

## REPORT

# A New Year Listening Post

Faroe Islands at the dawn of 2019

Report of a Listening Post held on 9 January 2019 in Tórshavn, Faroe Islands

Our participation is in the role as normal citizens using out thoughts, emotions and fantasies to describe the current situation in the society. Expressions from the participants, as well as emotions that arise during the event, are collected and organised into topics. The topics form the basis for developing hypothesis that shed light on mechanisms that are believed to be in play under the surface, i.e. emotional aspects. The methodological approach is collection of data, analysis of the collected material followed by construction of hypothesis based on the assumption that A represent B, which results in C.

When you read the current report, bear in mind that the conclusions are not personal, but represent subjectively defined trends in society.

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### **PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

*In this part, the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they: in work, unemployed or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, 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': the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.*

### **PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

*In Part 2, the aim collectively was to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.*

### **PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

*In Part 3, the participants were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, 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, participants 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.*

## **PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

### **Topic 1: Reality has become digitalized**

The internet and digital world have become an integrated part of how we create and experience our identity and interpersonal relations. The internet has expanded the possibilities of the Faroese population to communicate despite a remote geographical location, and even events such as Christmas, can be celebrated online. Technology has increased the speed of everything. Memoirs of people that have passed away used to appear in news-papers a week or even months after the death. Now these appear online instantly, which may limit the time for sorrow, joy and reflection in relation to deaths of relative or friends. The internet and digital equipment is being utilised in all aspects and tasks: shopping, socialization, communication and play. This provides possibilities for new relations and maintenance of relations despite physical distance. On the other hand, we lose "face-to-face" communication and the verbal communication on the social media is often characterised as being un-emphatic, and may foster isolation and solitude. Social skills are estimated and assumed to be under pressure and may deteriorate. Adults find it challenging to navigate in the digital world, while at the same time, they cannot ask advice from their own parents on how to raise and help their own children to navigate in the digital jungle.

### **Topic 2: The doubt thrives between polarization and the dialectics.**

We discuss greatly about a potential differences or clash between men and women, between the feminine and the masculine, between fiction and facts, between faith and science, between biology and culture, between rich and poor, and between city-dwellers versus countryside inhabitants. However, the assumed differences are not easily defined, nor what characterizes the various poles. The lack of residences is enormous in the capital region, while the countryside is struggling with a high number of empty houses. "Please turn on the lights in the houses to avoid that the village becomes dark, dismal and depressing!" The people in the countryside region perceive that the capital has the power to act, and that all others are observers. Perhaps, we have an unequal society, where some are making important decisions while the rest are passively observing the society? There is a lack of transparency in decision making processes, and in collaboration between the decision makers, which causes fragmentation. Moreover, we experience a great polarization between nearness and remoteness. In the centre of the doubt, we are left with great questions: will the enhanced polarization entail a change in how citizens respect each other? Which values will have the greatest dignity in the future? And finally, how will this influence our current norms?

### **Topic 3: The socialization changes at a tremendous pace**

The pattern of socialization has been altered. The nearness in relations has been attenuated or even disappeared and we have become more egocentrically orientated. We seem to live in our own universe, where we protect our own interests. We do not favor relations. Additionally, family patterns have changed and the family has become less important compared to a few years ago. Previously, we used to stay with relatives, when we travelled to their home-town. Today, we prefer to rent a house or hotel room. It is questionable, whether this is because we do not want nearness and communication, or because we are lacking resources to take care of our relatives, since we may primarily focus on our own little world. The society asks whether we look after and maintain our lives properly? Moreover, we experience a demand for each of us to take care of ourselves. There seems to be a dialectic situation between the individual and the collective. Thus, at the same time as we observe a tendency of ignorance of others, we also experience fear of being excluded from the community. Therefore, we may see a tendency towards conservatism. Newcomers experience, that even though they have lived in the Faroe Islands for more than twenty years, it is almost impossible for them to avoid conversations about traditional Faroese topics, such as sheep, weather and football. Although there are numerous women of different ethnical origin, with different language and cultural upbringing, we still fail to focus on exclusion and inclusion of people. Therefore, these people may find it challenging to be fully integrated in the Faroese society or learn the language.

### **Topic 4: Are our gender-roles and gender-identity biologically given or do we create them ourselves?**

There appears to be a great pressure on both genders. We talk about a biological characterization of the genders, what defines sex-roles, and what our gender identity is? On one hand the Faroese society is described as being gender equal. On the other hand, the Faroese society is described as being male-dominated, and that the women have limited influence. The news coverage, and especially the newspapers, emphasize men, both what concerns the written and visual material. However, we do have a woman's magazine and some underline, that the women have the responsibility for their lack of influence themselves. They do not rise to the occasion, but instead take the role as victims or passive bystanders. We have a loaded discussion and treatment of both genders, and apply devaluating descriptions of both female and male politicians. We

need to be more careful in our verbalization, since the present verbal approach makes both genders feel submissive; and that women do not accept this may be expressed in the recent #Metoo campaign. Gender roles have been altered. Women are pushed into a “macho-role”, making great demands to themselves and many girls do not thrive. We doubt how the Faroese boys thrive, and maybe they are suffering in the hidden, away from public attention, because many boys show less courage compared to earlier. The traditional roles of boys are changing, and as something new, they talk about existential issues. It appears that some boys and young men have found a platform in the digital game Fortnite. Here they can live out their biological instincts, sum as competing and hunting. At the same time, however, the digital life is associated with shame and devaluation by the society. Young men and young fathers are also pressed between family and work. They play a larger role in the family life, compared to the generation of their own fathers, but working life has not adapted to this. It is not equally accepted for men to go on paternal leave, or to stay home from work taking care of their children being ill. It may, however, be more accepted in work places dominated by women (for instance psychiatry) than in male-dominated workplaces. Employers do not have an equal treatment of the genders rights. Explicitly, the employers say, that women get the same rights and treatment, however, implicit is a desire to employ women, because they often become pregnant, and this entails challenges for the workplace. Though the society partly is characterized as gender equal, it is also depending on the social level, as equality does not exist in all societal groups, such as amongst single parents. Seen from a global perspective, the Nordic countries have the most gender equal legislation. The whole system around maternity leave is enhancing, although the system still is not as good as in our neighboring countries Sweden and Iceland. The Faroese society is out of date when it comes to gender roles, as the society has not followed the developmental process of the inhabitants and the changes in gender roles. We discuss whether the roles the gender take in the family are given by biology, or whether those differences are created by culture. To some it may be unrealistic, that a woman can have both top career and a family, an option more easily managed by men, as they do not carry and breastfeed the children. Globally we see, that still more female top leaders choose not to have children. On the other hand, we also see female leaders in the educational and research area having many children. And still, in the Faroe Islands, we appear to have social condemnation of women choosing career.

### **Topic 5: The speed creates even more speed**

The speed in the society is continuously growing, and embedded in the work with faster internet – 5G – there appears to be a wish for even more speed. The society demands, that we act fast, that we manage more in less time, and several inhabitants experience to be stressed. In the private zone, this entails that we have less resources for family life and children, and in the public sector, it entails the necessity for campaigns “Time for You”; a campaign established by the nurses with the aim to get more time for the

patient. The infrastructure is under rapid development, we want to use less time in moving from A to B, and the travelling pattern is altered. We are able to travel far and fast, when at the same time being stopped by traffic jam, because the infrastructure is not following the enhanced speed and activity. The course of life and the development of the single inhabitant also is going faster, and we experience, that people already at the age of 22 write their autobiography.

### **Topic 6: The welfare of the society or the individual?**

The welfare is growing, and so is knowledge and the number of possibilities. Compared to previously, we are able of doing a lot more, and therefore we do it. The possibilities of choosing are close to limitless. At the same time, there is a voice saying, that not everything is possible. The enhanced welfare and prosperity entail that the social patterns are under alteration. We experience, that we are more egocentrically oriented, and become strangers towards both ourselves and others. The enhanced welfare also entails greater diversity. Our view of life has changed, and this has entailed a polarization, that will bring changes in values in the society. The growing welfare causes us to wonder and question: how can it be, that the society is wealthy, and still there is a great lack of residences? How can it be, that we have a society, that craves money from its inhabitants? Why do we not have value in ourselves? Just by being inhabitants?

### **Topic 7: From globalization to glocalization**

The boundaries between work and private life are unclear. Today the identity is more defined by our profession compared to earlier. The digitalization makes it possible to go to bed with our work – we love work and we are able to make love to our work. The global world has come into our local world and has created glocalization. And we are afraid of, what this will do to our identity and our culture? We want to maintain the good parts of our culture, at the same time as we want to bring out the good parts from other cultures. We want to maintain our identity, at the same time as we want to adapt the majority and the group. This creates a strong fear of losing our own culture, which may entail conservatism.

## **PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

### **Hypothesis 1: The digital invasion deteriorates human interaction – we celebrate simultaneously as we experience fear.**

Despite that we greatly take advantage of the digital invasion in most dimensions of our daily lives, we are longing back to times, when we communicated and socialised in a face-to-face manner. We welcome the possibility to via social media to connect with family and to maintain relations with new and old friends. In addition, we welcome the opportunity to follow and participate in global discussions. We can access all types of information instantly, and we can book a holiday within minutes. We celebrate Christmas and other holidays on-line, sleep with our smart-phone and the world outside can be experiences through a wide screen. We are capable to reply to work emails around the clock, and our children socialise with friends via apps and digital games. This stimulates a feeling of possibilities without limitations and a limitless power to travel into the digital universe. However, this also causes lack of empathy and meaningfulness in our communication, which creates an emotionless and tough reality that makes no sense at individual level, and we worry. At the same time, relationships with our closest friends and family outside the digital environment in the real world become unnatural and taken over by digital relations between the citizens. Natural and conventional relations, nearness and socialisation between humans is being crushed. Simultaneously, we celebrate and experience expanded freedom on one hand, while on the other hand, we are uneasy by the new technology. We feel a clear, but undefined, fear for the digital universe, and express lack of transparency for, who controls the technological development and which consequences will arise from it for us and our children. How will it affect our identity, which is closely associated to our profession, if artificial intelligence, digitalization and automatization will take over our professional responsibilities?

### **Hypothesis 2: Gender and identity are no longer predefined, but created?**

Despite an apparent unequally in the distribution of men and women in politics and leading positions, the battle for equality seems to be won, which for example is proven in the law system. As a consequence of this, the traditional male and female roles in the family and society have been changed or even vanished. For example, women are expected to express masculinity and men are taking parental leave. However, the so far lack of clear manifestation of gender roles, has elicited pressure on both males and females. Gender is no longer a safe and stable fundament. The new generation has the

liberty to choose their own sexuality and some of them want to change gender, while others want to identify themselves as partly male and partly female. Inherent biological traits appear to be merely parameters to base our choice on, instead of the fundament for own identity. Man and citizen have been led stranded in a universe where it is natural to question the biological reality. The existence becomes an individual project and the pattern of socialization appears to be characterised by a dialectic dilemma. Some people identify this as freedom, while others feel alienated by the fear of not performing sufficiently. A feeling of having responsibility to find your own self without a natural foundation seems to foster pressure and polarization between the genders. However, it is perceived that the demands from society to girls and young women are clearer than those for boys and young men. As a consequence, girls and young women are subject to increased level of stress, since they both are expected to have a career and raise a family. In contrast, the demands to boys and young men are less clear, which results in confusion, apathy and despair. Collectively, this scenario causes polarization and erosion of collective responsibility. It appears that both genders in an attempt to re-invent their biologically determined identity escape into digital universes where the social media is the mean to socialization, with the boys and young men connecting to their masculinity in digital games where hunting and aggression is accepted.

### **Hypothesis 3: Globalization\* creates fear and builds copied and unnatural spheres.**

The world is unified and we have impact on and are being affected through our choices and decision-making process in the local sphere, which is inter-connected with the global rush. A multitude of possibilities of emerging the global into the local is arising. The country has opened up towards the global world and digital universe is part of our local dimension. We are advertising the local community as unspoiled, unexplored and unbelievable. Our renowned Michelin starred restaurant, KOKS, presents the local flavour, which the global community has accepted as unique, and which attracts guests from all over the world. However, the invasion of tourists disturbs life stock, nature and the peace on the islands. The unique local has become global and the global has become local. We have developed an uncertainty for what is wrong and what is right. Tradition and roles are being vanished. For some this is positive, provides freedom and innovation, but for others this is perceived as unknown and threatening, which results in confusion and despair. Some state, that we primarily have to focus on ourselves and protect us against foreign "invasion", which may cause egocentric behaviour and paranoia. Under the surface lurks the fear of losing collectiveness and values, as well as the need to be able to navigate in life within a safe environment and relations, which augments predictability. Again, this causes polarization in society for example between the countryside and the city regions, different social classes, religion and science, fiction and facts, as well as the local and the global, which is pressuring and threatening the

collective community. Tension and pressure builds between several different society sub-groups, where it primarily is conflicting fundamental values and world view that separates the groups. On the global level this phenomenon is appearing as nationalism, which is a world-wide trend that can be interpreted as affection for the known and safe life dimension. However, this also creates copied and unnatural spheres in society and in the digital environment, which provides emotions of belonging, identity and safeness.