International Listening Post 2013 – Lamezia Terme (South Italy)

Participants have been invited according some predefined criteria. The criteria are as following; some of the participants have attended a Listening Post before, some of the participants work in different subsystem of the organisation; male and female; young and older, employed for a long time; members of organisational boards; from different professional background and some who are not members of the organisation.

According to age four participants were below 30 years old and six between 35 and 47 years old.

Almost all the participants arrived on time, in fact the Listening Post started with 10 minutes delay that has been made up with a shorter time for break. The conversation started immediately and there was a high degree of participation. Young people participated very actively. Only one person spoke once (he is a cultural mediator). The conclusion of the last part led to few minutes of silence.

Part I

Emerging preoccupations and experiences

We live in a time of preoccupations regarding the future; nothing is like 20 years ago. Preoccupations are expressed both at individual and societal levels. The current situation is asking for mobilising mechanisms that help resisting the societal dynamics. However it is very difficult to resit to today's dynamics and at the same time hoping for a future and making it happening. The youngest members of society underline how their generation has started to resist long time ago and their preoccupation is not to get too much used to a position of resistance. One gets to being 30/35 year old without the autonomy to buy a house, have children and starting a family. The risk to think only in short terms has been expressed through a metaphor "I feel as we are on a frozen lake in which you jump from one place to the other without knowing what will be the outcome of the jump". It is as if thinking the future is constrained by time. This is experienced also in the kind of employment available: short term contracts.

Some other younger members of society presented a different picture. They tell their experience of developing at the same time their professional and personal (e.g. starting a family) lives highlighting how these can grow and develop together. This is a challenge to the traditional view that one needs to establish his/her professional career before starting a family. The experiences of some younger members of society tell a different story, it is possible to develop the two together and "translate" the experience of one dimension into the other.

Members of society expressed the difficulty of collaborating (doing and working together) as the result of a rampant individualism developed in the last decades. The current crisis if on one hand increases individualistic forms of life on the other hand seems to let emerging the desire to stay together. The family is still a strong component of the Italian welfare. However some of the younger members of society experience this as a sort of humiliation: it is the sign that they cannot be independent, autonomous and have to rely on family economic support.

Members of society compared the current crises to the one experience by previous generations after the end of War World II. Those generations had to take risks in order to think and build their future. The question is how much the current generations are ready to take risks? However there is a difference between realistic risk and phantasy risk. In other terms are we following an achievable dream or are we loosing ourselves following a phantasy? A lot of people are choosing the latter and gamble on slot machines or other legal forms of gambling. This is perceived as an unrealistic way of taking risk.

It seems that one emerging profile of members of society is that of having everything but with the least effort. This is a way of denying any form of learning. Members of society have reported examples of societal experiments among young people where the individualistic tendency is overcame through setting up small groups that are taking collective risks. Experiences have been presented of these groups that allow the formation of family type links without being a family.

In the conversation these examples have been welcomed and young members of society express pride in being members of these small groups.

Members of society express how political parties have lost their ideal nature and have become routes to gain power. This is associated with the lost of face-to-face relations that have been replaced by Facebook and other social media. It seems as if the lost of political parties and of face-to-face relations have weakened the possibility to have collective dreams. As if in moving from the real world to the virtual one we lost the social.

Once upon a time it was a dream for people to migrate to Europe. Today a new form of awareness is describing Europe as dying or dead. Europe is impoverishing and it demonstrates the end of a Western way of living.

Part II

The identified themes are as follows:

1) The humiliation of new generations and the burden of taking risk
2) The tension between individualistic drives and the desire to be together
3) Being trapped between the difficulty to take risk and the unrealistic risk of gambling
4) Acquired rights (human, civil etc.) are under attach and hope is lost
5) Not taking responsibilities as a way not to invest too much.

Part III

From the previous two parts three working hypothesis can be formulated:

- Being in between
- We are orphans
- Brotherhood

Being in between

Analysis

Society is experiencing an endemic job insecurity that is not impacting just on the experience of employment. Old certainties have been eroded for good. It is an in-flux state and it is not clear what we are building. The elements on how to get out of this situation are not clear or explicit. We are hanging in the balance, however this does not mean that there is no hope. As in any crisis we are experiencing the break of an old way but this produce a way to look forward.

We are experiencing a crisis that is bigger than the one experienced by the post War World II generation. Community links existed then and from those it was possible to rebuild societies. We have experienced a model of society were individualistic drives have been strong and successful. This model was based on the absence of community links. Thus social links and bonds are weak or

lost and it is harder to think of and take risk as a "together". We have experienced individually the wealth before the crisis as well as we are individually experiencing the current crisis.

We are witnessing the crumbling down of social movements, institutions and political parties. What is similar in this process is the theme of social links. Social links are crumbling in all the spheres of our societal life.

It seems that the family and other small societal groupings are resisting, it seems that the glue is the self-help. It seems that were community links and self-help are preserved the crumbling is halted. It is as if we are back to the 1960s, a time of self-help, societal investment and strong links.

Hypothesis

Feeling "in between" is a strong experience. Members of society seems to be aware of this transition from one system to another, some innovations/intuitions on how to move are visible however the future is still difficult to imagine. It is clear that the transition is not of one aspect but it is a systemic societal transition. The prevalence of individualism in our societies has made us impotent and "unable" to exercise some aspects of our citizenship that are crucial to be able to identify and build the future.

Individualism has destroyed the collective spirit of our grandparents, from the post WWII to today, and we are left without the communitarian links but also without the ability to build these links.

Orphans

Analysis

The model of the extended family, a large system and with strong social links, as meant and experienced by our grandparents is no longer. Today our children cannot make this experience. We have two houses, four parents and they are signs of a crumbling social institution. The educational role of the family is in crisis and missing. It is a cultural and educational issue. The family is not an innocent institution. Being the first educational institution it has to bear some of the responsibilities. The parent is no longer one who is the father or the mother. They are friends of their children and dress the same cloths. There is no longer expression of generational conflict between parents and children.

Hypothesis

Members of society are experiencing something similar to being orphans. There is no guide from any authority, there is a perception of a lack of emotional safety, lack of life plan and future. There is awareness, mixed with a significant anxiety, that there is no more a protective vertical regulation. The crumbling and destruction of social institutions like the family and the State is depriving members of society of societal systems able of containing fears and uncertainties as a way of providing for fundamental individual and collective needs. Both are no longer capable or in the position of providing support and trust.

It is perceived and expressed the emerging awareness of a time that is no longer and that is gone for good. Members of society are orphans of a "golden age", e.g. wealth, wellbeing and rights for all. From an age built with a collective spirit for achieving common good (e.g. welfare) to a wild situation in which it is prevalent the idea that individual freedom leads to happiness. Today members of society are orphans of a social system that at the same time reassured and now has led to a form of deprivation. It feels as if only rediscovering forms of the societal can tip the balance.

The absence of these forms of societal order generates anxiety and is challenging on how it is possible to self manage these emotions and fears and at the same time thinking and imagining the future.

Brotherhood

Analysis

Members of society are aware that the job insecurity is a vital aspect not just of one's employment but of one's life. The context of any job seems to take on a significant role.

Being part of a collective effort is a way of taking up and learning how to being responsible. It seems that the ability to mirror one's effort in his/her colleagues or in the final beneficiaries of the work is very important. As if the Obama's "We can..." is relevant.

It seems that today members of society aspire to have much with less effort. It seems as if there is a dependency from unknown others to find out a solution to the anxieties. However, and paradoxically, members of society express at the same time the belief that a new form of groupness, still unclear, could address the situation. It is as if everybody pays tax then the social will be better off.

Hypothesis

It seems as if the father and mother figures are fading away whilst it is growing the role of brotherhood and sisterhood, as if the father and mother figures are replaced by the siblings figure. As if the vertical dimension of authority is replaced, or is going to be replaced, by a horizontal dimension. Members of society have repeated this in more than one way.

It is as if one aspect of transition is society today is moving from paternal/maternal to brotherhood/sisterhood. These seem to be aspects of how to think the future through looking inside us.

A solution from an authority above is no longer expected. It seems that also the concept of super ego is crumbling. The dimension of "sibling" appears to "call for attention". The question then is what is brotherhood in the era of globalisation? How does this speak to the need of facing the crisis together, regrouping and reorganising as a collective?

It seems that a new meaning for "common good" is taking shape. No longer linked to an old past (e.g. welfare) but one that is promoting a sort of "*relational us*" where to explore and establish new societal ties.

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Italy