



Sweden at the dawn of 2018

Report of a Listening Post held in Gothenburg on 18 January 2018

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND 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.

The group shared current experiences, views and feelings that were seen as expressions of the present day, in a free manner, with associations and additions. The group's focus went from large to small, from veganism to nuclear weapons. The themes that emerged were:

Uncertainty and anxiety

There is an uncertainty in society about what is right and wrong, what is acceptable to think and believe. An "opinion parcel" is created and one keeps within its confines. Issues are difficult and diffuse. It is difficult to know whether one is doing the right or the wrong thing, good or evil – and "the good" can turn out to be "the evil". Who can one trust when fake news is produced? Should it be the experts who express themselves? There are no simple maps to follow.

Polarisation –and simultaneous differentiation

Polarisation and differentiation are two forces that can be seen parallel in society. Polarisation is powerful and swift. We are divided into us and them, man and woman (#metoo), evil and good, Swedish and non-Swedish – political views are set with absolute certainty against one another. Politicians should be certain about issues; politicians who raise uncertainty are not to be found.

Differentiation can be observed parallel to the above. Old norm systems are

questioned, and new norms are emerging rapidly. Veganism is a growing trend amongst the young. Norms relating to gender are also being challenged, where a rapid acceptance for non-binary and transgender issues is emerging. Polarisation is also counterbalanced by phenomena such as “nudging”, or the breakthrough of Kahneman’s book, “Thinking fast and slow”, thus reflecting an interest in understanding complex connections.

Responsibility and guilt

It is difficult to take responsibility when everything is so complex. Where should you direct your energy, who is accountable – “on whose table should I be pounding my fists?” One becomes uncertain in one’s role as a citizen, what shall I do when I take responsibility? How shall I show it, what can I say or do and how? There is a risk that one becomes passive instead, when one needs to make so many choices with serious consequences. Paradoxical behaviour emerges. One uses recycling bins diligently and then flies to Thailand with the whole family.

Entertainment versus seriousness

“Trump is mad – but in an amusing way.” One follows the world’s development as entertainment.

A sort of TV-game mentality comes into play, one can always press pause, save and reload. It is difficult to see effects; simple indulgences create hidden waves that affect society. We push a button and are sent goods from China easily and simply, return what we do not want, but do not see how air freight increases and the world’s airports build hangars filled with DHL parcels.

Together the participants attempt to formulate the conscious and unconscious dynamics that are dominating at the moment. Why is this happening just now? Is it possible to understand?

A period of relative peace and relative affluence has characterised several decades. Globalisation has increased, and the Internet makes communication possible across the globe. Complexity arises and makes us uncertain. The world picture changes. Disagreements are expressed in various forums and become visible. Polarisation simplifies issues enabling us to take a view.

The economic world order is also changing. “Follow the money” – so we see China emerging as a new economic superpower. Our position in the world is threatened. Are the cheap parcels from China that are flooding the country consolation prizes (or bribes) from the new world power?

Technical developments are rapid and difficult to comprehend. Artificial intelligence, robots and digitalisation drive development and shape society. We experience this as a diffuse threat. Human beings find it difficult to comprehend algorithms and exponential change curves. Artificial intelligence perhaps can be regarded as an opportunity. Perhaps we need intelligent machines that can program more intelligent machines that can understand, interpret and manage a

complex world

The stone age human being in us is unable to comprehend the limitless possibilities. Threat impulses are activated. We react neurologically with fight, flight or freeze. Bion's basic assumptions seem to be alive: fight-flight, dependency or pairing.

Where is there hope? The hope is that anger as energy can be a potential. Uncertainty is reversed in rage. This rage can be reappraised and regarded as an opportunity. Perhaps we need this rage, a holy rage, to lift us out of our passivity, lack of responsibility and uncertainty.

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