



An Organisation for Promoting
Understanding of Society

LISTENING POST

Serbia 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.

The LP started by one participant saying that it felt as if society was making the boundaries, whereas we could do so much more if those boundaries were not among us. Another participant was reminiscing of the social dreaming matrix, held prior to the workshops, and the dream that described a species of a rare shrimp which became extinct in reality, and in a dream they were half-shrimp/half-cockroach. She said it made her sad that something so rare could survive only if it bred with something so repulsive such as a cockroach; as if you have to taint yourself in order to survive. Somebody else said that the division to good and evil was in the dream erased. Another participant remembered that a friend of hers sent her recently a recording of a video clip from Ecuador, where native tribes were dancing, and how she thought at the moment - what a wonderful, crazy plant this was. Another thought followed immediately that nobody remembered to create a Facebook cover for the victims of Yemen, as they did after the events with the Charlie Hebdo. We do carry true, ancient good within ourselves, which is under pressure, and maybe it would come to the surface at one point, the participant said.

The mentioned dream reminded another participant to the recently extinct species, and it made him think of the fears for the survival of the nation. The participant dreaded while listening to the news about the number of people leaving the country (brain drain), and how difficult it was for the young to start a family life independently. Then another voice brought the group back to the topic of species that were being extinct as we spoke. Somebody said that survival required sacrifice. Then, another voice added that while some species were becoming extinct, another ones were being created – something has

to die so that something new can become alive. People allow to annihilate themselves inside while being alive, as if they were dead inside while they are alive; they have to decide for themselves and to try to find an inner child, for example, the participant said, I started meditating again; she continued that we have to return to ourselves and to give a hug to ourselves first. Another participant stepped in saying that he had a rock band called 'Bad Weather', he continued saying that there was such love inside the band members which they cannot bring out, and it felt as if they were walking in chains. In spite of that feeling, they continue playing, not giving up, knowing that somebody might always come to put them down.

Then, a new voice said that she was searching herself, her identity, and in that search she had attended a number of Reflective Citizens gatherings, which helped her open many new paths, and helped her realise we were not alone. Another participant associated on the word tribe, mentioned earlier; he said that he remembered the word primitive, and also remembered the late V. Jerotić who always wondered why we called those societies primitive. The participant said that while studying he met a lot of cockroaches, which was repulsive, and that the repulsive part was called survival. One of the conductors noted that the hideous, repulsive cockroaches maybe representing beggars, some people that we rejected, some nations we rejected - a man was a cockroach to man - or perhaps it was a part of being a human.

Then another participant remembered stories about ancient times, and the passing of different societies. Another one remembered another event where the topic of finding valuable things in garbage was mentioned, that there was a lot of effort made in trying to find something valuable in something which was thrown away. Somebody noticed that escaping into non-material was very present, and then an association came that possibly it had something to do with the concept of Reflective Citizen which was conducted free of charge.

A participant remembered history, and how our people was moving, migrating on large scale, and how it was described in famous novels such as the novel 'Migrations', by Crnjanski. Then, a participant said that people were leaving Serbia and Kosovo nowadays. Another voice brought to the group an image of a beach, filled with leftovers of glass and garbage, which the Mother Nature recycled into beautiful things. Then a participant continued that we have such a strong wish to ruin the lives of tribes, missionaries were sent to them, and even though the intention might have been good, it would be better to leave them alone. Then a participant shared a story about her colleague, a psychiatrist, who worked for many years in Africa, and South America, in Peru. She remembered him as an open-minded colleague, very hardworking colleague She met him recently on the street, and he shared with her that even though he was a pensioner, he had to continue working and travelling to those distant places because he could not support himself and the family on his pension.

Another participant said that last year scientists found traces of plastic in human body and many animals, and noticed that the things we threw away returned to us. Then, a participant wondered how much a person who was 40 years old was able to take care of his/her family and aging parents in present social conditions, saying that we often criticize without thinking about social responsibility. The old age was something ahead of all of us, and that's our reality - having to have a difficult old age, a participant noticed. However, another voice said that she disagreed that it was our reality, and said that it was unacceptable to her that we all agreed on that. Somebody else said that many people in our society were focused on material gain only, and wondered how we could

create an emancipated citizen, when people often say to their children to study so as to earn a university diploma only because it means a possibility for getting a job and leaving the country to work abroad. In other countries people learn to contribute to their own societies. Another voice said that many things in our life were a matter of choice, motivator and willingness, and highlighted that according to her it was a matter of choice and a matter of what made us move. A participant said that elderly people do live in very difficult economic situation, having to survive with only 150 EUR a month, and also many people who worked earn some 150 EUR a month, which was our tragic reality.

From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes:

1. Boundaries between us and the others; what is necessary so that we could tolerate the other
2. Inner strengths for overcoming walls, boundaries, how to find an individual's place in a group
3. Money and the lack of it; freedom the money gives and the need for freedom in general
4. Resilience and adaptation, how to overcome difficulties and envy towards those who resist and persevere
5. Reality and escapism, what are the places we resort to (our safe oasis and shelters)
6. Togetherness / how to be together amidst real social difficulties / how to build local communities and be socially responsible
7. Harmonization and integration

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: Resilience in overcoming harsh realities exists among us

Reality around is so difficult to endure. There was an image of migrants who had to eat insects in order to survive. Also, there was an image of children in hospitals, who watched through the hospital windows the city authorities' spending money on Christmas decorations adorning the streets – it is hurtful to citizens to watch it. There are so many hardships, which are making us helpless and envious. Also, we are aware of a number of other voices - extremist voices that exist out there. However, some citizens claimed there are more positive than negative things around us, and there was a highlighted need to find inner strength to see both the good and bad in ourselves and in others.

Hypothesis 2: Social responsibility is crucial in bringing about change

Change starts within us, inside of us and without changing ourselves and taking the responsibility, the society around us would not change. We need to be realistic when acting in bringing about social changes, we need to persevere and start cleaning our own yard, garbage first (a biologist said that cockroaches have an important function in ecosystem – they are cleaners). Oscillation between the reality we live in and reality we create through escapism brought to the surface the lyrics of a well-known pop song – this is our house, the house for all our children. Once a safe space for dialogue is created, it is possible to see both good and bad, and even the bad can be something that moves us towards change, once we are able to look at it in a responsible way.

Hypothesis 3: Finding strength in togetherness and sharing of knowledge is possible

It is necessary that we integrate issues within ourselves, while being aware that apathy stands in our way. Finding ways of being together through safe oasis and safe shelters can help, as well as help people spend their time in a more constructive way. The gatherings such as the Reflective Citizens are an opportunity to think freely and to express oneself freely. There is a wish for social change, however we need to think also how to talk to little extremists within ourselves. There is a need to bring more free dialogue to institutions. However, not many people want to take a constructive role of one who moves things, taking on the responsibility for convening spaces for open dialogue. We need to be ok with having different opinions, and not having to have a joint conclusion. There should be freedom of acceptance and giving right to being different. There is a need to rebel against heritage, and develop it further (reference was made to a dream about sending parents to a psychiatrist). Knowledge and experience give us the right kind of freedom, also the feeling of togetherness liberates.

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