REPORT

A New Year Listening Post

WEDNESDAY 6th January 2016 2.30pm to 5.30pm
Conveners: Tóra Petersen & Jan Willemoes

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:

Overwhelmed boundaries and blurred Identities
Throughout the world the boundaries are under pressure and overwhelmed by media, criminality, religion, economy and merchandise. Masses of refugees flow like tsunamis against northern Europe. The countries cannot resist the pressure and lock themselves in using fences, sanctions and boundary control. EU cannot hold its outer boundaries, and countries within focus only on own borders.

Where are *mine* boundaries?? Both national and personal identity are under extreme pressure by the overstepping of boundaries. The youths undertakes a global and Americanised identity through iPads, iPhone and an enlarged focus on "Me, Myself & I". They are massively exposed to TV-series, youtubes, snapchats, twitters, FB-cuts, movies, documentaries and "celebrities" – every hour every day. National language, traditions, fellow-feeling and common tales are on retreat and personal identity less embedded in near-by society.

Community spirit implodes – Community opposites explodes
A growing number of countries implode, where inner contrasts and differences result in revolutions, change of systems, masses of refugees, civil war etc. Other countries experiences school killings, terror actions, fundamental religiousness and radical politics.

New year's Evening in Koln (Germany) hundreds of women were sexually assaulted by a coordinated crowd of 1000 men of foreign origin, in front of the cathedral in the city centre.

When a bunch of religious communities gathers at "Tinghúsvøllur" (the heart of the capital and the country) in common prayer for politicians during election, the implicated differences and opposites become very visible and threatens with separation and splitting.

It seems like the system is attacked by it self, in the same way that cancer is a cell-attack on other cells in the same organism. It results in explosive actions and reactions, or results in passivity and stagnation. The ability to experience yourself – individual, group, organisation and society – as a part of a greater organism, seems to be markedly reduced. Joint responsibility has become "Self-responsibility".

The National Church ("Fólkakirkjan" – the church for the people) endeavours to embrace all diversities, strengthen the feeling of unity and inclusion of "the strangers". The wholeness and the holiness is trying to contain it all. However short-sighted standpoints, emotions and political squals get increasingly more powerful and makes it a difficult challenge to maintain unity and cohesion in society!

Craving for self-exposure versus "The Brave new World"

The mature part of the population experiences an increase in individual exposure rather than as a part of a community. "The individual in role" has overtaken "The Role in the system". An escalation of a "Selfie-culture" is taking place. Our memory becomes shorter, whilst traditions and the cultural roots decrease and become superficial.

The younger part of the population finds it natural and perceives it as an opportunity in "The Brave new World", as described by Alous Huxley. They constantly "zap" between high speed breaking-news and uploads in cyberspace.

While the mature part of the population talks about iPad-free vacation, the younger population talks about where to get high-speed internet-connection during vacation.

Ability to sort the Overflow!

Most people develops their own method of sorting the information, but many are not able to manage the overflow and thereby gets overloaded. Its far easier to google "how a banana can be cut in 10 different ways", than relate yourself to the discussion about refugees and boundaries - so focusing on the banana, thats what we do!

Is it dangerous, when "somebody else" do the sorting and segregation for you? Who's serving what kind of information to us? Don't we become "brainwashed", when we uncritical swallows flash-informations and news. The amount of information exceeds our abilities to manage it! The memory is short! We inhales the information without deciding on whether it is true or false! In New Zealand News (the opposite side of the Earth) the medias proclaims that each year 30.000 whales are killed in the Faroe Islands. In fact only 800-1000 whales are killed and the meat is solidary shared out between both inhabitants and participants in the killing.

Individual in foreground – Community in background

Visionary politics, able to gather the population, do not exist. The politicians change party and convictions as often as others change underwear. The mentality seems to be "everyone looks after his own interests", while party discipline and solidarity seems nonexistent. The trade unions and other functional unities loose territory and individual points of view dominate debates and the agendas. Capitalism and Industry "wrestles" with the politicians in public debates and win! Profit beats Principals of equality and justness! Beneath surface men dominates women and certain religious communities outmaneouvres governmental and common institutions.

Tolerance is dancing with Fear
The population holds on to basic values and stands against the great amount of changes and violent events: Masses of refugees, reformation of the industrial fishing privileges, legislation of marriage, climate changes, wars in the Middle East, obvious abuse of power etc. Many have become intolerant, less flexible and more fearful. Its safe to make "likes" on Facebook, but nobody opens their own door to (the) strange and unknown and the government does not contribute or take part in the refugee challenge.

However, lots of citizens and voluntary grassroots in the population works every day to help refugees and needy people in the World. Regarding resources and economy, we are one of the richest nations in the World. Regarding governmental donation to people in need, we are one of the poorest nations.

The unconsiousness dance between Tolerance and Fear puts us in the role of the observant, characterized by passivity, disengagement and alienation - and the nasty feeling of shame.

Sitting in a cosy corner of the world – with a passive balcony view
While refugees, natural disasters and increasing inequality overwhelm great parts of the World, we are situated in a "cosy corner of the world". A small group of 18 islands defining a small nation with less than 50.000 inhabitants - surrounded by a wealth of fish – far away from others and everything. We are like the oceanic ship not affected by the tsunami smashing towards the coasts and boundaries of the continents. We contemplate everything, which happens around us, but we do not relate to it in an active and responsible way. Many citizens do have difficulties accepting that we, in an irresponsible way, only take care of ourselves. We feel alone and stays isolated – with a guilty consciense. We sit with the view from the balcony and witness the drama in the global scene underneath us!

Human closeness vanishes as CyberPresence appears!
Our presence is demanded in cyberspace. People bring their iPhone to bed, to toilet, to the dinertable and to family gatherings. Through the "phone-pings" and social medias we get the feeling of connectedness and importance. For many people even happiness and lust is connected to cyberspace. But the quality contact with the person next to you vanishes. The ability and competence to create and maintain social contact – to our selves and others – in a physical and felt closeness, weakens. Thereby, the foundation for a conscious and active community weakens – the digital screen dominates, and leaves only little space for dialog, eye contact and quality of the presence and closeness.

Sloughing
We are in the middle of an extreme transformation. The cleft between generations, tales and humans is no longer bridged. Our high speed society breeds superficiality and media-exposure – all wisely administered by the young part of the population, in contrast to the frightened elder part of the population. The new generation always succeeds in footing! The extreme changes of the foundation of the society is of such magnitude, that tangible we are in a period of sloughing – a fast change from one kind of existence to another kind of existence.

The silencers and the grumblers
We´ve never had better circumstances and welfare, and we´ve never been more dissatisfied and complaining. We observe the suffering of others, but we omit to actively take responsibility. At the Listening post some voices were very silent. When asking them, what they were silent about, they expressed the feelings of shame and bad consciousnes – and that the grumbling and negative attitude is an effort to legitimise the constant craving and wish for having even more.

Part 3.   ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Hypothesis 1: Outer boundaries are overwhelmed – inner boundaries are contracted
Throughout the World boundaries and territories are punched, provoked and overwhelmed by masses of refugees, social media, crime, economy, religion etc. Outer boundaries have no practical function and inner boundaries are contracted. At the same time the contraction of inner boundaries makes the inner differences more obvious, and radicalised forces, attacking its own cell system, become prominent.
Therefore citizens comprehends the unknown and unfamiliar as an utmost threat against own way of life and norms of the society. Radicalisation and polarization, which become obvious with the contraction of inner boundaries, are seen as frightening and a threat against community and solidarity. The citizen therefore comprehends an outer AND an inner threat, which causes fear of being overwhelmed, destroyed and wiped out.
It results in a systemic implosion, where the citizen either reacts explosively in social medias or sink in to passive withdrawal from the community and solidarity.

Hypothesis 2: The individual gets the pride of place – context is placed in the background
We live in a high speed society where human contact, information, stimulus and approval exist in tiny and frequent flashes through our smartphones that constantly "ping" with "likes", snapshats and Twitters. Human closeness consists of superficial self-exposure and Selfies of our Self's. History, tradition and social anchoring loose it's footing. It affects the elder and mature part of the population with an experience of loosing their ground, closeness and safety. The young citizens float around in the new order, where the presence of the inner universe in the global cyberspace is the foundation. Individuals exposes themselves as them selves in them selves – and very seldom with rooting in a community og context. The rapidness of changes causes a cleft so wide between "what is" and "what was", that it is experienced as sloughing.
Therefore citizen experiences that the superficial life creates a superficial relation to them selves. A loss of existential rooting creates an anxiety too overwhelming, the citizen do not dare to feel it in their self. Thereby an addiction to "the electronic self" rises, where satisfaction can be reached in frequent "flash-modes".
This results in a generational shift – a sloughing without a natural evolution – where exposure of the individual gets the pride of place, whilst context and community are placed in the background or vanishes.

Hypothesis 3: Cosy Corner of the World
The Faroe Islands is a small island community in the middle of the North Atlantic with natural oceanic boundaries to the rest of the World. Its a micro society with a balcony-view towards suffering and distress in the rest of the World. Welfare have never been better, but we´ve never expressed more dissatisfaction. Despite richness and wealth the government doesn´t act responsible, but voluntary citizens spends time and uses a lot of ressources helping needys and refugees in other parts of the global society. Governmental authorities *not* taking their co-responsibility creates a silent feeling of shame within the citizen.
The citizen therefore shall manage both the shame of the irresponsible passivity and the anxiety of overwhelmed boundaries. A latent bad conscience restrains expression of happiness and satisfaction. This results in a behaviour with active citizen on social medias, whilst passive in its being and responsibility. Struggle for power in the society exists in silence and beneath surface, where men and certain religious communities control the country, have the power and the money. The citizens flash their dissatisfaction, which legitimate the passivity and provide shelter for the shame by not engaging in outside world challenges.