

Themes and Hypotheses from the Listening Post:

The Faroes and the World at the Dawn of 2009

Friday 16th January 2009 3.00pm to 5.30pm

Theme I: The Crisis and Jante's Law

(The Law that says that nobody is better (or something special) than anybody else)

There are now more poorly people, more flu, tummy ache, and, not least, more stress about. The financial crisis enhances the level of *Angst* in society. The Faroe Islands are a small community. Everybody knows everybody, and Jante's Law reigns. Always remember that you also have to be together tomorrow. And one must not frighten the young people away, thus depopulating the islands. Aggression is something one must not show. Therefore one doesn't speak openly, but in a woolen and slow way. One's opinions get wrapped up until they are unrecognizable, told to the neighbour rather than to the person they're about. Or one suppress or "forgets" what one wanted to say.

One participant formulates her uncertainty this way: "If I were a child today, I would be scared." There is some uncertainty about whether there is reason to be worried about the crisis, if there is a crisis in the first place or just something we talk into being. The Faroes are one of the countries least affected by the crisis. We have learnt from the crisis of '92. The Faroes have a gigantic potential: fish, unique mapped-out genes, artists in all genres, sportspeople, oil, wave energy, economic reserves. In a way the crisis gives relief: Slowing us down to normal, making craftsmen return from abroad, back to prices and costs one can afford. On the other hand we depends upon the globalized world around us. Can other countries tear the Faroes down in their fall??

Fear gains a foothold partly as psychosomatic symptoms: increased sickleave, stress etc., and partly as increased cultural activities: the men play with new high-tech rescue boats, people go to the theatre and to concerts as never before. The New Year fireworks beat all records, and everybody indulges in FaceBook.

Hypothesis I: The Crisis and Jante's Law

Due to the somewhat closed and anti-aggressive social conventions in the small tight-knit island community, the *Angst* and uncertainty which the financial crisis produces and provokes cannot be discussed openly. So it manifests itself partly as increased psychosomatic symptoms - and partly in a switching from an interest in long term investments and improvements of one's house and garden to a rallying around cultural events.

Theme II: Excitement and Hope.

At present the whole public sector is in shock after a budget with cuts all over. The situation is experienced as a brutal termination of all aspirations and dreams, e.g. "Vision Faroe 2015", which has been developed in focus groups etc. over the past years.

There is also a feeling of change in the air. A change of systems?...of gender?...culture?...attitudes? Treading water, waiting for something to happen. The future lies in knowledge and culture, but the agents of the old system focus on allocating funds for more tunnels and short term investments. It is very important that the young people going abroad for education, work or to see the world return to the islands. But how do the islands, the society, become attractive enough to attract the young ones to settle?

There is a tendency for the leaders to withdraw psychologically and as leaders. They hang back and become less visible. There are fewer who apply for managerial positions, and the leaders speak more quiet and less clearly. You sense a change in demands toward the leader-role.

There is a longing for energy, breadth of view and courage for long term decisions. It is not difficult to find solutions for the problems, but the political system and traditions transform all fresh ideas into tangled balls of yarn and slowness. No broad majorities. And every time an opposition takes office, it slows down or spoils everything the government has just implemented.

In industry whispers are heard of new opportunities created by the crisis. Not much ado, but rumours spread about daring ideas and a sense of possibilities. "Crises bring change. During stable times not much happens", as someone put it.

Perhaps the hope of change is the kind the new US President, Obama, embodies. Perhaps the expectations of 'Bank Parcel II' are of the same ilk. What is the real topic: Hope of Change or Change of Hope?? Clearly there are a multitude of mutually conflicting hopes, wishes, and expectations which all have been bundled on the back of a single man. And the new thing is this emotional insistence on hope and change, an - until now - uninterpreted dream.

Hypothesis II: The Times Are Changing

There is suspense in society due to the dissatisfaction with the present set-up and hope for change. Neither the discontent nor the hope has yet taken shape. People are awaiting and treading water. But something new is in the making.