



An Organisation for Promoting
Understanding of Society

LISTENING POST

Ireland 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.

This year, the convenors of the Ireland Listening Post: "Ireland and the World at the Dawn of 2019" changed the venue. The new venue was also in the city centre, in a community resource centre known in the psychotherapeutic and community-based communities. The venue, the convenors felt, would provide more comfort for the increasing numbers of participants who had been attending in the last few years.

However, only one third of those who booked a place attended this year's Global Listening Post. A significant number of that third were new to the Listening Post process, many attending had travelled long distances to be there and for two participants who went to the former building, being present entailed a two kilometre dash across the city centre to arrive on time.

The convenors thought about how change, albeit for the best motives, always brings unintended consequences. Dislocation and newness bring us face to face with the unfamiliar and an unknowingness. The attending group came together and worked with commitment and candour to think, relate and speak on behalf of the whole.

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

Part One opened with a member saying how the recent violent deaths of a number of women in the last week in Ireland have been on her mind. She

expressed her concern about what might be going on and how we are relating to each other.

This was followed by a member who spoke about organisational and institutional change: increased collective responsibility and a move away from the authoritative structures that we have had.

How can we manage tasks in the context of the unknown of how things will evolve? It's hard to know what is happening with Brexit and Trump. When society looks back in 100 years on this period, will it compare with the time when Hitler came to power? "How can we think about a future that we can't even imagine? "There are big question marks over everything for example our values".

It's a time of uncertainty. Everything has changed. Young people are better educated, are more open, more tolerant. The majority of the young in Britain who voted in their referendum did not vote for Brexit. "What will their future be like and what can you do to support young people when you don't know what lies ahead."

There is a generational discord when you see what happened with the younger voters in Britain voting 'Remain'.

Is there more violence now, more violence against women?

It frustrates me how quickly we are expected to have an opinion on things. I feel out of sync and a bit conflicted about this. Should I make judgements more quickly? My experience is that people who do are also very quick to assign actions to values, they go on to act more quickly and they get things done more quickly. So, should I also?

It seems like our response or judgement has to be black or white. I'm afraid that having a nuance can be interpreted as being, for example, racist. Is it better to choose to say nothing?

How polarised life has become - How quick we are to jump to judgement - to one side or the other, fueled by slogans, headlines and social media.

Brexit and Trump are polarising which manifests in a lack of power. We might think that everything is okay, we're all going along thinking that everything is okay. But what happens when the disenfranchised unite and become cohesive- the voice of people who felt left out. That really challenges me.

Why are we talking about things happening outside Ireland?

I think we are very affected by what happens outside Ireland. We've opened ourselves up to globalisation and we are feeling the effects.

The border (with Northern Ireland) - how peace can be challenged as a consequence of Brexit. Is blame and dissatisfaction going to be projected over the border?

There is a theme of dislocation. I came early to this event and wandered into the Carmelite Church next door. It is really beautiful. I believe that it is the home to a relic of St Valentine. I'm thinking we have beautiful buildings like this and what they represent.

Trump has disrupted post war containment in the EU and the middle east. Brexit has disrupted the EU. Trump speaks to the disenfranchised and by so doing disrupts the equilibrium. I am wondering where it ends up? What is this country going to look like?

Only one third of those expected turned up to the Phoenix Park to see the Pope this year. There were photos and images on television and in the papers showing all the empty seats.

We are a modern country but scratch the surface - what remains underneath? What is being unleashed?

Another hotel which was earmarked as a direct provision center was burned down last night. Was it linked to the Far Right?

The 'containers' that we have had post second world war are being challenged.

Where are we? What about our own savagery in the civil war (97 years ago) - how will we remember the Centenary in three years' time?

We are so concerned about borders and ethnic groups - but our planet is so vulnerable. I heard today about magnetic fields shifting towards Russia. Micro and macro borders - why do we have to have borders? The axis is shifting - perhaps borders provide a sense of control that we don't have in the physical planet.

Borders, boundaries and relationships and getting things done. All the stuff being played out on a world stage, but they are just turf wars between people and groups. All the gatekeepers who are not prepared to share. How can people work together to the benefit of local, regional and national interests? Look at the leaders - who has the courage to call it? If the message isn't what is wanted can it be said or heard?

Boris Johnson was in Dublin recently and got so much coverage on national media not because of the substance of his message but because of his celebrity status.

Would Theresa May be talked about in the way she is if she was a man? It seems as if women who put their heads about the parapet to be leaders get their heads chopped off, for example, Nóirín O Sullivan (a previous Garda Commissioner), Frances Fitzgerald (previous Minister for Justice) and Mary Robinson (a previous President).

Men are expected to do strokes, women aren't.

It's hard to make change. Women are not given the same latitude as a man. Men have an extra punch. Men cover for men, women don't pull for women. We hang women out to dry if they are not perfect. Men don't have to be perfect.

Who is 'they'?

Women don't have the same history to work from.

There is not the same reverence for women leaders such as Markievicz. The sacrifices the wives of the men of 1916 such as Sinéad De Valera made is not recognised or valued.

Despite the huge shift it's still hard to see how it will be for our daughters. There is still a lack of value to the gender differences, particularly the nurturing role. We have different perspectives – how do they both get included?

The impending nursing and midwifery strike is an example of how the nurturing piece hasn't been valued as much as number crunching.

Men have also been forced into roles. They have been thrown into being the breadwinner. Now everyone is being forced into the same roles of work and education. The rearing of children is now outsourced. My mother had no choice: she couldn't work because of the marriage ban but my children also have no choice, they will have to work, each young parent will have to work.

My husband worked part-time to take a lead role rearing the children. This choice shouldn't be devalued. He shouldn't be considered any less of a man.

The women leaders mentioned earlier (who put their heads above the parapet) weren't members of political parties or groups. The men mentioned were members of political parties or groups. Men strategise.

Did you know that the word strategy comes from the army?

But if you are a member of a cultural group, you're in the middle of it, it's your group and it feels right.

There has been such an emphasis in recent times on governance and GDPR - governance which is accepted and GDPR which is resisted. GDPR feels like a heavy grid coming down - as if it is going to improve something.

What's happening to our data we don't know about?

Is there something about GDPR that is bringing something to the forefront – a wish to future proof?

But the introduction of GDPR was for a good aim. Interestingly Ireland is taking GDPR very seriously, much more than other EU states. We've been very compliant over GDPR.

Perhaps our capacity to take on GDPR in Ireland has some connection with our acknowledgement of the abuse that happened in the institutions in the past and a recognition that we are all capable of being abusive and violent towards others.

Perhaps it represents something of a need for self-defence - If we can anticipate and plan to protect against certain behaviours instead of dealing straightforwardly and addressing what has and is being done.

Rather than talk about it, we put in rules so we don't have to – so we can distance ourselves from bad behaviour. How do we talk about our own capacity to not behave?

There are homeless children NOW and yet we are obsessing over dead babies. We prefer to wallow in the past. We will commemorate and yet we won't ensure that children now get the support they need. There is abuse now.

But the meeting of the women of the Magdalene Laundries in Áras an Uachtaráin hosted by the President last year gave them a voice, was very powerful and needed to be done.

In ten years time we will be talking about the homelessness that exists now.

Rules and Regulation vs what needs to be done -1000s of children are homeless.

All the Tribunals – look at the costs. We need to prevent abuse and deal with current abuses that are happening.

Are we now embarrassed? What are we doing now that we will be embarrassed about in the future for example - the Direct Provision service we provide to Asylum Seekers; the way Travellers are treated. I wonder what other countries think of us?

The world I live in is far more complex than what I have heard here. All my bosses are women, Angela Merkel and Theresa May are leaders of nations. I passed by the early stages of the building of the new Children's Hospital and it is amazing and complex – 6/7 cranes sky high and I felt so proud of the hospital. It is on its way, it is happening. That is the other side of things. The criticism of overspend is unwarranted.

We can build a fabulous new hospital but it's the people who will work there who need valuing.

The solution is not to get rid of men but to value men and women.

We see these as Irish problems - I understand that the homelessness situation in New Zealand is currently worse than Ireland. A lot of the issues are global not just Irish. I don't know where we stand internationally vis a vis abuse. So much of the abuse that happens in Ireland is caught up in deference.

Perhaps it is easier not to deal with it. We are all capable of violence and hate.

This is our first year of abortion being available in Ireland and already there is trouble making and it's getting personal. In Galway there was a demonstration outside a clinic that stopped an abortion.

There has been a call to ban protest at the clinics. The referendum which won the right to repeal the eight amendment and introduce abortion was such a seismic shift and it was so polarised. It was difficult to be in the middle ground and the issues or nuances raised by the middle group weren't addressed. There are still conversations that need to happen.

I had really interesting conversations with people before the referendum. I remember I had one car journey with someone who held the opposing view to me. However, it was so interesting and illuminating to have such a great opportunity to be with someone who held different views and talk about it.

I was active in the campaign to repeal the 8th amendment and I also had great conversations with people about the nuances and the doubts and the clarities about why they were voting.

Now abortion is real life and more mutual understanding is needed rather than polarisation. One third of the population voted to retain the 8th Amendment.

I'm aware that the end of Part One is approaching - and I need to say that my overarching pre-occupation is that as a species we are in trouble. We have to find ways to save the planet. Unless we learn how to collaborate rather than compete or at least come to some place in between, we are in trouble.

There are contradictions about the consumption of goods - I was looking into the window of the Patagonia (outdoor pursuits) shop the other day. I was thinking that when we used to go walking, we used to just put on our oldest clothes. Now we can spend a fortune on outdoor clothes and the company (Patagonia) presents itself as environmentally concerned.

But Patagonia has been leading campaigns for decades. I was involved recently in a campaign and a lot of middle ground was found between generations and neighbours. It seems so much easier to fall into the black and white polarised places. You hear that Europe is falling apart and moving to the right, but the Green's are the most popular political party in Germany and the President of France is very pro the European Union. What do we fuel by putting things into two camps?

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.

In Part Three of the Listening Post, while the group was not able to form an agreed hypothesis, the following were the main themes and discussion points.

While there have been notable changes recently in Irish society that indicate an increase in openness and accountability, (such as a sense of an increased collective responsibility and a move away from the authoritative structures; campaigns such as to Repeal the 8th Amendment of the Constitution to allow for abortion; acknowledgement of the abuses of the past such as the apology to the women who worked in the Magdalene Laundries), we are feeling increasingly anxious, insecure, and uncertain about where society is going.

We worry about those who feel disenfranchised by the changes and campaigns and their capacity to unify and mobilise for action.

We are still shocked at how Ireland seems to tolerate homelessness, violence against women, our treatment of children, asylum seekers, refugees and Travellers and wonder how will we be judged in 100 years.

We are still held captive, but by different systems, for example, globalisation brings us so much information and has such an impact, that it is difficult to know how, when and if to act; while the marriage ban (where women on marriage had to leave work) no longer exists, both parents feel forced to work outside the home in order to provide enough for their families.

We are scared, particularly for our children, about the increasing threat to our planet by our seemingly unlimited consumerism, despite the massive campaigning, publicity and work to improve the planet's survival potential.

In a desire to be considerate, responsible and nuanced in our thinking rather than taking up adversarial polarised positions in which there are winners and losers, do we risk being left behind by leaving judgement to others who take action quickly and with ease and so advance their positions?

The sheer speed and amount of campaigns and issues that are brought to our attention and the headlines through which they are presented, can distract us and make it hard to think and to respond thoughtfully and responsibly with the result that we can feel paralysed.

So with all of the changes and developments, including globalisation, increased information flow, the decrease in borders and increase in movement, and conversely the potential hardening of other borders, nationalism and threat to freedom of movement, we can feel unsure, overwhelmed or even paralysed about taking personal and collective responsibility and action.

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