

AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Sweden 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.

Some participants were affected by the deadly attack the same morning on a staff member at a home for refugee youth in Gothenburg. One formulation was "concerned citizen" which cannot have the same trust in institutions as before. Will they handle the pressure in new situations and tasks from the big amount of asylum seekers that has arrived to Sweden during the last year? It is hard to comprehend and understand what is going on right now and one tries to avoid going into black / white thinking. The complexity of the situation makes it more important than ever to "comprehend and understand" when you can hear the trample of boots in European political development.

One wondered also if the Swedish Welfare State in Sweden had played its part and rather become an obstacle for development and adaptation. It might have to be torn down to enable something new to grow up - and in the situation of today rather be seen as a national "lifelong deception". One example could be that the task to reduce unemployment is unrealistic in a harder international competition where both employees and workers are replaced by modern technology. Thoughts that earlier had been unthinkable were formulated and as an example of "the new" citizen salary was mentioned.

Part 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

The weakening of Institutions both by harder pressure from their task and less investment in them from citizens.

The loosening up of democracy for example through the "contempt of politicians" creating a gap between the electorate and their representatives

Complexity makes it hard to see connections between what goes on in Sweden and on the international scene. Lack of awareness of complexity leads to populism.

Identity - who are we going to be in the future and fear of the future which goes together with lack of hope and belief in the future.

The concept of the Swedish Welfare State as a limitation and/or obstacle for handling international dilemmas. Its primary function was in domestic politics

How to manage to keep conversation going on - to create and defend space for discussion and dialogue when fear limits the willingness to speak.

Part 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post members are working with the data gathered from Parts I and II, with the aim to collectively identify the underlying dynamics – conscious and unconscious – that may be predominant at the time of the group meeting. As well as developing hypotheses as why they might be occurring at the moment. As such at this point the members are working with their 'psychological' or 'internal' world.

Reflection and dialogue

The space for dialogue is restricted between people in society and on workplaces. "The corridor of opinion" is a concept used in media. The dialogue between citizens and politicians is also weakened through what is named as "contempt of politicians" - people does not trust elected advocates and see them as careerists rather than responsible representatives. This means that the space for personal reflections and standpoints is diminished also out of fear for doing or thinking wrong since the situation is so complicated and difficult to grasp. The fear of doing wrong and lack of engagement is deeper than the readiness to formulate an opinion and act in the role of citizen.

Guidance

In a situation where old solutions to new problems does not function and one seeks for guidance since it is hard to orient oneself and accordingly hard to "manage oneself" in the role of citizen. After a long period of ideal in society focusing on the individuals own responsibility is it unfamiliar and uncomfortable to find oneself in a situation where you wish to have a leadership that can deal realistically with the situation. At the same time one fears for leaders with simple answers for complicated questions that could attract people and drive society in an authoritarian and populist direction.

Identity

Institutions have become weaker both in regard to how they can in fact manage their tasks and the confidence citizens feel for and invest in them. The country has had a long period when the concept of the "Swedish Welfare State" has given security for citizens. When it now cannot help the country to handle international situations the national identity gets disturbed - especially since it is to be represented by a minority government experienced as completely powerless to act. The result of the latest election can be seen as hard for the government to handle without a stable majority as a basis. At the same time the result of the election can be seen as mirroring the ambivalence and confusion of the people in the nation expressed through the result of the votes

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