

## REPORT

# A New Year Listening Post

WEDNESDAY 6<sup>th</sup> January 2010 3.00pm to 5.30pm

**Conveners: Steen Visholm, Jan Willemoes & Arnold H. Nielsen**

*Listening Posts are based on the notion that a group of people meeting together to study the behaviour of the society as a society allows the unconscious expression of some characteristics of the wider social system and the experience of the Listening Post is itself, therefore, relevant to an understanding of society beyond individual and personal preoccupations. The aim of the Listening Post is to enable participants as individual citizens to reflect on their own relatedness to society and to try to develop an understanding of what is happening in society at this moment. The Listening post will provide an opportunity for participants to share their preoccupations in relation to the various societal roles they may have. Collectively they are invited to try to identify the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at this time.*

### **Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES.**

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or 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’, that relating to the ‘socio’ or ‘external’ world of participants.

### **Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

In Part Two, the aim was collectively to identify the major themes emerging from Part One. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes:

#### **Theme 1: From outer-related to inner-based identity**

The population is gathering using more time in finding and maintaining the inner and cultural foothold in the society. There is a striving towards roots, history and culture – also among the young generation – and there is an increasing appreciation of our inner value as a nation and as a society. We are less dependent on the surrounding worlds thinking and perception of Faroe Islands and we no longer use Denmark as an “enemy image” to develop and maintain our boundaries of identity and self-perception.

The self-perception is challenged by the younger generation, the guests and the foreigners. As a new-comer expressed it: “I think there is an immensely drive among people. It is as if everything is possible on the Faroe Islands. Here is a lot of space for initiative. Come On!!”

Old values is transformed into new values: All people gathers at funerals – young as well as old – to meet, to honour the dead, to show respect, as it has happened for centuries. The real values in society is are founded in survival of the local society, in reciprocity and interdependency. Teenagers have new values, are very international but Teenagers are also conscious about the cultural heritage, they sing and quince the old chants.

The common denominator is “to exist” on FaceBook. “If you are not on FaceBook you do not exist!”, “Facebook and Twitter tie people together across generations”. It is like The Hunters’ Mentality is wrapped into Modernity.

### **Theme 2: Overdriven consideration is killing off the youngsters**

The family-roles are far more legitimate than the professional roles. The tight knitted family systems always levels everything flat, nobody stands out from the crowd. Distinctive social control, excessive self-criticism and religious radicalism terrifies the youngsters and they hesitate to return to the Islands after studies and educations abroad.

The youngsters are narcissistic and demand exposure, individuality and personal success, but experience the older generation and the culture as a heavy featherbed, hardly acknowledging and appreciating success. Is it envy or caution?

The new generation wants to be seen and recognized for their acts, they do not accept - nor want to live in - anonymity. Emigrated Faroese youngsters sign up for national competitions in our neighbouring countries Denmark and Iceland in dance-contest, sporting-contest, singing-contest, talent-contest etc. – and win the contests!!

### **Theme 3: Success in Silence**

”We are occupied of our success outside our borders, but do not expose the success inside our society. It is almost as career, success, the uniqueness, the enviable “stuff” is totally ignored on The Faroe Islands”, ”Almost all success takes place in silence (BakkaFrost, Thor etc). We got prizes for Company of the Year, Leader of the Year, but we just glance at it, and then it is almost gone from the tongue of people?”

“If you say nothing, you do not say too much”, “ The higher you climb, the harder you fall”. As a consultant expressed it: “All my successful customers want to be anonymous and they do not like their success to be exposed in the society!”

### **Theme 4: The ghost is coming....or is it ??**

“First we heard a lot about H1N1 and now the weather is really bad...! There has been an awful amount of talk about economy, sickness and climate...”. ”H1N1, CO2, CTD...it is as if we are surrounded by a coded language”. “I am so tired and exhausted waiting for the flu (H1N1) or the storm to come. Earlier we waited for Haley’s Comet..!”, “What is reality and what is *reality in the mind*? And what is created by the media? It all seems quite hysteric....people and society alike!”

Workload has repressed depression, holidays trigger depression, emotions come to the surface in people’s leisure time. People are afraid of losing their job, so they appear sick at work. They do not dare staying at home, they hide and cuddle in work.

“What about depopulation? Will the society be deserted? Is this a realistic possibility? Can it happen? I am deeply afraid, that this nation is getting dismantled !!”

“Northern outbacks like New Foundland, Iceland and Northern Norway are getting vacated as we speak.

### **Theme 5: The Meetings in the dawn – in between but under ground**

“I do experience increasing trust among people and inside the networks”. “There is courage and openness in the smaller circles and all together I sense a lot more mutual trust in our society”. “I sense an inner change...We are getting better in working with value-increasing networks and professional alliances“.

The National “Vision 2015” is hardly mentioned in 2009, but “I think there is an unconscious work going on with Vision 2015. We have laid down the foundation stone, have done the seeding. I think the Vision 2015 is alive and grows in silence”.

“The Fish Farming Industry is capable of extensive co-operation. They focus on collaboration (between “siblings”) to maintain and expand the overall value and

earnings. Even though some of them have to decrease or die.” “There are also collaboration initiatives in making united IT-platforms instead of sub-optimizing.”

Because of the H1N1 athletes, football players etc. no longer shakes hands. But at the funeral everybody shakes hands with everybody and places the hand on top of the coffin. There are a lot of meetings at the funerals. It is a social happening. There is an old structure and value in a funeral. The politicians meets the people at funerals. As we write this LP-rapport a new play at the National Theatre is announced with the title “The Worlds best Funerals”.

“I would like to go to a funeral without a dead!”, as one articulated.

### **Theme 6: The Leadership is being castrated and taunted in public**

There have been heavy attacks on the Prime Minister. They have been personally towards his character, intelligence, ability etc. This would never happen in same degree in our neighbour countries. It is also an attack on the leadership, the hope, and the lack of paternal decisiveness. “Where is the leadership? Why cannot we gather in saving the nation?” The Irresponsibility is ruling and the confidence is missing!

What does the big deficit in the balance of payments mean and why do the politicians not do anything about it?”, “The politicians seems paralysed and unable to act, but We are the one who elected them”, “Decisions which will hurt will not be taken”, “I get the feeling of powerlessness and impotence”. Where are the grown ups? Where are the decision-makers?

The ambivalence among the decision-makers leaves the population in a vacuum. A part of the population express hope about that Denmark will come and save us (dependency), another part of the population express that we will have to break the bonds with Denmark or die (fight/flight). The vacuum invites irresponsibility and there is no longer confidence in the decision-makers.

A journalist bites in a living shellfish (Norway Lobster) on a Food Festival promoting new ways of handling oceanic food. Subsequently the journalist was prosecuted for Animal Cruelty (Faroe Islands is a Fishing Nation which also kills pilot whales). It resulted in the most extended and most expensive lawsuit ever in the Faroese Judicial History. Is this an adequate use of funds and resources (The journalist is just acquitted)? Where do we NOT use our resources?

### **Theme 7: New boundaries and borders in our mind?**

Faroese people have struggled to survive and to increase the population on the North Atlantic cliffs, but what is the self-perception of our *borders and boundaries in the mind?* There are 50.000 Faroese in the Faroe Islands, but there are 75.000 people speaking the language. The amount of people speaking the language is increasing but the population on Faroe Islands is decreasing. The capital of Denmark, Copenhagen, is often called the second largest Faroese city (15.000 Faroese lives there). Does our self-perception as society stop at the frontiers? What about all the Faroese living abroad – are they Faroese or are they emigrants? How do we attach to them? A lot of them leave the global maelstrom for periods and take a temporarily stay on Faroe Islands to recover their breath. Visiting foreigners and travel magazines also pronounces Faroe Islands as a breathing spot in the world.

“It is too narrow-minded speaking of a *Faroese* university. We got to speak about an *international* university!”, “We are dependent on importing skills and proficiencies. But why do we hesitate and obstruct this opportunity? Are we just interested in having Faroese on Faroe Islands? We need more nations in our nation!”, “We have 1200 people from other nations living in our society!”

Do we need to adjust our self-perception and the boundaries of our society?

### **Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, 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 the members 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.

#### **Analysis and Hypothesis 1. The Vacuum and the hidden power**

In the centre of the Faroe Islands there is a vacuum. Where there should be competent adults, men and women, leaders and politicians, scientists and historians, warriors and peacekeepers, fathers and mothers there is nothing but a vacuum. And if there is something there, it is invisible or it has been attacked heavily. This is about envy and fear of envy. The Islands have a strong tradition for that (so-called "Jante-Law"), nobody dares to put them self up front – or is allowed to do so – within the society. Putting one self forward demands safety: the old traditional dance and singing and talent shows in the entertainment business. Or at funerals where everybody is aligned and a common member. You are first safe when you are dead. As someone formulated it: "I would like going to funerals without a dead!".

#### **Analysis and Hypothesis 2. The hope is fragile and hidden**

The hope is fragile and if babies are made they shall be hidden. There is so much envy out there so we have to be silent and careful with those things that carry the hope and visions. It could be women and Facebook, networks, matrix not 'patrix' that carry the hope.

There must be a massive longing for authority and fathers, since there is used so much energy to hide it and it is attacked so heavily. Since the lives of men traditionally were very dangerous, you (women) should not rely too heavily on them. Leading to a sense of loneliness and dreaming of big strong reliable fathers sustains the maternal powerlessness and invisibility.

#### **Analysis and Hypothesis 3. Impotent Fatherhood and Invisible Motherhood**

The male nation leader is getting castrated and taunted in public, the older patriarchic generation holds on to the power without getting in touch with the young, less authoritarian generation, and the females are vanishing and hardly mentioned in any context. Nobody takes risky decisions and nobody takes care of the deficit in the balance of payment. There is no confidence in the leadership and everybody is fed up with stories about "The ghost is coming...". There is no real cooperation within the parenthood nor between nations, those responsible are withdrawing into passivity and fumbling activities.

This leaves the members of the society in ambivalence, helplessness and overwhelming anxiety provoking a range of defence mechanisms such as denial and displacement. This results in an apathetic and depressed parenthood leaving a large part of the citizens in a blogged state of mind escaping into an unrealistic perception of society and global connectedness. This leads to underlying irresponsibility, disengagement and dependency on a saviour (Denmark?).

Maybe the exposure to Existential Ultimatives – as the imaginative confrontation with the borders of existence like the possible National Death is the only sociotherapeutic way leading to a new existential Awakening taking responsibility for ourselves as a country, a nation and not least in the individual mode choosing citizenship in a global

society. This in contrast to the possibility of totally surrendering to an Ultimate Rescuer.

#### **Analysis and Hypothesis 4. Hope arises among siblings apart from hierarchy**

It seems like hope, creativity and innovation has difficult growing conditions within patriarchic hierarchy, within the restrictive culture and under the vacant leadership. But the youngsters create new ways to go and to succeed (emigration, web-meetings), equally minded and equally situated members of society creates successful cooperation within Fishfarming, IT-platforms, Professional Networks, Voluntary Mergers. Many citizens appreciate the collective meetings in equality at funerals, at the airport, at the national dance-festivities, and now there are fruitful meetings between generations at Facebook and Twitter too.

The members of society therefore dares to trust in the future. They whisper about the formulated “Vision 2015”, they put energy into togetherness and traditions, they swallow the Faroese success abroad on a common platform and they incite each other to go for the goals – but not in public. It is like a underground, a rise of a new order, a new generation getting prepared to fill in the vacuum after the absent and invisible, but still powerful generation. Still hesitating though, and some emigrates meanwhile.

This results in a no-man’s land where forces are not strong enough to bridge the gap, and without bridging there will be no building. It is as if everybody is in a waiting-mode, waiting for someone to legitimate the hope, the babies and the visions. But who is it?? Who will rise from equality, among siblings, and fertilize “the new way”?

#### **Analysis and Hypothesis 5. From frontiers to new boundaries in the mind**

The rapidly changing global society seems like a maelstrom both attracting and scaring the Faroese people. The speed, the crisis and the turbulence creates the need for a calm “breathing spot”. The Faroese know the breathing spot in the middle of the North Atlantic ocean and an increasingly number of global citizens does it too (rated “no. 1” by National Geographic Traveller), but are we interested in visits or new citizens? We are only 1200 immigrants out of 50.000 inhabitants and the number is decreasing these days. But 75.000 speak the language, located abroad in minor societies and the number is increasing. Less Faroese people inside the frontiers and increasing Faroese people outside the frontiers provokes our self-perception and the boundaries in the mind. The boundaries between the islands and the global society is vanishing, the relationship with Denmark is less problematic and there is a powerful battle going on to bring alive the old traditions and values among the young generations, searching for a foothold and inner-based identity. Members of society make an effort to perceive the world, the society and the dynamics within the traditional framework, but they do not succeed.

Reality does not fit with the perception, and causes excluding behaviour instead of including attitude and thinking. This results in the need for new and expanded boundaries in the mind (for identity, society and nation), a redefinition of our self-perception with less importance on frontiers. A move from “Faroe Islands in the world” to “Faroese in the world”. The underlying dynamic is anxiety of invasion, boundlessness and the feeling of “being in a mob”.