

REPORT

A New Year Listening Post

WEDNESDAY 10th January 2017 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, neighborhood or voluntary or leisure organizations, 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:

1. Good times - for whom and what?

Things are going well in the Faroes and big companies have billion turnovers. This is positive on the one hand and creates questions about imbalances on the other hand: Do the arts get their fair share? In addition, does nature? There are great differences between rich and poor and the question is whether our societal structure makes some people poor while others become wealthier.

The big companies become bigger and emphasize efficiency and rationalization, whilst the average Faroese pay the prize by losing jobs that are laid down. Smaller companies find it hard to be heard and get influence.

Mainstreaming is a must! The baker on the corner has disappeared whilst imported pre-baked bread can be bought in all big retailers.

2. The struggle between greed, jealousy and our ethical values

Is greed a human character that creates less solidarity and bigger wealth for the individual person? And does generosity create less wealth? Are we ready to accept the imbalance? Or are we in the midst of protesting against more power to the rich and their domination in setting the agenda?

We offer Airbnb rent and make a lot of money instead of offering long-term accommodation to those who really need a place to live in. We buy cheap meals in Burger King, because it tastes good, and pay neither attention to the ingredients nor to the production and the rights of the employees. The signs of industries being socially responsible or showing environmental consideration are hard to find.

In our greed, we seem to place responsibility with the authorities instead of accepting our co-responsibility. We ask ourselves what kind of society we have and what kind we want? What is wealth? Is a society wealthy when the economy is strong or are a society's human resources a sign of its wealth?

Are we fading out the Nordic welfare society? Some people think that we need an economic crisis before we prioritize our true and important values while others think that the positive aspects of the development of our society are being prevented to come forward or to be verbalized. Greed can also be a condition of development and for good things to happen.

3. The fight for respect and equal rights

There are stirrings in both our local and global labor markets. In the Faroes, part of the workforce claims gender equality in occupation and wages, ie in relation to education and responsibility and not whether the job traditionally has been done by a man or a woman. Nurses and kinder garden teachers have chosen to strike in order to get higher wages and the strong economy is an opportunity to claim what is rightfully theirs. Various branches of trade claim – both the leaders and the society in general - for respect for the work done. Faroese women are proactive, get education and demand wages accordingly. The lives of previous generations of Faroese women were rough and difficult, and their story is quite invisible in society in general. However, recently their story finally was published in a book - written by a man (!).

Globally (in USA) women want the real story acknowledged about how human kind made it to the moon: American women did the work behind the mission: the calculations and preparations, which made the mission possible. On the other hand, the news coverage of divorced women has been characterized by a harsh and bad tone, underpinned by incorrect statistics. Various societal systems seem to accept this today.

In general there is a fight for power and for the right to define the matters, and the fight is raised both between men and women and internally between the sexes.

4. Globalization, technology and power

Globalization and technology create strength and courage: we easily identify with our neighbors in Iceland who recently agreed on a law securing women and men equal payment for equal jobs. Global movements like #me-too show us that identification and solidarity aren't limited by geographical borders but offer opportunities to set the score and write new

stories and to put one's foot down. Identity thus has a global arena besides the local one. Contrary, the debate going on is more characterized as a fight of whom is right and whom is wrong, than it is a dialog with the agenda to understand the different viewpoints. Some voices or subjects are silenced while others come forward.

We don't know what to trust or what is 'fake news'. It is regarded as a scandal that public service institutions allow large amounts of fake news stories and refer to sources without credibility: If it sounds good, it seems true! Often facts, science and statistics backing news seem to lack.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Hypothesis 1: From Folklore Dance Rings to Fish Farming Cage Rings - from Solidarity to Profit

There are good times and all signs are pointing in the right economic direction. Globalization and new technology give strength and courage. However, the good times have taken us “from Folklore Dance Ring to Fish Farming Cage Ring”, where the greed has power and control. We see it within the big salmon producer Bakkafrost which discharged half the employees to preserve power of competition and profit which exceeded by far the regard for their employees and a fragile community.

We see it as well in the increased tourism where people rent to Airbnb rather than to those who need a place to stay and live. We see that big companies and management do not take nature and our descendants into account.

Citizens experience that the difference between rich and poor gets bigger and the middle class gets smaller. The envy grows whilst the greediness takes power and steps clearly forward in the human character – maybe even as an admirable characteristic. It is daunting for the less greedy who can not be safe in communities and former times' solidarity.

This results in a culture where “Everyone is all for himself”. Many more speculate in profit instead of community which again reinforce the differences between those who have a lot and those who have less. It can be an endless ring where the Scandinavian welfare model is being threatened in existence.

Hypothesis 2: Claiming Equality of Rights

The small society has become a part of the bigger world with the internet where the #me-too movement now sets the agenda in the fight for women rights. Enough is enough with male dominance and sexual harassment! Together the women have enough strength to go up against those with massive power and authority. They have gotten a voice and an identity in the global arena.

Faroese women have achieved a will of power as well. This has led to strikes with demand of greater respect and higher wages for female occupations such as nursing and kinder garden teaching. It is a struggle for power between women and men.

It is also a struggle for preserving welfare service in society where all must have equal admission to equal and just citizen service and rights.

Citizens experience the differences as unfair and not right. It creates a lot of anger and strong outrage in big parts of the community where known structures and norms have existed. The shifts create an anxiety for what is coming.

This results in serial minor revolts, battles and adjustments above and beneath the surface. This will continue until there is a new balance leading to bigger equality and uniform rights – especially between men and women.

Hypothesis 3: Intense Wrestling between “Truth” and “Fake News” creates fundamental anxiety in Citizenship.

The equilibrium of the power in the world is distorted and there is an ongoing war about world power. The war is about values in which Twitter and the Internet are the weapons. “Fake News” and the news coverage on social media lead to people not knowing whom to trust and many are filled with false stories.

The discussion in the Faroe Islands is marked by silence and resignation. Those who speak out are most concerned about power of definition and being right, rather than to listen and understand one another. We have a culture where we do not discuss. The few who speak a lot about few subjects dominate the others who do not say so much. There are important subjects that are not being addressed. Topics are being silenced. Topics that otherwise are prominent in the society.

Citizens experience that it can have big consequences to speak up and social fear is experienced as decisive in our little society. The possibility to believe that there is a “truth” and a “fact” has gone, and this removes a significant part of the existential ground which citizens stand and rely upon.

This results in an unsafe and diffuse identity which creates a fundamental anxiety at the individual level. Citizens protect themselves by withdrawing from the discussions and direct interaction with fellow citizens and instead cultivate and strengthen their own individual identity. Below the surface a counter pressure builds up where more and more limit their use of internet and seek more personal contact in smaller fora.