

## AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

### Denmark and the World at the Dawn of 2016 Report of a New Year's Listening Post



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

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

*In this part of the Listening Post participants are invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles. This part is concerned with what might be called 'the stuff of people's everyday lives' that relates to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants. Participants are invited to share their preoccupations and experiences as citizens of Australia, and to explore these from their various social roles, be these in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities.*

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

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

#### **Theme 1: Deep, Homeless Yearnings**

There seems to be a longing for grieving together, joining each other in a crying choir, demonstrate togetherness and dissociation on Face Book, carry torches and walk arm in arm against the evil. Not only Charlie Hebdo, the two terror killed people in Copenhagen on February 14, 2015 in Copenhagen, the killings in Paris on November 13, 2015, but also the death of David Bowie, generate collective grief and emotions of unity.

Sometimes, a lack of cohesion is experienced. Several people did not think Bowie meant so much to them and were surprised by the emotional intensity of their own response, while others find that the terror is embedded in connections so complex that it can be difficult to combine your intellect with these clear, strong, and unambiguous emotions. If you dissociate yourself from one group, you are suddenly friends with another, which you do not really want to befriend.

Many small outbursts of aggression pop up in the undergrowth of society. Hate mails flourish. Politicians must endure huge numbers of these mails. A man walks on a bridge over the motorway and leans over the railing to spit onto a group of fugitives walking below.

Somebody else films the episode and puts it on Face Book. The man is massively attacked, as are subsequently “naïve” friends of fugitives. The sexual assaults in Köln trigger emotional storms.

**Hypothesis 1:** The complex responses in postmodern society create a yearning for a simple world with friends and foes, love and hate, and strong emotions. Sometimes, this yearning turns into aggressive outbursts; at other occasions, it mobilizes torchlight processions and community singing. Political visions are being missed which cope with the complexity, and at the same time mobilize us emotionally.

## **Theme 2: Things Are Not What They Seem to Be.**

There seems to be a feeling that reality is different from the way it immediately appears to us. A report on whistle blowing in a major company shows an increase in cases of deception and fraud, but the probable explanation may well be vice versa: less corruption, but more reports on incidents. State and municipalities contribute with “new speak” which labels budget reductions anything but what they really are. Efforts to include children with learning- and social difficulties in school use pedagogical methods, which expose the weak performers and thereby create exclusion. Nationalist vicars explain the parable about the good Samaritan as a story of self-sacrifice to one’s own family. One political party stands for being the protector of the elderly but on a nearer inspection, they vote for reductions in that specific area when the opportunity arises. The media convey a general picture of increasing poverty, of everything getting worse, even though things actually progress steadily on a global scale: less violence, more education, less hunger, less illness. Politicians increasingly deny facts without flinching. It is common to say that “It may well be that one report or another says so and so, but I feel that it is actually the way I say.” On one hand, technological development leads to huge progress; on the other, much energy is being spent on built-in obsolescence. The Ballerup mixer from the 1960s still works while the 2005 food processor is long gone.

**Hypothesis 2:** Uncertainty characterizes life in the Information Age: which information can be trusted and which information has been constructed in order to cover yet other information, the message of which the sender wants to conceal. The mediation of information about the globalized society appears to be entangled in wrong proportions, concealment, substitution, and distortion. People miss solid foundations and reliable bases of action.

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