

REPORT

A New Year Listening Post

WEDNESDAY 8th January 2014 2.30pm to 5.30pm

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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:

Democracy democratizes and get polarized

We live in a democracy with freedom of speech, where everyone can utter their opinion on social media like Facebook etc. Democracy has evolved into people expressing their opinions on social media instead of discussing and debating in public institutions. This imbues the power and potency in an elected majority, and the powerlessness and impotence in the many social media.

The political majority is autocratic and benefits the wealthy, while the many voices expressing social conscience, knowledge and expertise are ignored.

- *"Knowledge has been democratized. If 51% says the earth is flat, then it is true, even if experts argue otherwise".*

At the same time the public debate culture is on its knees. One newspaper has undergone bankruptcy and the public service media is in an economic crisis. This situation polarizes the debate between the people and the elected politicians. Debate platforms in the social media democratize democracy, but the power remains centralized with the few, and thus democracy is at a crossroad: Will democracy be public enlightenment, debate and participation, or will it be the dictatorship of the majority?

- *"It is sad that we are so few, but disagrees so much about what and how we should prioritize".*

Education, roots and community are diminished

Traditional values and the humanistic worldview, which has defined our society, are challenged today. At the same time subjects like Latin and Ancient Lore are disappearing from our educational system, diminishing classical insights and values in our society.

- *"We live in a time where we are discarding the roots of our European cultural heritage. We focus on what we need today, not where we are coming from. We think "what pays?" rather than "what do we need?", and thus the foundation of our society are diminished".*

The focus on the individual, gratification of needs and self realization negates solidarity, community and togetherness.

Responsibility is fleeting..... Who owns it?

Never before has there been so much "fingerpointing" directed at politicians or other public persona with responsibilities. A lot of energy is directed at faultfinding and criticism – example: a Face Book group was formed to bully people, that doesn't spell well.

- *"We cannot throw stones, when we live in a glass house".*

But we are also part of our community ourselves, and when will we regulate our own behavior? We are occupied by observing others instead of focusing on what we can do ourselves. We have to start with our selves, take responsibility and be responsible.

- *"I am a part of the community, and what does that do to me? I will rather apply myself than assume victimhood. But I don't!"*

The society is now producing children, that cannot read or write. This is being observed in the penal institutions, who now questions the school system. The people surrounding the failing children are facing increased scrutiny. Where are the professionals? The teachers, the doctors, the educationalists, the social workers? Who actually does something and who should be doing something? Nobody talks about the pre-school children aged 0-7! Maybe we will make it 0-5, because now they have to go to school and learn something.... We send them away from us and away from being children. In the home the time is reserved for other things and other people than the children.

Our children determines our future. We have to prepare our children for the task ahead of them. In reality that responsibility is put on the professionals and institutions instead of the family.

- *"With that upbringing, who is going to take care of us, when we grow old? That's in only 20 years!".*
- *"Our democratic society, maybe we should determine ourselves, instead of leaving it to the politicians"*
- *"Where are the professionals, that should react? Where is the family?"*
- *"The system is breaking down.... My 87 year old aunt needs care, but now there is no public support on the Faroe Islands."*

Many are having 25 year anniversaries at work...This means there is a need for further education and upgrading, especially since the influx of people is low. Why don't we focus on what we CAN do ourselves, instead of whats hard and out of reach?

Social media restricts dialog and human interaction

On social media everyone can criticize everyone and point fingers without consequences. Both users and non-users of the social media gets a rough treatment without a possibility to retort. There is no authentic meeting between people, and thus no effort to reach eachother, to find common ground.

The human interaction is crippled.

- *"It should be called the anti-social media, because it is incredibly anti-social, its too easy to throw accusations without consequences. We don't talk with each other, like we do at the listening post!"*
- *"If I say something, or do something, then I risk getting bullied! But if I have to be faultless to have a public voice, I will never say anything....."*

It is too easy to criticize and too easy not to contribute!!

Balance between security and insecurity

Individual and social security are diminishing. Insecurity and uncertainty are growing, and the trust in the established system is decreasing. It is like the balance between security and insecurity has tipped, and distrust and suspiciousness are settling between people, and between people and the authorities.

The hidden agendas in the political system, the obvious disregard of morals and majority decisions circumventing the expertise creates insecurity, which affects the common citizen. The individual retreats into small communities, clans and sects, where common denominator is reliable.

- *"The insecurity in Syria causes me to question our own democracy. I have never felt more insecure in my own country!! I feel like my existence is being threatened.....!"*
- *"I have frequented many penal communities without feeling insecure. The systems there are stabile and predictable".*

At the same time the Faroe Islands are a good place to be compared to most other places in the world. The basics of Maslows pyramids of needs are met, the gender roles are well defined and the society has welfare.

- *" We have good circumstances on the Faroe Islands! Healthcare, AV and public schools functions well compared to the world around us. No one goes to bed hungry".*
- *"I have returned home after 28 years in another part of the world. I have seen how women here are organizing themselves, reducing their work hours".*
- *"In the prison in Herstedvester (in Denmark) there is a department with 50 convicted murderers from Greenland. We don't have a single one. Their population is the same size as ours, and seen in that light we have to praise our society. We have have some people in need, but no people without help".*

Anxiety, loneliness and isolation are thriving

The level of anxiety in the society has risen. The anxiety is rooted in the individual citizen and in the individual existence. It is intricate and it is growing. The anxiety is bound to an experience of failure, decay and increased distrust of the system. It looks like the decay in the individual is greater than the decay of the system. An inner disintegration!

At the same time, there are rising expectations of being a successful human being. The parents' responsibility are to help their children cope with the society, and then hope they will become strong individuals with enough resources to be socially responsible. It seems like individuals are being polarized instead of being united.

Charity and brotherly love are being challenged!! Loneliness is dominating!!

People are not integrated into the families and the society in the same way anymore. Tendency is exclusion rather than inclusion.

- *"Many get the diagnosis ADHD.... But is it a disease or a reaction to a dysfunctional environment??"*

Affluence is choking welfare

Citizens with international experience remark that other parts of the world are yearning to achieve the same degree of welfare, solidarity and security as our society provides. But

the returning citizen also observes, that it looks like we are “.. crushing empathy and solidarity in our society, just to privatize everything for the benefit of the few”.

The polarization between “the wealthy” and “the many” is escalating in step with political decisions, while the population is passively observing the process with a fatalistic attitude.

- *“The division between the “mackerel-elite” and the underprivileged is greater than ever”.*

At the same time the polarization and apathy creates a vacuum, which presents an opportunity for those, who would enrich themselves at the expense of others. Democracy bends to the will of the strong.... both here and in the world around us. Solidarity and unity are losing ground to affluence and “power players” in our welfare society. The power players are setting morals and ethical business conduct aside in the vacuum of the polarized society.

The share of resources reserved for the weaker groups in our society (children, elderly, the criminals and the sick and infirm) is decreasing. Lower taxes are prioritized higher than the needs of the weak.

- *“Remedial classes were removed from a girl in the public school... and I lost my enthusiasm for teaching, I became disillusioned.”*

Since the tax rate finance the principal of solidarity, welfare is losing ground to affluence.

Change brings new opportunities

The many changes and increased insecurity in the society also brings frameshifts and opportunities. In the past it was taboo to discuss sexual abuse, but today it is discussed in social media, church, the press, families and in the workplace.

We live in a time with fantastic opportunities, and the knowledge/enlightenment is greater than ever. We are in a state of perpetual motion. Private opinion has a place in the public space, and there are rich opportunities to participate in public discussions.

What is normal for our generation? And what will be normal for the next...?

Since we talk so much, what are we *not* talking about....?

There are many examples of success and new initiatives in private business. But it is like it is ignored and silenced. Success and initiative are bound to the vacuum, which is created by the polarization of the population, and are thus subject to distrust, decaying welfare and greed.

Thus the public mood remains negative and depressed, and people can't, or won't, see the opportunities, initiatives and successes as signs of prosperity and life.

If you stick your neck out, you are in danger. You risk being criticized and belittled!!

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Hypothesis 1: “The only wolf in a Wolfpack!”

The community is increasingly superficial. The social media creates a “zapping” consciousness and a drastically reduced quality of human interaction. Cultural roots, anchoring in the family, traditions, basic decency and genuine intimacy are not prioritized. At the same time the trust and belief in authorities are dwindling. Unity and cohesion are challenged by egocentrism – its every man for himself!

Therefore the individual citizen increasingly experience anxiety, loneliness and isolation in their lives and their interactions.

This results in a polarization of people, where charity and solidarity are challenged. Citizens are turning on each other instead of standing together, and many experience loneliness in the masses.

Hypothesis 2: Affluence is choking welfare

The political decisions favor the privileged, while the needy are not prioritized. The tax rate is financing the welfare, and when it is reduced, there are fewer resources for the many and the privileged few get more. Protests are short lived in the social media, and the power players can safely ignore them.

Citizens experience this as a violation, and are afflicted with an increasing sense of impotence, powerlessness and hopelessness.

The result is a polarized citizenry, where the stage is set by right-wing politicians and prominent industrialists, who enrich themselves, while weaker and thus invisible groups in society are abandoned and suffering.

Hypothesis 3: Responsibility without being responsible

Currently the Faroese society is a dictatorship of the majority, where hidden agendas and self-interest dominates the elected parliament. The voice of the people and the public discussion are muffled and without impact, and has the appearance of a choir of eunuchs with shrill voices.

The citizens are idly floating in the vacuum between power and impotence. On one hand this allows them to point fingers, criticize and call for responsibility from both politicians and family, on the other hand they experience anxiety, distrust and the impotence caused by the suffocating embrace of victimhood. Fatalism and apathy are thriving.

The result of this is, that it holds no consequences for the power players to wield responsibility without being responsible. The citizens are disillusioned and huddle together in small clans, networks and congregations.

Hypothesis 4: Family or Society?

With affluence come greater expectations of the responsibility of the society. In step with development, an ever-increasing part of the care for odd characters and abnormalities is placed on the society instead of the family or the local community, who used to have that responsibility.

Thus it is opaque to the citizen what their responsibilities are, and where the responsibilities shall be placed: The private citizens or the professional institutions?

The result is a widespread "all or nothing" mentality in preference to fingerpointing rather than taking responsibility. That leaves the elderly in a no-mans-land, the criminals and the outcasts in oblivion, and the youngest in the bog of loneliness.

Hypothesis 5: Rays of light surrounded by shadows

The many changes and frame shifts also leads to new initiatives, more enlightenment, dissolution of taboos, necessary generational changes and new opportunities. But the mood of the people is very critical and aggressive. Success and prosperity can easily be seen as having been achieved on the expense of the weak, or as a result of corruption or back room deals. The citizen is surrounded by an environment of blame, accusations and distrust, and is finding it difficult to be or express encouragement and optimism in the public space. Most tales told are negative, and to be positive is almost heretical.

It creates anxiety and insecurity in the citizen to be walled in by the intense and passive-aggressive mood.

The result is, that many initiatives and new directions can't be discussed, and thus can't affect the disillusioned mood of the people. The rays of light are surrounded by shadows.