

AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Denmark and the World at the Dawn of 2013
Report of a Listening Post held in Aarhus on 9th January



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post we were invited to identify, contribute, and explore our experience in our various social roles. This part of the evening was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to our social context.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was for us to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. The following represents some of these themes:

1. Inequality and Ambivalence
2. Empowerment versus powerlessness
3. The role as citizen in change

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, 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 the members 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.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Inequality and Ambivalence

Analysis: The difference between the rich and the poor is extending. All the same Denmark is still a country with a relatively large equality between the rich and the poor compared to the rest of the world. But people feel that the cohesion within the Danish society is being threatened. This dissolution is experienced not only economically, but also geographically. In a derogatory way we talk about 'the outskirts of Denmark' or 'waterfront Denmark'. We see trends showing a much more segregated society than earlier. The communities we used to rely on are under pressure. The unions, the government schools and the church are let down and especially the rich find private solutions. It seems as if the Danes has got used to the economic crisis. Economic wealth is not the same as satisfaction. If you look at foreign policy we see new flows and tendencies that might foster a new order. In Spain citizens protest because people are forced to sell their houses due to the economic crisis and become homeless. In Denmark: The political debate has changed with this government – focus is on the matter rather than on people.

Hypothesis: The paranoid/schizoid reaction to the crisis is crumbling and we see a movement towards the depressive position. Ambivalence is a daily experience and we investigate the great dilemmas thoroughly. We accept the crisis as a condition and the anxiety is hereby reduced. There is generally a greater understanding of what it means to live with ambiguity and change.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Empowerment versus powerlessness

Analysis: More and more people take up voluntary work. It might start because one has extra energy and resources or because one is engaged in a course or see people in need of help. The voluntary work is more and more often seen integrated in the services given by the community and the public institutions and sometimes these depend on voluntary work. We can see a schizophrenic experience because empowerment and powerlessness exist as parallel feelings. This expresses the dilemma between the enthusiasm which voluntary workers carry as opposed to top-down management and control which lead to demotivation within the public sector. The permanent demand for reduction of costs within the public sector gives a demotivated staff, tending them to keep good ideas to themselves and give up easily. Is voluntary work really an antidemocratic element, where one can try to come to terms with one's guilty conscience or a calculated manipulation?

Hypothesis: We meet bad conscience concerning doing too little for the community. It is hard to reach out and make a real change. The well-off middle-class (represented by the participants at The Listening Post Meeting) has enough social capital to create and fulfill their role and take care of family members suffering due to the crisis. We belong to the privileged and some fear a riot from the suppressed or distressed by the crisis, others worry how to get through to help these.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

The role as citizen in change

Analysis: We turn our backs to the old communities (the church, the union, government schools) and the role as citizen is changing. We both see more individuation and new communities being created. The responsible citizen who contributes to society is becoming rare. The government tries to appeal to the responsible citizen with slogans like 'do what you can and take (only) what you need'. The language changes as well, we not only talk about 'citizens' in connection with society, we label people: consumers, addicts or simply 'users' in a slightly derogative way. Feelings of solidarity or passion are widespread too.

One has to create one's own space. People with lots of resources create themselves, while the less fortunate drop out of school, of university, of the educational system as such and end at the bottom of the system. On the one hand we worry that young people don't join the unions and on the other we wonder whether we are overprotecting the young people. We might 'infantilize' them so they don't grow up to become independent, responsible citizens and human beings. On the other hand young people seem professionally very competent and moves around in the world in a curious and open-minded way.

Hypothesis: We emasculate young people by servicing them too much and in that way we underpin both the process of individuation and the breakdown of the role as citizens. At the same time we envy the young people their flexibility and the fact that they are competent and very good at getting hold of new fields and engaging in new communities. Envy is combined with bad conscience because so much talent might be wasted when the young well-educated people are kept out of jobs.

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