AN ORGANISATION FOR PROMOTING UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY

Sweden and the World at the Dawn of 2017
Report of a OPUS Listening Post®
held in Lund on 18th 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.

11 participants and 2 convenors were present, giving a total of 13. Of these, 8 were men and 5 women, ranging in age from around 30 to 90.

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

Participants in the roles of e.g. teacher, therapist, psychologist, physician, pensioner, artist, parent and consultant were invited to share experiences and to explore these from the different perspectives.

The discussion started from an experience of biological domination perspective in healthcare. The individual explanation is focused. In school the teachers work is more and more regulated and supervised. Best Practice and control is more important than professional responsibility. Advocates of psychosocial explanations do not any longer have the energy to argue and fight for an alternative ideology. Rules and measurement are unchallenged as guidelines. Some parts in education is still free from this but under attack.

On a personal level the building of the body is central – Why is so many eating so much protein? Some exercise like professionals while others become more and more immobile. The objectives for training is a fit body or better achievement, like enhancing learning. We do not do it because it's fun; instead it feels driven by performance pressures.

A feeling of being lost was expressed, of not knowing if what one does makes a difference, and of a lack of human contact and the sharing of experiences and feelings. In health care patients are talked about in terms of a "need" for personal

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encounters, which then can be ordinated by medical doctors. It feels odd, an instrumentalization of the human condition. And the provision of human encounters is limited by the available resources. There is a relational-fatigue – there are only so many encounters that you have the energy for, and the authorization and ordination of encounters as a way to regulate this, but that also becomes a self-reinforcing process. This has been developed in a system with "self-referral", in order to handle the ever growing queues in the health system.

There is a fear of what will happen with the unaccompanied children when the homes for asylum seekers are attacked. We can't provide necessary security.

But this fear may be induced. Someone wants us to fear the situation – but everybody is not afraid. There is clearly a growing polarization in Europe. But it's not "the others" that deprives the Europeans their jobs, it's the automatization and the logic of market economy. The passion in politics seems to be with the extreme right nationalistic party.

This can lead to paradoxes as assuming artists to be scientists or entrepreneurs. Artists cannot be entrepreneurs – art is not produced for a purpose, but is a purpose in itself.

Another paradox: We experience loss, but assets are more and more immaterial. A stolen bag with calendar and work documents is swiftly replaced. The consequences are very short-lived. We are both exposed and stable. A reference was made to dating-apps.

A sign in the room was the trigger for a discussion on how rules are followed or not in our lives. There is a striving for extreme security but the control obtained is deceptive. We handle rules and borders largely in a self-organizing way.

Competition is the driving force of society. Competition overrules cooperation.

A woman told of her experience at a conference recently, focusing Human Rights, and where particularly young people seemed very engaged in these questions, in a way reminding of the revolutionary spirit of '68. Defense of HR replaces the political movements as channel for civil engagement. Maybe this is a more individualized than political engagement?

Individualism was linked to competition, reflections on how biologists see competition among many animal species, when resources are scarce, and experiences of people being well groomed and civilized even in quite informal settings, as if competing in keeping up appearances. In contrast to experience of a well ordered surface were experiences of stark contrasts in the conditions of life and culture in some parts of cities. While some people live on the street, whole families from the same neighborhood might take a three week vacation in Thailand over Christmas.

In a way, the city presents a facade to the world, of being prosperous and growing, wanting to be taken seriously, but behind the facade there is troubles, violence, poverty, and generally friction and turmoil. Appearance seems more important than

authenticity. Both for parents at a school-meeting and cities that build signature buildings while social problems lingers.

Animals seem more interesting and important than people. Cats on the internet and horses at the sport arena. In some countries higher order animals even are granted some rights – previously exclusive for humans.

One question is how the algorithms on internet that supervises and selects news for us will handle us in the future. Maybe as inferior beings.

The themes presented by the groups were:

- Facade – showing confidence but struggling with loss of control
- Difficulty to find a meaningful role
- Have we hit the rock bottom?
- Human's role in a post humanistic world
- Borders, and border violation
- Inner/outer conflict – confusion
- Influence/lack of influence
- Trust or control?
- Adaption vs. self-assertion
- Inner/outer security
- Interchangeability, saturation – lack of resources
- Yearning for (human) meetings

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: Keeping up appearance – avoiding or hindering human encounters

The dominating force for development in society is the pursuit of profit, often through rationalization or dominance. Other values are pushed aside and this creates an unsafe inner world. Unmet needs, e.g. of caring, evokes shame which must be kept inside but can't be regulated.

Lacking other guidelines we invest in a façade to give an impression of success. This facade hinders authentic meetings. We are unable both to recognize these psychological needs in ourselves and in others. This creates pressure on regression.

Hypothesis 2. Regression leads to splitting – holding is too heavy

For some the schizoid splitting is more alluring than the holding in the depressive position. To keep up the façade of success they shamelessly focus on their own interests and displace impulses to care and to hold on to ideals.

Hypothesis 3. The Reign of pessimism – we allow fear to dominate

Others hold the balancing depressed position. The world appears to be falling apart and the fear induced by the unscrupulous selfishness dominates the conversation in society. The splitting is sustained in the international political arena.

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