

EGATIN Study Days, 26.4 2024

Welcome to Aarhus

'Where are we - the wider perspective'

Kristian Valbak

Welcome to the Study Days!

The Local Organizing Committee has been working for more than a year with the preparations. So - let me start by presenting the other members:

[Ana Loncar Knutsen](#), [Susanne Broeng](#), [Lene Hjort](#) and [Kristian Rokkedal](#).

You can turn to them if you have questions or need help.

In times of disruption

Today we shall study the challenges in our clinical work and tomorrow in addition reflect on the challenges facing our trainings.

We are in times of disruption! According to the dictionary, 'disruption' typically refers to a significant disturbance, interruption, or change that alters the normal course of events or operations within a system, organization, or society. Disruption can also refer to broader social or economic changes that challenge existing power structures, norms, or institutions.

While disruption can be disruptive and challenging in the short term, it can also lead to positive outcomes such as innovation, progress, and growth. The best example is the emergence of the Internet and what followed.

No doubt, we are in a time, where unexpected and devastating events seems to multiply.

I can only imagine how terrible is must be living in Ukraine or being trapped in Gaza. Or being persecuted in China or in Myanmar because of religious beliefs.



Homeless

We cannot be unaffected. However, it surely depends on who we are, and where we are.

Context is important, isn't it. The context we live in, the context we work in and of course the context we grew up in.

Our possibilities in life and ways of living, are dependent on our context.

When I try to understand how differently we can understand the world around us, I always remember Karls Marx's word:

'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness'

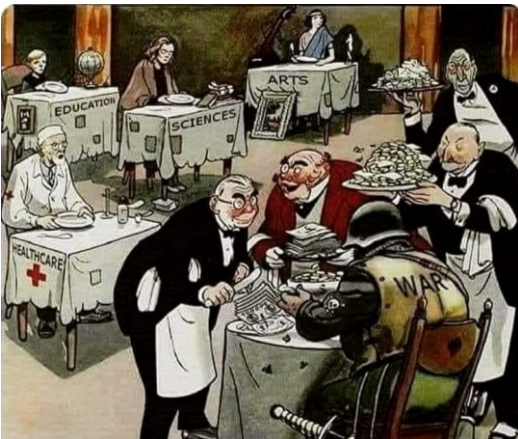
Karl Marx, 1859 (From lecture in Lisbon, 2014)

Many of us have lived a continuous development in prosperity, education and welfare since the second world war. We now experience that this development has been disrupted or shall we say interrupted. In recent time significant changes have occurred: The climate crisis with unprecedented high temperatures, causing floods and draughts leading to famine and displacement of large numbers of refugees.

Shortly before the upcoming EU election there seems to be a majority of parties, that will not legislate climate change regulations.

The covid pandemic - in death toll not seen since the Spanish flu - has more or less affected all of us - in general by disconnecting us from each other.

And now wars will destroy land and homes for millions of people - for years.



Once again

In all European countries a new rearmament takes resources and priority, at the expense of health care, education, art and sciences. The political and economic power concentrates in still fewer hands. The hands of cynical, brutal, paranoid, corrupt and narcissistic leaders.

I am more and more convinced, that we are about to destroy the planet for the human race.

Sometimes I get this uncanny feeling about the future. A feeling of loss, not only of possibilities, but loss of values, culture and knowledge. Novels by a German and an Austrian author comes to mind:

First published in 1924, "The Magic Mountain" ('Der Zauberberg') by Thomas Mann describes a long stay at an isolated sanatorium in the mountains. Set against the backdrop of Europe on the brink of World War I, the novel explores themes of time, illness, mortality, and the search for meaning in life. I was deeply fascinated by the story of the long recreation from tuberculosis, followed by the brutal report of the protagonist's death at the front in WW1 shortly after his return home. The question was: Has it all been in vain? Is the dream over?

Stefan Zweig wrote 'The World of Yesterday' ('Die Welt von Gestern') shortly before WW2. He grieved the breakdown of freedom and loss of the vibrant cultural and intellectual atmosphere of Vienna and Europe. In the center of these social and political upheavals was the rise of nationalism, militarism, and totalitarianism.

He became totally disillusioned, emigrated to Argentina, where he committed suicide with his wife in 1942.

I am sure, you must have lived for some times to have these dystopic thoughts. Is it just me? Or do we have difficulty looking up and facing reality?

Denmark

Let me talk about something more invigorating, namely the Danish Foundation Group Matrix.

The World Happiness Report 2024 ranks Denmark as the second-happiest country in the world on the basis of - among a range of variables - generosity and a perceived lack of corruption.

I don't know why we are so happy here in Denmark. But it's a fact we have widespread democracy, social welfare, free health care and schools and a high degree of trust in the authorities. It's estimated that only 12 % of all countries in the world has a true democracy. So, in terms of freedom of speech and political influence, you can be grateful, if you have what must be considered a privilege.

We are not very religious, but we have a Christian culture and a kingdom - the oldest in the world - and the oldest national flag. Maybe we are the most flag fond people in the world?

In the past we had several small colonies.



The West Indies Islands

From 1672 to 1917 Denmark had a colony in the Caribbean called the Danish West Indies. You can count six Danish flags in the painting



Denmark is a small country

The last one, Greenland - the world's largest island and home to 56,000 people - was a Danish colony until 1953, when it was redefined as a district of Denmark. In addition to its own local government, Greenland has two representatives in the Danish Parliament - and the highest suicide rate in the world.



Here is a map of the EU! (Notice the United Kingdom has sunk into the sea!) - a map, where Denmark takes another first place.

Is that young people drink a lot of alcohol? It could be, but no!

Denmark is also a nation of consumers. The map shows the EU-countries CO₂-outlet from consumption per capita in 2021.

We were once a larger kingdom, but after the wars with the Swedes, the English and the Germans in the mid of the 19th century, and the two World Wars we barely survived as an independent country.

Most people know that around 7000 Danish jews in October 1943 were shipped to Sweden, not because they were Jews, but because they were Danish.



German refugees

But did you know that 250,000 German fugitives were in large camps in Denmark from 1945 to 1949. They were tolerated, but not much more.

The High Schools



The school in which we are hosted is based on an old Danish tradition. The so-called 'high schools' - originally an afterschool for rural citizens - were to become a cherished way of learning, 'not for the school, but for life'. The schools are for everybody over 17 and a half in age, and against social differences. For discussion, - learning democracy and equality. The schools have different

distinct characteristics. This Deaconal college - founded in Christianity - has educations, that fosters compassion and cares for the weak and ill.



Training in being part of a community

The awareness of others opinion starts in the kindergarten: The small citizens are placed in a circle, where they learn to listen, and to respect others. The non-hierarchical seating arrangements supposed to foster a sense of inclusivity and respect for diverse perspectives and encourage active participation.

Danish news media reports from all over the world, because we are dependent on what happens out there. We must listen to the voices of our greater allies. Not being too cocky is part of the Danish mentality.

The Cooperation

Another distinctive feature of the Danish foundation matrix is the Cooperative movement. Originally a social and economic movement that started in England with the establishment of the Rochdale Society, the Cooperation operates on the principle of democratic governance, emphasized principles of mutual aid, solidarity, and self-help. It advocated workers' rights, social justice, education and democratic participation in economic decision-making.

The first consumer association opened in 1866 and these cooperations grew fast in number. Shortly after came the Cooperative Dairies; the first in Hjedding in 1882, and soon was most of Denmark covered with dairies.



Hjedding Dairy 1882

Before the dairies every peasant delivered milk and butter from his own farm. With the dairies, the production was centralized and became a joined venture, with better quality as a result. Decisions were taken in meetings, where every member had one vote (disregarding the number of owned cows).



Presenters Grandfather 1907

Today, cooperative enterprises continue to play a role in many sectors of the economy, providing an alternative to traditional for-profit business models. Two million Danes are members of the Consumer Cooperation.

Aros

Aarhus was originally Aros, meaning 'mouth of the river'. Dating back from year 700 just before the Viking age. There are similar cities with that name in Norway and Sweden. Trondheim was previously Nid'Aros' and Västeros in Sweden was 'Vestre Aros'.

With a population of around 350,000, the city is known for its excellent quality of life and high happiness index. Did you know, that Aarhus for many years has branded itself as the city of the smile!

Today Aarhus is characterized by its many learning institutions. Every seventh person you meet in the street is a student.

How are the trainings doing in Denmark?

But what happened to the Mental Health Service in Denmark? The context has not been easy. We are surrounded by a New Public Management thinking, rigid regulations and a neo-biological focus on diagnoses. Rationalization has centralized the specialized health system including the psychiatric hospital treatment, which became part of the larger somatic hospital in 2018 - and crumbled from that.



Aarhus University Hospital, a superhospital in Skejby

The supply of psychoanalytic treatments also suffers from the general limitations including lack of educated therapists and supervisors. At the same time, the trainees, who until now largely have been recruited from the institutional psychiatry, have been hit by the cutback in resources for educational support.

What happened in Europe

It is difficult to determine, whether there has been a continuous progress of group analysis or group analytic psychotherapy in my time.

If we consider that the Group Analytical Society international represents an interest and a practice, then there has been progress measured by membership. The same can be said with the growing number of institutes affiliated with EGATIN. However, although information on the number of candidates in institutes is continuously collected, we have not had a fairly comprehensive picture since the 2008 survey, which included almost all institutes, - at that time 32 out of 34.

The pandemic boosted the on-line possibilities for communication and relations. And the training also took that method as a way to continue and survive. These days the question is asked if it will be accepted to have an all-online education in group analysis!

It is reported, that the institutes in Germany and Norway have great demand for their educations. In Germany, private practice is thriving with subsidies for group treatments, largely made possible by research-based evidence.

In a broader perspective Brexit - first of all - helped to weaken relations to London. The war in Ukraine hampered the physical contact with colleagues in Ukraine and Russia. The increased tension in the Middle East, and especially the war in Gaza, has again led to strong exchanges of opinions and conflict between the Israeli group and other members of the group analytic society. Many Israeli colleagues have left the GASi Internet forum (which will now be closed) and have threatened to terminate their membership of the society.

EGATIN never had an office where the committee could hold meetings or, for that matter, a permanent location for an archive. A bank account and web site have been managed from different countries as the committee has changed hands. Recently, and unexpectedly the organization experienced the closure of its bank account, perhaps because of tightening of banking regulations to avoid money laundering, financial fraud and to apply trade sanctions.

It may happen that a dream is over, but how can we find hope and faith in the future? Is there a way out of this?

In these days you can't open a newspaper or professional magazine without being told of the new fertilizer, Artificial Intelligence. It can be used for a variety of tasks, we are told, also in the health service? We were talking about artificial intelligence in the last large group in Aarhus. I don't think that was a coincidence. To what degree will we be influenced by AI. Will we end up being robots ourselves, sending our avatars to the therapy groups?

The bot's can answer every question you ask. I am not familiar with those chat creatures, but decided to ask 'Chat GPT': 'What is EGATIN?' The answer came with no hesitation:

'EGATIN is an anthelmintic medication used to treat infections caused by certain types of parasitic worms' (Chat GPT, 2024)

What do You know!

The spirit of the conference

The title of these study day is rather straight forward. Who will benefit from group analysis? The question is not even new. When I looked through the themes of the EGATIN study days in the past, I realized, that it has very often been about applied Group Analysis. Whatever our endeavor, when we work in the helping profession, we must be ready to adjust to the changes society brings to us and our patients.

But wait, we must have something inspiring. What can be the spirit of this conference?



The infinite bridge

Look at the frontpage photo. It is The Infinite Bridge - which against all odds has become a hall mark of Aarhus. It is a circular wooden structure that extends out into the sea, creating a loop that appears to go on infinitely when viewed from certain angles.

The installation is more an idea, than a spectacular construction. More visual, than functional.

The architect, Johan Gjøde - son of deceased Susanne Ulv, co-founder of IGA-Aarhus - got the idea to the Infinite Bridge as a one-time contribution to the exhibition, Sculpture by the sea in Aarhus 2015. However, due to the public's positive response and growing popularity, it was rebuilt and became a permanent fixture in the city offering panoramic views of the surrounding landscape and the sea. Its design encourages contemplation and connection with nature.

Shall the circular form suggest to us, that we are going nowhere? Yes, and no! It's about looking from different perspectives, different individual viewpoints or ways of understanding and interpreting our professional world. Depending on your position on the bridge, you can look back, look out and look in. Or looking further, into the future.

The circle is also a symbol of eternity, of unity and of the seasons (of which we have four in Denmark). Like the green new leaves at the beech trees, the bridge will reappear every spring as a symbol of rebirth and hope.

I will end this kaleidoscopic and maybe disruptive welcome speech by the sincerely hope that all of us here will find the courage to take part in the event. Please engage - do not wait!

Welcome and don't forget to have a good time!