AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

# The Faröe Islands and the World at the Dawn of 2013
## Report of a Listening Post held on 9th January

**Encouraging The Reflective Citizen**

## 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, neighbourhood or 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', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

## Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was collectively to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes:

### 1. A great rift between the politicians and the people
Political decisions are made behind closed doors without public discussion and with disregard for expert advice. The politicians refuse to partake in public discussions and technical arguments are disregarded. People feels disheartened and experience a distance to the politicians, whom they suspect are getting away with corrupting the society. People are becoming indifferent towards the political leadership and are losing faith in the democratic process.

### 2. The youth are unhappy
Younger and younger children are seeking help because they aren't thriving or are otherwise unwell. The authorities are trying to get the public schools to solve all these problems, but the teachers are drowning in an ever increasing workload, so the public schools doesn't see themselves as capable of tackling these tasks. It seems like there is a long process between recognizing problems and receiving outside help.

### 3. Deafening silence
There are loads of issues are taboo in the Faröe Islands, amongst others are sexual abuse of children and alcohol abuse in families with children, and the Faröese are disposed towards trying to get rid of the problems by ignoring them. Even when everyone knows of sexual or alcohol abuse no one dares speak up. There is a strong wish that people would take more responsibility, dare express their thoughts and openly say that they were the ones who blew the whistle. People also miss public discussions and reflections about the issues that are taboo.

### 4. The need for closeness
The social life has moved into Facebook, and that process have amputated and crippled human closeness and interactions. The result has been isolation, loneliness and longing. It is a dilemma to be both understimulated and overinformed.

### 5. Alcohol
Focus is on treating symptoms rather than diagnosing problems. Energy are used on obsolete alcohol laws and state alcohol monopolies instead of looking for reasons for alcohol abuse in the families and in the society.

6. Women in the workplace
Traditional gender roles make many women chose to work reduced hours. This choice decreases their influence on the workplace, and leaves the arena to the men and the powers that be.

7. A lot is going on
In spite of, or maybe because of, the stagnation of the political arena, lots of changes are happening among people. People are taking initiative and aren't waiting for the state to solve their problems. But these initiatives are often met with skeptical appraisals, since no one are expected to take responsibility or speak their mind.

8. Exit Faröes vs Enter Faröes
After ignoring the warnings for many years its suddenly dawning on the Faröese people and politicians that the decreasing population reduces the economy, and that the individual has to shoulder an ever increasing burden. In spite of this reality more energy has been used to find the causes of the depopulation rather than identifying ways to increase immigration. On the contrary, the Faröe Islands efficiently discourages immigration. Even foreign spouses of Faröese citizens have a hard time getting permits to live and work on the Faröe Islands, and even in the successful cases the applicants have to go through a long and difficult process.

9. Big mother
We are drowning in welfare, which we take for granted and it is making us lazy. When the state takes care of all of our needs, the citizens become incompetent and don't feel responsible for even the most basic tasks in the society. The demands for welfare are unreasonable and unrealistic compared to what the political leadership can provide.

**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.

*Hypothesis 1*

*Polarization*

The rift between the political leadership and the citizens is greater than ever, and the political tenacity and trust between people are diminished. The media seem superficial, without courage or perspective, the culture of discussion has become weak and of low quality, and the public discussion been silenced. People instead vent their frustrations on Facebook, which seems to have become a safety- valve for the disheartened. The result is a hard and raw tone in the discussions and a polarization of political positions.

*Hypothesis 2*

*Distrust in the political leadership create firebrands*

The political leadership behaves like teenagers who doesn't think of the consequences of their actions and are divided. People feel that the politicians disrespect expertise, that they are short sighted and that they act impulsively. Distrust for the political system creates firebrands among the people, who takes initiative and responsibility in both social and economical areas.

*Hypothesis 3*

*Understimulation and overinformation*

At the same time as social networks has created a broad platform for increased openness in the democratic discussion, which has recently helped open up discussions about issues considered to be taboos, the social networks also diminish the social sensitivities in people. Personal relations become shallower, especially damaging young people and children, who lose human interactions and togetherness. This results in less closeness, less authenticity and more self-promotion and selfishness.

*Hypothesis 4*

*Exit Faröes vs Enter Faröes*

Despite everyone agreeing that the need for immigration is the largest problem facing the nation, we are not very god at receiving foreigners. There are examples of visitors who has invited to the Faröes, who has been able to travel freely all over the EU, but has been unable to obtain a visa for the Faröe Islands. A small and homogeneous society in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean seems to have a limited openness and tolerance.

*Hypothesis 5*

*Men and power*

Women cannot let go of patriarchal power structures and traditional gender roles, and don't step onto the arena in politics, business or public works. They instead choose work reduced hours or emigrate. This causes stagnation in the society and depopulation of the country.

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