

→ Report 2

**Denmark and the World
at the Dawn of 2012**
Report 1 of a Listening Post
held in Aarhus 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 lives,' the relating of 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.

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

Breaking down of the system

Analysis: Is the capitalist system on the verge of breaking down? Can we see the crisis as a sign of this and a crackled social order? Greed caused the crisis and is now threatening the European stability and coherence. The power is out of the hands of the politicians; the financial markets have taken over. Someone is irritated that we keep believing in growth. The fantasy 'growth' must collapse. Politicians and the media focus on growth as the only way out of the crisis – some find it demoralizing and too pessimistic. The media takes part in creating anxiety amongst consumers, which results in less optimism and demand. Some mention the positive that might result from a break down and are curious as to what will remain. There are thoughts and feelings like: 'to hell with it, let the capitalist system collapse. Let's see what'll happen'. Transformation of the capitalist system – a new economic world order – economic democracy – is it possible?

The Arabic Spring. Is it a new beginning nourished by the strength and will of young people who want another system. Or is it a step towards a more radical Islamic development?

Hypothesis: The feeling that something is changing worldwide creates anxiety, but it also creates a fragile hope and makes people believe that new different social communities and activities will emerge.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Sustainability

Analysis: Parallel to the ambiguous theme on the break down of the capitalist system voices were heard that had belief in innovation especially within sustainable products and energy. One was working as a volunteer within an ecological society. When the young people at the listening post voiced a theme it turned out that they were more concerned with the climate, ecology and the resources of the world than the economic system as such. Economic market forces limit use of and further development of sustainable energy because fossil resources are still good business. Economical interests overrule climate interests. Some see the positive traces: Some big companies are concern with sustainability because they can see it matters! So the market responds quicker than the politicians because it can see that it pays back to take care of the environment. Some believe in microloans to create sustainable growth in poor countries.

Hypothesis: Young people are concerned with environmental problems and senior citizens carry a burden of guilt because they have caused the problems. Where the older generations tend to give in to laziness and give up acting, the belief in the forces of the youth is strong and in the responsibility of each of us.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Analysis: A citizen tells about a nasty experience her sons had on a night out, where they were assaulted by other young people with a non-Danish background. The sons dared not report it to the police. Is our democratic belief in the legal system being castrated? And do we only believe in democracy when our institutionalized system of revenge is intact?

People expressed anxiety for the stigmatization and exclusion of foreigners which has been part of Danish legislation and rhetoric for the last couple of decades. In spite of a change in concrete legislation carried out by this government which improves conditions for this group, people present are concerned that the rough rhetoric will remain. People are frustrated that foreigners all are seen alike. They are as different as the rest of us and some react, like some Danes, negatively against 'new' immigrants, when they find themselves established. Positive stories about integration were told. One had lived close to a ghetto for 25 years and had biked through it every day seeing teenagers acting like anywhere else in society. Worries about expressions and attitudes signaling 'them-and-us', because it threatens our democracy. Does biological conservatism result in a critical attitude to strangers? Positive signals to keep up the spirit: we have got a Danish Minister of Church with an Indian background who suggests that homosexuals can get married in church.

How can we contain the anxiety to a degree that deliberate curiosity and anxiety as conditions for learning, also about the unknown, the foreigners.

Does the weakened position of the church in the Western World mean that we, people, have to contain the anxiety themselves? Are the containing structures too few or too weak? After the Utøya tragedy the Norwegian Prime Minister Stoltenberg's reaction to terror and fright was democracy and caring for each other.

Many examples showed signs of fear of being excluded from the community. Being part of a group at work is threatened because of the economic crisis and possible loss of job. Popular programs on television show ethnic Danes who are excluded. That goes for 'Young Mothers' that follow young women, who find it difficult to cope as mothers, and where the result sometimes is that the children are removed by the authorities who represent the community.

Hypothesis: The theme 'a society of anxiety' was born out of lack of belief in ourselves, politicians or democracy as saviors. Therefore we have to find ways to contain our anxiety or create new communities. We are the happiest people in the world and to us this means: having confidence in each other, close relations, freedom of speech and courage to go out into the world.

Conveners: Bente Sonne and Birthe Johansen
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Denmark and the World at the Dawn of 2012

Report 2 of a Listening Post held in Vanløse on 10th January

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Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis: Porridge and champagne

Porridge as a new food trend has come to Copenhagen, presumably from England. One can visit a porridge bar and a porridge restaurant.

Many people are also relieved because of the crisis. The bubble economy was bubbling over a great deal of anxiety, feeling that it could not be long before we would all get our well-deserved punishment. Generally, there are expectations that we have become more honest and loyal during the crisis and that we tend to go back to basic values. And that we realize that the flat screen TV and the sofa we bought for borrowed money in the past were signs of superfluous consumption. Again, it is possible to attract qualified personnel to old peoples' homes. In 2011 more expensive champagne was sold than ever before.

Some see young people as underachieving. They want to do the right thing and hide their own opinion of what is right and wrong. Generally, we do accept the fact that we are in the middle of a crisis, but it seems be difficult to single out the people who most afflicted by it. However, unemployment exists, also among people joining the listening post. And for instance, mentally ill children receive less money, but these reductions are wrapped up in *newspeak*.

Hypothesis: A circle of anxiety, guilt and hope

The middle classes are situated in a circle of anxiety, guilt and hope. They fear unemployment and marginalization, that the Chinese take over their work, that they'll have to move away from house and home. But they also harbour feelings of guilt and the sentiment is that they deserve punishment after the omnipotence of the manic bubble economy. Hope is associated to the idea that the crisis has saved them from a superficial life of easy consumption and made people get together in the celebration of real values. At the same time others deny the existence of the crisis and lose themselves in even wilder partying.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: Dissolution of fixed alliances and images of the enemy

President Bush drew the axis of evil which placed the Muslim world in the position of evil incarnate after September, 11, a position which the Soviet Union and the Eastern countries had previously held, but today these countries appear more marginal. While President Obama has not succeeded in passing many reforms, he has been able to reduce international polarizations. The Arabic spring has opened the eyes of the Middle East to democracy and freedom, and it is shown that the different populations are not conforming to fundamentalist creeds the way their rulers made us in the west believe.

The world was left with a shock when it turned out that Breivik, the the right-wing nationalist whose bombs and shoot-outs killed almost 100 people, was not a Muslim with a turban. Instead he was a rather average-looking Norwegian with extreme right-wing beliefs.

The COP 15 summit in Copenhagen seemed to demonstrate in a offhandway that China and India are not prepared to give in to dictates from USA, and that the balance of

power in the world is changing. Even though the economic crisis increases the level of anxiety, the world appears to be able to endure the unstable situation without turning to polarizations. Opposition against the bubble economy and its leading agents lack of accepting responsibility for it, has led to violent street fights as well as more sophisticated oppositional forms as the OCUPY movement.

Hypothesis: The depressive position

At the beginning of 2012 the world is in a state of uncertainty and openness where stable patterns of conflict and alliances are not yet visible. Neither socialism nor capitalism is victorious, and from the middle of Muslim fundamentalism, freedom movements step forward. It appears that the world at the moment can tolerate complexity from the depressive position.

Convener: Martin Bomholt, Thomas Birkholm and Steen Visholm