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**Denmark and the World
at the Dawn of 2011**
Report 1 of a Listening Post
held in Vanløse on 11th 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 to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following three interrelated themes:

- 1. Economic crisis and increased individual positioning**
- 2. Boundaries are moved – secrets come out in the open**
- 3. Emotions replace rationality**

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

Economic crisis and increased individual positioning

Analysis: The economic crisis has come closer. Unemployment is now an experience which many people have in their lives. Some of the participants here are or have just been unemployed, others feel that such a situation could be just round the corner. Anxiety is connected with this. It has been said that people's fear of becoming unemployed is a displacement as unemployment in Denmark does not imply poverty in

the most basic sense of the word, but in fact it may mean becoming rich in another sense, namely in time. But it is not possible to disregard the risk of having to move from one's house and home due to unemployment. It is also painful – which should not be underestimated – not to have access to the same status symbols as others have. There is a general feeling that an irrational positioning is taking place as a way of giving an answer to the economic crisis. Of course, the economic crisis is also political, but only the extreme right wing populists are able to express themselves clearly and authentically. Confusion, bewilderment and group fragmentation abound, and for that reason the fight for attention is also part of individual citizens' interaction. Politicians are not generally seen as trustworthy, and on the part of the politicians themselves, they seem lost in opinion polls and dreams of being reelected, and it no longer seems convincing that they want to fight for anything or anyone. Time is spent on positioning themselves attractively and commercially on facebook and other social media.

Hypothesis: In these times of globalization and crisis it seems that there is a general anxiety that one can disappear from oneself, from one's nearest and dearest and from society. Identity and positions are experienced as provisional and supplies of individual attention have to be delivered almost daily in order to secure employment and social positions. The individual citizens may feel that they have to be reelected each day and therefore they anxiously read all messages from their networks on face book as if these were data from an opinion poll. In this way the citizens can be seen as being represented by the politicians, but at the same time people may be disappointed that the politicians lack a clear identity as much as they do themselves.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Boundaries are moved – secrets come out in the open

Analysis: The positioning activities on Facebook expose the individual citizen to an extent formerly unheard of. Photos from private parties reach everybody, and one can read about the most intimate and personal things in blogs and other social media. All the time reality entertainment on TV provides us with personal and private data about the chosen few, and everybody seems to love it. Compared to the stuffy attempts at hiding everything from the neighbors and each other, it can be experienced as an emancipatory development that everything is out in the open and de-privatized.

Wikie-leak, too, is predominantly seen as a step towards a more open society. On the other hand boundaries and limits are pushed so that derogatory expressions that could not have passed unnoticed before, do not catch anybody's attention today. Where native Danish children suffer from ADHD and other sophisticated problems, second generation immigrants are characterized without further ado as troublemakers. Where there were substantiated criteria for what treatment should be given to early damaged children and other children requiring treatment, the public management systems put indirectly a pressure on local authorities so that law has to give way to budget considerations. A market mentality comes into existence, but it is perverted version of the market. The public authorities have given up on their professionalism and focus on 'as if' quality and project their own irrational logic on e.g. leaders of treatment centres and are considered greedy when they suggest a treatment they see as necessary. A new case like the one in Tønder (incest) might help just as the murdering in Arizona gave rise to a debate concerning whether the violently hyped political language in itself produces violence.

Climate problems change traditional boundaries: islands disappear and parts of Australia are flooded, and here, too, seriousness and action are missing.

Government officials who do not speak the truth on purpose are exposed, but they are neither fired nor discredited publicly. Power slowly undermines the law.

Hypothesis: The new social media make it possible and produce an openness at the interpersonal as well as societal level. What before were state secrets or private and personal matters are put forward for anyone to see.

Openness has an emancipatory aspect built into it, but it is also a reflection of deterioration in societal ethics. One thing is that politicians might be busy beautifying reality and their own efforts, but when they are no longer afraid of being caught lying, it points to a general acceptance of manipulation and disuse of power.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Emotions replace rationality

Analysis: Rationality, knowledge and professionalism are increasingly important for establishing societal standards. The right wing demands harsher punishments and refer to a sense of justice in the public. People have a feeling that violations of the law are not punished severely enough – that is what the politicians say! Research shows, however, that contrary to what people generally believe, harsher sentences are in fact often given, just as it is an often proved scientific fact that prisons produce more crime than resocialisation. Children seem only to need family therapeutic care in the spring which is very fortunate as later in the year there is no more money in the box. The media have stopped investigating and clarifying reality and concentrate their efforts on persons and scandals and mistake critical journalism with summarizing two opposite points of view per case. What is in between is taken out from the whole so that it is not possible to test the arguments. Feelings and predictions of opinion polls replace reasoning and arguments. We live in a knowledge society, but one may fear that all the information we can get hold of makes us confused and even more stupid. It is for instance often shown that children in the 9th grade do arithmetic at the level of an ideal 2nd grade.

Hypothesis: Feelings and wishful thinking are undermining language, the democratic debate and thereby also the rational leadership of society. People are helpless and afraid when confronted with natural phenomena and the vast system in place. To question/challenge society's membership and predominant family traditions, to rebel against how things are always done. Isolation feels good, there is a need to be by one's self, to be left in peace, alone or with one's own friends, to possibly protect one's self from the angst caused by external forces.

Conveners: Bente Sonne and Birthe Johansen

→ [Report 1](#)

Denmark and the World at the Dawn of 2011

Report 2 of a Listening Post held in Aarhus on 11th January

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

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Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

1. Fear of losing values
2. Complexity and powerlessness
3. Citizens unable to act

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Fear of losing values

Analysis: Citizens are frustrated over the absence of ethics and values in the actual political debate. Both medias and politicians simplifies the political debate so it becomes tactical and has a very short range in the fight for power. Are we naive and stupid to ask for morals when it comes to both politics and politicians? Either the politicians have a bad character or power corrupt you – the case is that the ministry of integration acts illegally refusing to grant stateless Palestinians permission to stay in Denmark. The Prime Minister might have violated the Constitution, and the Supreme Court grants citizens permission to try the case in court.

Politicians have a doubtful character – take Berlusconi – the Italians don't bother having a gangster ruling the country. Do we simply resign to politicians and the political debate? What do we do to help the politicians to become better politicians? The Danish Folkparty (DF) succeeds in their heavy rhetoric about 'Danish values' and a very simple picture of the enemy – the Muslims and people seeking asylum. We introduce a score system to prohibited or minimize immigration to Denmark – a score system which might be in conflict with international human rights. Power undermines the law. Citizens feel embarrassed and outraged. At the same time the feeling of being powerless – to witness something without doing anything. People ask for honesty, confidence and decency. Today values are difficult to grasp and we see no deep or broad dialogue on values and

ethics – only the perspective presented by DF. Denmark is among the five countries in the world most likely to be submitted to a terror threat and strangely, a survey shows that we are the happiest people in the world. It was voiced that our values and emotions are the most important components.

Hypothesis: There is a loss of a feeling of social and collective values, where we witness the politicians' corrupt power. On the one hand it creates responsibility and makes us want to do something, but on the other hand it leaves us paralyzed. We are in an ambivalent situation – part of us wants to split up in 'them' and 'us' and part of us is looking for integrating possibilities concerning values and ethics.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Complexity and powerlessness

Analysis: The economic crisis has come closer and cuttings are seen everywhere in the public sector. Some of the participants work with cuttings as leaders or consultants. The cuttings are felt as unjustifiable because a minority gets more. Our welfare system is under pressure and we might lose social services which we have taken for granted during the last decades like for example the quality of our primary school and the whole educational system. At the same time the participants at the Listening Post have experienced that times of cut downs also hold possibilities for renewal and change – an opinion which it is not as 'political correct' to express as the one on loss of social services. It is no longer so evident who the enemy is, and the answers are not always black or white. When the leaders of the social democratic party meet secretly with some of the bosses from big business, it on the one hand leaves hope for political renewal, and on the other hand confusion because it disturbs ones political basic assumptions – such as, corporatism or cooperation between union and business is bad.

The participants experience that their own actions seem full of contradictions. 'I shop ecological some days – other days I don't'. 'I move my child from a public to a private school' or 'I'm a socialist, a collectivist and a drive a big Audi'. Dilemma and confusion because of the political power we have as consumers and at the same time a feeling of powerlessness, a lack of belief in the effect. Is it powerlessness or hypocrisy? A majority of the participants in the Listening Post have been organized in political parties or movements earlier, but only few are so today. Have we lost our common sense - who is the crazy one – me or the rest of the world? Where are the milestones – how do I orientate? Are we changing from responsible citizens to consumers? Do we need enemies? Are we totally self-centered (as DF), inconsistent, split and ambivalent?

Hypothesis: The political and social containing structures change fast and people find it more and more complex to orientate and find or on their own create containing structures. This put a pressure on the individual to mobilize energy to find or create communities where one feels one belongs.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Citizens unable to act

Analysis: Some participants have been motivated to take part in the Listening Post to be good citizens, because they wanted to influence, take responsibility, to make things happen.

The participants were consultants, teachers and leaders concerned in their jobs and professional roles with identifying, reflecting and analyzing. They had experience with identification and understanding and the barriers in this connection – also in relation with family-roles. Some participants had had to try to understand the feeling and motivation in family-members who had joined DF. The identification and contact one has with children as parent and grandparent was described as some of the most valuable. The complexity in the world as such was touched upon, but left again quickly – new economic heavy-weighters like China, Brasilia and India were mentioned. Women get educated and pass the men on the jobmarket. We see new types of power and a new distribution of power in the world.

Hypothesis: The Listening Post functions as an ideal model – a room for reflection – which is more or less absent in society today. Too paralyzed to act citizens prefer to stay in a mood of analyzing and reflection. A revival of the juvenile urge for change and will to act we saw in the 70s pop up now and again as a possible scenario for self-organization when young people don't do anything.

Convener: Åse Lading