OPUS

AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY

Denmark and the World at the Dawn of 2017
Report of an OPUS Listening Post®
held in Copenhagen on 16 January 2017

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS & EXPERIENCES

In this part, the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they: in work, unemployed or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, 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': the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2, the aim collectively was to identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

Theme 1: Disruption and robustness

In spite of the fact that many people distance themselves from New Public Management, the public sector, the state, society with its institutions appear increasingly as an unreliable persecuting maternal monster:

> "Mama's gonna make all of your nightmares come true.
> Mama's gonna put all her fears into you.
> Mama's gonna keep you right here under her wing.
> She won't let you fly, but she might let you sing.
> Mama's gonna keep baby cosy and warm." (Pink Floyd: The Wall)

The containing capacity of institutions has been eroded and especially the tax scandal has contributed to widespread frustrations. Society has lost billions of money because changing governments have cut down on the staff in the taxation department far beyond any rational sense.

Commonly 'new speak' presents down cuts and doubtful rationalizations as gifts to unprivileged citizens and their helpers. The new buzzwords 'disruption' and 'robust' reinforce the existing individualization of the challenges on the job market. Consultants who provide organizational changes have left before anyone can estimate the effects of the changes. One has to be robust to endure all the changes, which rarely result in a so-called creative disruption, but rather muddle the connection between cause and effect.

Theme 2: Extreme sport and radical diets

Leaders seem to be very much taken up with extreme sport. No job applications are without a few references to the marathons or half marathons that the applicant has taken part in. The mass media spend much time on health, on exercise and sports and on what people are supposed to eat and drink and what not to eat and drink. This is not only seen in relation to the individual's health, but also to estimates of local and global sustainability. No coherent discourses are found, but many discourses that are mutually exclusive. In the present debate, it is possible to position oneself in several different discourses. Apart from possibly leading to better health and more sustainability, there seems to be other aims involved.

In a world of accelerating complexity the connection between cause and effect can be difficult to identify and therefore is often left to creative fantasizing. As such it can be nice for a leader to demonstrate that there is in fact something he or she masters – if only a whole or half marathon

Sports, exercise and diets support one's identity project in a society where identity is increasingly more important than action. Young people often use their radical diets to challenge the power relations between themselves and their parents or the staff in the institutions.

A universal feeling of guilt seem to require many victims. Citizens have to cleanse and punish themselves by detoxing and following tough diets and training programmes.

Theme 3: No-one dares say anything – everybody screams and shouts in the social media.

It is increasingly experienced as dangerous to say something via the official channels. If one criticizes something at work, one is disloyal and risks being fired or is seen as a troublemaker who has better act positively.

The small number of journalists who have the time to look into things and who can therefore ask critical questions are met by distancing politicians who present themselves through feelings instead of facts and arguments.

In return despondency and anger turn up in the social media where many people try to get rid of their anger by directing it at big groups of anonymous people or at politicians.

PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In Part 3, the participants were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, 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, participants 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:

A tendency is that the basic feeling of security is threatened in society. The state and the public institutions make mistakes, explain them away and do not live up to their own norms and regulations.

Hypothesis 2.

A tendency is that the time spent on exercise and health, also serves subconscious aims. Leaders demonstrate that they are able to do something specific and not only act contingently in complex systems. Guilt is eased through self-punishment, and so positioning oneself in health and illness discourses reinforces the individual's threatened identity.

Hypothesis 3:

A tendency is that communication and dialogues no longer have mutually binding consequences and leave people isolated and lonely.

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