



An Organisation for Promoting
Understanding of Society

LISTENING POST

Sweden at the Dawn of 2019

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.

A couple of weeks into the new year we, eleven Swedish citizens, gathered in order to reflect on Sweden and on being citizen in Sweden at the beginning of 2019. Together we comprised a Listening Post. Our conversation contained three parts: sharing experiences, defining themes and interpret common themes. In our reflections we assumed that there is a relationship between the large social movements in society and things that happen in daily life. It was in this dialectic, between the large and the small, between the inside and the outside, that the content of the conversation emerged.

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

Dislocation and change

The listening post was held on the day when Sweden, after four months of negotiations, finally could expect to get a new government. The process of forming the government had not only dislocated the political landscape, it had also dislocated premises of forming a government. The government was based on rejecting coalitions partners rather than on a political agenda. Concerns keeping the extremist parties from power were more important than what was to be accomplished when in power. Questions like who takes who, who will govern who seemed to be central in the process. We spoke about the shift of paradigm and of feelings of chaos and disorientation when facing the new social and political landscape.

Another dislocation concerned the conditions of democracy in the new “platformsociety”. Platformsociety was illustrated by Amazon that was described in a metaphor: we were all cows in the meadow of Amazon, and for a fee you could go on sightseeing in their beautiful garden. In other words, a dislocation of power was identified, i.e. a dislocation from politics to platforms.

The dislocations are complex transformations that we, as citizen, cannot to do anything about. We can only to try to find our way in the new landscape, to find a room of our own. How much this affect people’s willingness to change is hard to know. But the dislocation can cause people to become unable to see changes that take place in front of them, and their obscured vision could contribute to their resistance to change. You must be able to see both old and new systems in order to understand new possibilities. Health care is one example where change is made difficult by people’s thinking in terms of old systems.

The possibilities of meeting others via video have dislocated people’s conceptions of human interchange. Medical consultations and therapy sessions via video require new ways of understanding the essence of human encounters. Is it good or bad? Hard to know.

Living in Middleland

In the polarized social landscape, energy is drawn towards the fringes. Most citizens prefer to stay the middle. But in Middleland emptiness prevails. It is difficult to become visible in Middleland, let alone to see others. Conversations often become shallow in a society with norms that require not being moved, and not moving others. At the same time there is a deep longing for what is genuine and authentic. In Middleland chatting lies as a dense filter that absorbs commitment and meaning.

People in Middleland are tired. Tired from holding back. Tired of being held back. Tired from their endeavors. Tired of their endeavours.

In Middleland severity rules. Invisible norms convey that it is dangerous to do something, to be somebody. However, threats and rules are not articulated. Nobody knows the consequences, yet the rules are obeyed. People bend in front of the rigor of conformity. Conformity could be understood as the consequence of an extended practice of measuring and categorizing people. Also, in the categorization practice there has been a dislocation; from external, observable criteria to integral, personal traits as the basic criteria. This dislocation evokes shame and guilt.

IT-technology has dislocated human encounters and two different kind of encounter paradigms have emerged. I the newer form, people are framed. Slightly exaggerated, you could say that it is an encounter between two portraits. It is encounters without body and without backside. In the old form of encounters, people meet in bodies, and with bodies. This polarization can be perceived in another way. That is, in Middleland, the spirit of empathy has been let out of the bottle and is flying around, difficult to catch and unwilling to return

to the bodies that once contained it.

In Middleland you are left to your own resources. How will this affect coming generations? In spite of parental involvement there is an uncertainty as to use adult authority, and to intervene when necessary. The question about what is being done to the younger generation is legitimate and urgent. In parenthood, as well as in other arenas in Middleland, people want to govern but not lead.

The mechanisms operating in Middleland shrink the room for actions and its citizens have lost confidence in their own abilities and creativity. This leads to feelings of shame and guilt when faced with one's personal insufficiency.

Climate change has produced a shame of flying. This is one example of how shame becomes institutionalized. However, the deepest shame and guilt probably has to do with the sense of insufficiency. Insufficiency in relation to your fellow humans, insufficient in relation to yourself.

Splitting

What is going on in Sweden in the beginning of 2019, how can it be understood? A shared interpretation emerged from the flow in the conversation. Splitting was perceived as a central mechanism that affects the daily life of Swedish citizens. In its institutionalized form, splitting drives the polarizations of social and political life. In practice, it concerns our inclinations to constantly create polarizations between good and evil. Psychologically, the splitting mechanism produces an inability to bring good and bad together internally, which leads to an inability to act.

In object-relation theory it is assumed that the ability to unite good and bad into something whole is a precondition for realizing your full potential as a human being. The tendency to split the world into good and evil, us and them, follows us through life. And it is this tendency that has been mobilized and institutionalized. The splitting mechanism creates antagonism and categorizations that undermine the ability to think, act and cooperate. Splitting in the gender system where men are seen as evil and women as saints is one example. The splitting between person and one's "personal brand" is another. Generally speaking, it is the splitting mechanism that produces the culture in Middleland.

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.

Convenors: Britta Högberg and Jarl Råstrand