OPUS

An Organisation for Promoting Understanding of Society

LISTENING POST

Hungary at the Dawn of 2019

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.

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

In our case the composition of the group was somewhat heterogeneous in terms of age and profession, there were 4 university professors, 3 consultants, a programmer, 3 young fresh graduates, a pastor and a freelancer in tourism industry, altogether 13 people were participating including the convenors, who have taken a participant-researcher role.

This time was the first occasion that in the sharing part the chairs were randomly spread in the room, and we have skipped the participants' introduction part. We intended to emphasize with this, that the connection to each other is not relevant, and we are representing the society through our individual stories, from our several societal roles instead of sticking to one or a few roles shared in our personal introduction.

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.

Every participant had 5 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 in groups of 3-4. At the end each sub-group identified a few themes, and shared these with all of the participants.

The themes were as follows:

1. political situation
2. polarized society
3. social split/fragmentation/breach
4. lack of taking responsibility
5. young generation
6. gadgets (generation problem)
7. mistrust
8. internet
9. our addictions
10. exaggeration
11. relationships/connections
12. uncertainty regarding the future
13. existential uncertainty

Theme1 - Political situation

Politics was a frequently brought up topic, sharings were mostly around what to do with politics, how to relate to the current situation rather than around specific political questions.

Some shared the experience that they used to ignore politics, and recently they have started to follow the news and actual discussions. 'For the last 8-10 years I have tried to block myself from politics, but now this is broken through.' 'I am dealing with politics since there was this obstruction story. I nearly always followed the parliamentary broadcast, I also watched the live videos from the mass demonstrations.'

Other participants shared opposite experience, they try to ignore politics, or their connection to it. 'As a citizen I follow these situations less and less. I would like to think that I am modern, but I have to say that what we live in postmodernity, where you can never be sure what are the real facts.'

'Before, I used to be prepared for questions like "What do you do?" at class reunions. We had our 20th reunion and I was surprised by this question. I don't fit into these roles anymore. I have a feeling like these are not my politicians, not my anthem. … I am not concerned about politics, but much more about the risks of our monetary system.'

There were a few reflections about the mass demonstrations against the government, that were happening in December 2018 and the beginning of the year. 'As long as we call the demonstrations by nicknames (tüntetés often referred to as tünti), nothing will change. … Recently I have heard about initiatives to change our anthem, as it is reinforcing the old patterns and draws the same stories from time to time over the history.'

Theme 2 - Polarized society; Theme 3 - social split/fragmentation/breach

Several contributions were around the topic of social polarization, social fragmentation. The shared experiences highlight two aspects of the same phenomenon.

On one hand many of the participants reported about a stronger focus on oneself, creating a pleasant environment around themselves. Some associated this shift in focus with their roles - 'focus is shifting more and more inwards. In my external roles I am more and more uncertain' - while others emphasized the physical manifestation of their internal experience - 'I'm doing yoga for 1.5 years now, and i have moved in with my

girlfriend - this also physically embodies my ambition to create an inner harmony.'

Two of the participants shared their thoughts in relation to their religion. 'I feel inner peace (quietude), and the source of this is my connection with God and my stable marriage. I feel gratitude every day when I wake up for having this standard of living, which many people are lacking.' 'For me there is a clear inner path as a Christian, the child of God, however the difficult situations of everyday life - conflicts, going to work - get to me too. For example when one of the siblings turn out to have cancer - then what happens to the others? I am grateful, and if I'm thinking in the long run, I know my life is in good hands.'

On the other hand there were several remarks about how do we individually experience the process - the phenomenon of polarization - together with its difficulties. The current political situation also emerged as a topic here - some shared how they feel the belonging to one or an other party is represented as polarities in society. 'On 8th April [date of the election in Hungary] we made a decision with my husband that we are staying and that we continue building this bubble (values, friends, family) around ourselves, which we have started. Then a thought came that we might not benefit from this bubble on the short/medium term, as we'll become invalid in work, in the shop, etc.' 'It frustrates me that there is no freedom of media. I try to lift fanaticism and I have discussions with my fanatical friends.' 'Society is being torn apart due to Facebook and things like that. The TV is on in lots of places, etc... Lot of people unplug themselves from the propaganda and they look into themselves. Because of the internet everyone can reach what [information] they want. Society seems to be torn apart. Tougher and tougher situations arise when these groups of people meet.'

One participant shared various polarities of their life. 'I've grown into the role of the intellectual - I'm the first child with a degree in the family. There is duality in my family (at home) values, role and in my life in Budapest, how I live my life every day. The gap is getting even wider. I have a desire for both my family values and for my urban self. There is ample freedom, but it's hard as well... Which is the good choice? It's not only the parents living in the countryside and me living in the city but also the difference between generations. While my grandma has lived a whole life together in a room with her adopting parents because of the war, I already had my own flat when I was 18.'

Some participants not only felt that the society is divided, but also shared their preoccupation with the phenomena that the government is creating the picture of a common enemy by scapegoating.

'I usually have discussions with those who are on the right wing, to lift this brainwashedness a bit.' 'As for political comments... How is it possible to paint such an extreme picture about other groups, people? Sometimes I read comments which are on a whole different level - ignorance is huge. How can anyone communicate so aggressively? Society is torn in half. Some are more self-reflective, more assertive; others are spiteful and this is how they gratify themselves. How can we move forward from this?'

'After Christmas we visited distant relatives. In ordinary days I hardly see anyone who is thinking in a radically different way than I do, and there [during the visit] I was in minority. How should I handle this? Either I listen their yakking well-known from the propaganda with contempt or I share my own point of view. This is like breach/disunity... What's more important for me - sustaining the relationship or standing for my point of view? I didn't stand for what I believe in.' 'There is even duality in the family... I even

invoke the reaction with my bare presence.'

Theme 4 - Lack of taking responsibility

Several participants shared their preoccupations around the topic of taking responsibility, mainly on societal level. There was one sharing about taking responsibility for the young generation: 'I listen to slam poetry where the young generation's opinion is a topic. I have a feeling that we shift off responsibility, like we couldn't help them being like they are.'

Most of the contributions around this topic were concerned about taking responsibility for our own future: 'There are more and more discussions about our anthem, how sad it is, do we have to still moan so much, it would be time to change it.'

There was again a remark about the contrast how society want change in politics, and many calling mass demonstrations by nickname 'As long as we call them "tünti" [a nickname for "demonstration"] the change is a long way'.

'With the help of technology we obtained everything from the fairy tales. The magical objects are around us, but people haven't yet realized this. We have internet in our pocket, that bears all knowledge of the globe, yet people use internet for watching cat videos.'

A participant could connect to this topic on individual level and shared how the victim role was shifting in her family 'Half of my life was about keeping silent in my family, because of my different opinion. Now I got the thought that maybe the victim isn't me but it's them or both of us.'

Theme 5 - Young generation; Theme 6 - Gadgets (generation problem); Theme 7 - Mistrust

From their different social roles participants shared their view and concerns regarding the younger generations. In this part of the sharing, other topics, like the excessive usage of gadgets and mistrust among students also arose, and these also seem to be connected to the theme of younger generations.

First one participant shared their general experience regarding youth. 'I am preoccupied with the rising generation - I teach in two grammar schools. Apart from 1-2 good examples, what I see is very saddening.'

Then some thoughts were shared related to way people use their phones and other IT accessories. 'There is another bubble within the family. They use these gadgets far more than I do. Whether am I excluding myself or are they excluding me? I have lonely moments... whose responsibility is that - theirs or mine? I know that I should connect, but I'm not interested in that, I should force myself... and they don't realise that they are abandoning me. The same is happening on a large scale what is happening on a small scale.'

One participant brought in their dilemma regarding the future of their work. 'If this generation is so fanatic about gadgets, then how long will my profession - which is the trainer profession - exist, and what is my role in this - to adapt or to prove that connecting through gadgets is not the same.'

Lack of trust was also a topic commented on during the sharing. One participant shared their own experience as a university student. 'It's not easy anymore to establish a group of friends at the university, therefore we have created something new, a community (e.g. volunteers), however in reality we were seeking friends. The question emerges - Are hey my friends or it's only the subject at hand which holds us together? Although we are looking for friends, we don't trust each other.' Another participant shared their point of view from the role of a university lecturer. 'I feel sorry for the students - there's a high degree of freedom and they don't know what to do with it. The most shocking is how little they trust each other. Maybe to the degree of sharing notes, yes. After this, how can I expect from them to trust me, a teacher. I have to fight to gain their trust in the first year. There's empathy in me for them, however there's also massive incomprehension.'

Theme 8 - Internet; Theme 9 - Our addictions

Two of the more minor themes are that of the internet and that of addictions. These are related, as the topic of addiction emerged - although not exclusive to, but with a strong emphasis on online, virtual or IT platforms and equipment.

One participant stated how important, he felt, the freedom/accessibility provided by the internet was. 'For 15 years I don't have a TV. I feel fortunate, because instead of spending my time in front of a medium [television] which is edited for me by others, I get to follow a medium [the internet] that I can edit for myself.'

Another participant shared how he was trying to break out of the online world. 'I am also very addicted to my gadgets. We created a SmartDetox programme with my fellow university students, to get offline. It is paradoxically based on a Facebook group. We share knowledge and post challenges.'

Theme 10 - Exaggeration

This theme was brought up by two of the participants, both times connected to work and the current employment situation in Hungary. The first thought represents how employees are gaining more and more negotiating power over employers. 'I sense a commotion related to workplaces. The lack of human resources should drive organisations to appreciate their employees and to pay attention to them, however anyone who has two arms and two legs gets hired. This year 2 of the theses I judged had employee satisfaction as a main topic. It seems like we have tipped over a point... let's stop for a minute, we're not going to our workplaces to party. It's like the point of creating value with our work is fading.'

Another aspect was that of a to-be employee, someone, who is on the lookout for a new job. 'Is any workplace worth going from interview to interview for months? I have to make a display of myself, then I should feel privileged when they hire me.'

Theme 11 - Relationship/connections

The topic of relationships, human connections were touched in several context, on one hand disappointment of empty relationships was expressed, but on the other hand stories about the importance of creating and maintaining real relationships were also shared.

Two contributions were around the topic of dating: 'The depersonalization of dating makes me preoccupied. Tinder is used by many to swipe left or write while sitting on the toilet. This is very disappointing and superficial.' 'I got to know a girl back in September, it was a superficial acquaintance, then we connected on Facebook and we were up to meet in December. On the day we wanted to meet she called me saying that she is on a mass demonstration, and if I was ok to join her. She already told her friends that this is a date-demonstration (randi-tünti). At the end we spent some time together on the demonstration, we had a good talk, it was ok. It turned out to be some kind of friendship. When we met next time she came with her boyfriend.'

Another participant has shared her preoccupation of this phenomena on a societal level: 'I cannot identify myself with the role I really take in the society. I have a picture of myself as I am reasonable man, but currently not all information is available, facts are distorted and I feel I cannot call myself a reasonable man. I often see myself as I am trying emotionally keep distance of what is surrounding me. I have a feeling that I self-defensively lock up myself. I have a feeling of emptiness. Sometimes I have a thought that I only get so passionate about something (yoga, politics) to fill this emptiness. Some of us even plays with the thought of not filling this emptiness and simply spend our days in mindfulness.'

A participant shared her concern about the lack of personal connection in recruitment: 'Why do I have to make a display of myself? After 6 rounds of interviews I should feel honoured to get an offer. It would be so much better to have a real talk and after that both of us could see whether there is connection or not.'

Participants has shared both personal and societal level stories about the importance existence of real connections: 'Recently I had a very difficult life situation, and it showed me that I can count on many of my friends' ; 'It is important for me to create possibilities for people to have real connections - like get together for sledge ride. This gives me power from day to day to get up and go on.' A participant shared a story about a community collaboration that amazed him 'People raised enough money to carry out the research and testing of a new drug without any company or state capital'.

Theme 12 - Uncertainty in/about the future; Theme 13 - Existential uncertainty

Participants has shared several preoccupations that reflect great uncertainty. In the theme identification part two themes around this were named: one of them was phrased as "uncertainty in/about the future' and the other one as 'existential uncertainty'.

Some of the shared preoccupations about the future were more on a societal level: 'I read the political comments and I am concerned, what is going to happen here?'

'I am interested about the topic of mixing European and Muslim cultures. I have made some readings about eh Muslim culture, and I found scary the possible outcomes of mixing these two cultures. My interpretation is that it isn't us who will come out as a winner at the end'.

'I am concerned that the financial system will collapse. In a Budapest sized city nourishment would run out in 5 days. The question arises, what am I doing in the city? If these 5 days passes it is going to be to late to think about this.'

'I have a depressing feeling, not only here but in my everyday life as well'

Other participants has also shared their feeling of uncertainty, more on a personal, existential level. Two women has shared their preoccupations related to the existential aspects of being single:

'I am concerned about the support that I can expect from the society as a single woman without children over 40. Related to this the quality of the public healthcare system is also worrying, I have to go to a private doctor if I really have a problem'.

'As a single woman I have no chance to own a flat because of the incredibly high prices. Recently I got to know a 32-year-old guy, he lives with his family, as he cannot afford to move out. He should have taken a mortgage 8 years ago, now it is impossible. Young people cannot move out from home, even renting a room is expensive, renting a flat is hardly affordable'.

'My mother has diabetes for 20 years, I researched alternative ways of healing diabetes. With my help she got significantly better in 3 months and the improvement was radical in 8 months. This experience made me think about the healthcare system governed by law. There are ways of healing, that are illegal but they really do help. Recently I had a disturbing experience, two of my friends that are good people and did not make any harm were arrested over the drug laws.'

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.

Participants were working in 2 subgroups, and they have defined 6 different hypotheses, although the main underlying themes of all hypotheses is estrangement (from oneself and others), addictions and uncertainty, anxiety.

The analysis has been distilled into the following hypotheses:

Analysis 1: If there would be a real emergency situation, starving, or war people would fight each other for survival instead of cooperation. Real connection and caring for each other is missing from the society, this might be the cause why people experience uncertainty. They cannot expect support and help from their environment. This continuous existential uncertainty, feeling insecure makes people escape reality and get addicted to certain things, for instance widgets. The question is how and why did it become so difficult for the members of the society to get connected to each other. The group found the deeper underlying reason is the damaged primal trust / mother relation. Although this topic was not specifically mentioned in the sharing section (part1), the group agreed that this is the best reason they can find.

Hypothesis 1: Since the primal trust / mother relation is damaged we are looking for external reinforcement and this is not expected from a human, we rather grab the first opportunity. Members of the society have addiction for instance to gadgets (or anything that can give the desired reinforcement), and as a result we live even more isolated and in fear/anxiety.

Analysis 2: Working does not fill any more all of our time, there is more time we can use for information consumption. In addition to this, the 'cost' of gathering information became marginal, so those who would like to, can have access to a wide variety of information. The consequence on one hand is that there are several different views about what is the truth, what is right, several different truth models are coexisting, and like-minded people can easily connect and multiply, enhance the ideas. This is causing a split in the society.

There is one other major consequence of this high information volume. There is too much emotional impulse coming with the information, and members of the society are distracting themselves to allow only as much emotion as they are still able to handle. This is why people are still sensitive on an individual level, but became insensitive on a societal level.

Hypothesis 2: Because of the more intense information flow, the (emotional) stimulus became too much, members of the society cannot handle this level of information, and as a self-defensive mechanism their stimulation threshold is heightened. Resulting in exaggerated stimulus (sent and received) when it comes to competing for attention.

Analysis 3: A participant found that an important dynamic, that more and more people get to know and have access to new ways of healing themselves with psychedelics. The group could connect to the topic, and shared their healing experiences that were only briefly mentioned in the sharing section. We could conclude, that there are several ways how members of the society can search for mental and physical well-being. The easy access to platforms for sharing success stories makes it easy to spread the word of working solution. When the hypothesis was shared with the other sub-group we realized, that these solutions are only those that are serving the real and deep healing and development, but also short-term happiness-boosters, so the last part of this hypothesis is understood as a positive scenario.

Hypothesis 3: The more primal trust is damaged, members of the society look for recovery the more. The result is that the coping strategies that work are spreading, and the society can heal through its members.

Analysis 4: In today's fast paced environment there is an abundance of stimuli and information, which also increases the degree of perceived freedom and the number of options in a given situation. On one hand people can feel lost between the possibilities and their options, on the other hand they reach their limits in terms of processing so much stimuli and information. One of the

defense mechanism of individuals is to simplify their view of the surrounding world by creating categories and to reduce the complexity of the environment so that it is possible to put every phenomena/object/people into one of these categories. As a result of individuals over-simplifying their experience of the world, members of the society tend to shift towards extremes and thus society becomes polarised.

Hypothesis 4: As the amount of freedom/possibilities/options/information invoke the feeling of 'too much' (overwhelming complexity), the need for simplification (labelling, reductionism) arises in the members of the the society therefore they start to over-simplify/think black and white/apply binary thinking, as a consequence of which society becomes more and more polarised.

Analysis 5: Individuals are concerned and uncertain about the future and have existential fear (How will I survive? How will society support me in tough situations? Am I alone? What will happen to my job as a result of everything going digital?). In this time of uncertainty topped with their fear people have a stronger and stronger need for someone or something that is guiding them, so when a stark ideology or message is presented, they are more willing to become a follower, as this provides them with a sense of stability - something to turn to. Due to this they are more easily influenced or steered in certain directions by politics, the media and by central powers. These phenomena might contribute to the polarisation and fragmentation of society.

Hypothesis 5: As there is uncertainty in people's minds, members of the society experience existential fear and they mistrust each other. As a consequence, it is easier for the higher authorities (e.g. politicians, media, central powers) to influence/steer/control them.

Analysis 6: Individuals have difficulty facing or do not want to face their own reality (Who am I and what am I like compared to others), they are trying to avoid this confrontation by diverting their attention from the outer world and/or from themselves for example creating profiles on social media which contain highly edited pictures and information, shifting from personal contact to online presence, using drugs, or escaping into the world of (video/computer) games. The constant avoidance of one's confrontation of reality might push the individual into an addiction to the new and main focus of their attention.

Hypothesis 6: Because the individual doesn't want to face their own reality, they are trying to escape the reality and members of society turn their attention away from the outer world and/or themselves and as a consequence of constantly avoiding facing the real world they become addicted to their new focus of attention (e.g. games, phones/tablets/gadgets, drugs...).

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