role**

The topic of family taboos was raised by one of the ladies. Her family lives in the house of the great-grandfather, who was a painter, and his memory is highly regarded in family. Some years ago, somebody has found the diary of this great-grandfather. After reading his diary it turned out that he was strongly antisemitist, and due to this her picture of her role model has collapsed.

Now her sister's husband is a jew-hater, and she takes and identifies herself with the role of the victim. Her interpretation is that this antisemitism has passed to her family and they carry this burden.

She has decided to move out from this victim-role, and she has found great support in a book that she is reading. The title is *The Decision* (Edith Eva Eger), and it is written by a holocaust-survivor.

By examining, reflecting on this situation she is looking for the answer for the question: How will someone be a victim? Her finding is that it is not an aggressor and a victim facing each other, but two children, and they are both victims.

She sees this being parallel of what happens in the society. Individually she has started to overcome this situation, but she is not convinced that this is happening on society-level as well.

This family has found one more diary, and this is how they know that the grandmother must host a Russian general, and once she has also hid a German soldier in the other room. She summed up as they were all humans, and they simply behaved as humans.

Another lady from the group has shared her thought about the world war, when several Russian soldiers have raped women, and that this fact is absolutely unprocessed emotionally.

She knows about a community existing in Vienna, it is called "Invaders' children", which was founded to emotionally process the fact that they were conceived this way. These people are now in their 40-50s.

In the village, where her grandmother lived there must have been several children who were conceived this way, but this was a taboo, the grandparents have taken these secrets to the grave. And there were no communities to process these burdens.

We are all affected as a young lady thought, it is as standard as owning a smartphone. Nobody is talking about it but it pops up again and again, because it is visible. If there are 4-5 children in a family it is visible who does not belong to the family by blood. It is known that there were home-made abortions among our grandparents. In a village everybody could see that the soldiers were in this house. It was also known that resistance or fight back had very hard even fatal consequences. These are treated as secrets, and there are very harsh confrontations to the 90-year old grandmothers.

Feminine values are becoming stronger in the society, there is a tendency to move from patriarchal to matriarchal society. The question is what is this society built on, while there are such unprocessed burdens?

A young boy finds that girls surrounding him are very good in any areas, while boys and men are struggling to find their role. It is difficult to find masculine values in a way that it is accepted by the girls as well. Our education is also strengthening feminism.

Another participant had a personal story about this topic. This lady was at home when it was snowing. By the time the husband came home she has cleared off the snow from the garage entrance. The husband argued about she taking away his job. A family house magnifies gender roles, which were not observable when living in a flat.

## **Theme 4 - War, taking responsibility**

The topic of war was mentioned by four of the participants mostly in the context of a possible dreaded future which might come around as a consequence of people not taking responsibility for their actions.

One participant shared that he had met one of his ex-groupmates from university and they were discussing the possibility of an impending war. '1912 was the year when everyone felt that they are in the golden age, and yet two years later millions of people massacred each other. Now there is a war-like rethorics. People say: we have many issues, but at least do not let it be war.' He also mentioned that they were also talking about the militartism of China and Russia.

Another participant shared that there was a funny mailing going on between her husband and his ex-fellow-soldiers as they had been planning a meeting after 30 years of leaving the army. She also commented that when she got to know the location of the meeting she thought 'This is also one of the cities where there is a shooting-range being built for children. This is scary.'

One participant shared his worries and beliefs regarding the future. 'What will happen if - in some years - our world, our society collapses? We'll declare war on each other, we'll be killing people, our ethics will be changed, but we'll still have to be humans. I believe that there is some sort of awakening. At the end God will still remain, and he will lead us. Transcendence... Finding myself.'

There was a participant who brought in the idea of war as a turning point, as a means to re-focus our attention. 'War must be very sobering. We're whipped out of estrangement and alienation. The question is: are we capable of being non-estranged without a war?'

## **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 "psychic" or 'internal' world. Their ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them. Participants were working in 2 subgroups, and they have defined 8 different hypotheses, although the main underlying themes of all hypotheses is estrangement (from oneself and others), sexual roles, taboos and taking responsibility.*

*The analysis has been distilled into the following hypotheses:*

**Analysis 1:** The members of society do not consider death as a natural phase of life, we have estranged from death. This generates constant anxiety in many of us, that can be experienced in silence. This is why we need that much noise. Since this estrangement is present, there is no turning towards each other, there is no silence either, which could help people to process their feelings about death.

Death and letting life go is becoming difficult in our lives as we are used to letting everything go, things are coming and going in this consumer society where everything is replaceable. This could be a cause and an effect as well. Might be that we are not able to handle and face death because we are socialized in this consumer society, and this is causing estrangement.

Since we don't accept death, we don't want to face the fact that it is part of life, we are escaping into noises, we are generating internal and external noises, and this is why we miss real confrontation even with ourselves.

These sub-topics are interrelated, hard to tell which one is the cause, which is the effect.

**Hypothesis 1:** Escaping to internal and external noises is happening because of not accepting death, and this leads to the absence of facing/confronting reality.

**Analysis 2:** Separation is a phenomenon which means a growing distance between the members of society and even internally, a distance within ourselves. It is related to taking responsibility, we don't have to take responsibility for each other if we declare that there is a large distance between us. We don't even take responsibility for ourselves, and saying we cannot help getting into a situation we are taking the role of a victim. Whatever the individual's position in society might be, the role of victim can be taken.

**Hypothesis 2:** Taking the victim's role is happening because there is no responsibility-taking leading to separation.

**Analysis 3:** There are plenty of unprocessed taboos (related to sexual roles) in front of our eyes. There are no attractive role-models, strong characters about how a man or a woman should be. There is nothing to relate-to. This is the reason why the members of society cannot become real men or women, and as a result being a man or a woman is becoming empty, contentless.

**Hypothesis 3:** Not becoming real men and women is happening because of the unprocessed taboos in front of our eyes leading the male and female principle to becoming contentless.

**Analysis 4:** The members of the society don't treat each other with respect and dignity, we experience that life becoming less and less valuable. We need to create stability around us and within ourselves to make sure if everything collapses this is there for us. We cannot expect to get external encouragement, and the world around us to provide the emotional stability we need. Members of the society desire emotional stability, and this is related to the radicalization. They need to have a strong core, a strong belief. A gap between the behaviour and the expressed beliefs is observable in the society as people cannot follow the too radical principles in their own everyday life.

**Hypothesis 4:** Respect/dignity is shaken or disappearing, this is happening because of the tendency of devaluation of life, leading to necessity for searching/creating a stable core.

**Analysis 5:** The majority of the people have been brought up in a safe environment, in an era in which they haven't personally experienced war or any kind of ekphrasis. As a consequence of not having experienced silence, war or life on a deeper level, a great emotional distance separates us from our real selves and we're occupied by superficial activities and relationships. People spend more and more time with their phones and gadgets which promise to enhance their relationships and thus involvement in society, however it does exactly the opposite: it strengthens their isolation and estrangement. As a result of the lack of real experience and more intensive alienation, people start 'playing with the fire' and can easily get carried away in their continuous search for more vivid and radical impulses.

**Hypothesis 5:** Since we don't have authentic, personal experience of ekphrasis, in members of the society there is a great emotional distance from the experience what could make us real (silence, death, life) therefore we take it easy and 'play with the fire'.

**Analysis 6:** In our society there are many unprocessed traumas (e.g. unspoken taboos, family stories of war, etc.). As people who are affected by these traumas are unable/do not want to face reality, they tend to turn their attention to the outer world instead of shifting their focus to their emotions, thoughts, feelings. Constantly searching for some diversion in their environment while ignoring the root-cause which is blocking their well-being might have two outcomes. Either the outwards focus with the unprocessed traumas and the unchanged behavioural patterns will re-generate smaller and bigger traumatic phenomena, or the individual reaches a point where the painful experience can be dealt with, thus initiating a process of self-reflection on working on/with the trauma.

**Hypothesis 6:** Since we are carrying unprocessed traumas which generate fear, we occupy ourselves with other things, what in turn either generates yet another trauma or induces a process of facing the reality.

**Analysis 7:** Members of the society do not dare to/are incapable/unwilling to take responsibility for their own past/present/future and also for that of others, they take up the victim's role. As people have the tendency to minimalise their own suffering they try to escape from this role, however they often do not have the appropriate tools/support/help for this. In many cases they find that the easiest way of stepping out of the victim's role is to turn the situation and take up the aggressor's role instead. This way they lessen their own vulnerability but as a result they generate more victims.

**Hypothesis 7:** Since people do not take responsibility, they take on the victim role from which they try to step out of; as a result of the role conflict they themselves become aggressors and create more victims.

**Analysis 8:** By experiencing higher and higher levels of estrangement and alienation in the society some people start looking for a stable group of people who share similar values and views, thus providing a sense of increased safety and decreased uncertainty. The people in these small communities and sub-groups of society help each other in achieving their goals and support each other therefore providing encouragement to not give up but to lead a valuable life.

**Hypothesis 8:** Since a segment of people has reached a boiling-point (a high level of estrangement in society), these members of the society strive for finding/establishing a stable core of like-minded people and by supporting each other together they opt for life.

**Conveners:** Tímea Ágota Tóth, Kinga Illyés