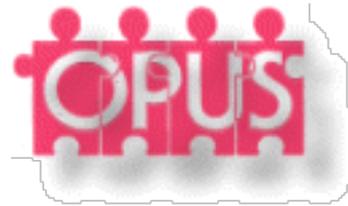


AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY (OPUS)

Denmark and the World at the Dawn of 2014 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 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 Two, the aim was collectively to identify the major themes emerging from Part One. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes:

Theme: Manuals or common sense

Manuals and procedures increasingly replace professional estimates and common sense. For instance, doctors may experience being in conflict with themselves whether they should follow the manual and do something stupid, but legitimate, or act according to their own estimate and do something sensible, but illegitimate. Robots and schematic rules of conduct are beginning to appear in the relations between citizens and the general public.

Hypothesis:

When chasing rationalization and innovation, people end up making themselves superfluous. Until then, reality doubles into two constructions: one based on rules, the other one on the remaining reality, and the two worlds have increasingly less to do with each other.

Theme: the Chinese

The idea that the Chinese economic expansion and their accelerating ability to compete on the world market acts as in a way that everybody is being pressurized into hectically pursuing being number one in the competition race where reflection is postponed indefinitely. It is the fear of falling out or falling off the international competition

merry-go-round that activates stress on thinking. The traditional demonization of certain persons and groups is on its way out. The consequence is not peace and quiet, but an underlying anxiousness which makes survival peoples' first priority even in countries where there is not a general lack of provisions. Children have to start school earlier, stay there all day and receive more tuition with less time for play. As early as in the 6th form, pupils have to make choices that determine their future. A social democratic Minister for Economic Affairs identifies himself with the book title: the competitive state, without any further reflections. The Pisa investigations make the nation succumb to anxiety and trembling. The political leadership has no idea of direction or vision, but orient themselves around production outputs in countries we usually compare ourselves to.

Hypothesis:

Both leaders and the population as such are blinded by the idea that nations are organizations which fight for their lives in a cut-throat international competition where citizens of all ages are employees. We lose the idea of cooperation and discussion of direction and goals.

Theme: silence of criticism

There is no one who presents a concrete criticism of the system anymore. New Public Management plus positive psychology make criticism a function of individual pathology. Journalism has become a kind of sport journalism where journalists write about scandals and fights and politely ask the combatants to give their opinion, but do not investigate the affairs themselves. However, the rhetoric of the public administration has learned a lesson from the advertising agencies and sells cuts and reductions as quality projects and progress. It is likely that the general focus on the role of the whistle-blower is produced by the increasing pressure from national and international competition on organizations and institutions. Large groups of intellectuals still like to criticise everything – without experiencing a need to present alternatives or appreciate all the things which in fact function really well.

Hypothesis:

As a societal productive force, criticism has been smothered without any further reflections. Criticism is either expressed as stress, depression etc. or through abstract analyses which are only an inspiration for exclusive circles.

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