

VILORUM – HVILERUM – RUHERAUM - RESTING PLACE

I grew up in Sweden, a country with a very well functioning socialdemocracy from the 60ties until the end of the 80ties. The economy was on top and the political system was build on distributing the incomes of the country to all citizens.

Unions got powerful and created rules that benefited the employees, so they got better working-conditions and higher salaries.

Families could afford a cottage on the countryside and would leave the city friday night for some fresh air.

Schools got better. Children with learningproblems got special lessons. Children with parents speaking a foreign language got lessons in their mother tounge as well as in swedish, so they could benefit from being bi-lingual.

In every school I went to as a child, and at every work I had after, there was always a VILORUM.

RESTING PLACE would be the best english translation as the word rest-room lead your thoughts to an american toilet.

The resting place was simply a small room with a wash-hand basin, a bed, a pillow and a blanket. A very important thing was the key, so you could lock the door and be sure not to be disturbed.

At school your teacher would get the key for you. At a place of work you would get it at the reception or from the housekeeper, or it would simply be sitting on the inside of the door. Typical reasons for spending a few hours in the resting place would be aches of the first day of period, a headache or any kind of disease that just started, which made you need a aspirin and some rest, before returning to work. For some reason there was an unspoken rule, that didn't qualify hang-overs for a few hours in the resting place. I don't know if this was a moral only existing in the places where I worked...

In 1992 I moved to Germany and later to Denmark. As I got back to Sweden eight years later I realized that the swedish welfare I grew up with, was gone. A welfare I must admint, I had been very proud of, especially around friends in Germany, where actually the former East-Germans saw Sweden as "ein Musterland" – the word Erich Honecker used for Sweden, der Ideal Stat.

In the year of 2000 the socialdemocracy was clearly on the right side of politics. It had happened little by little, but for someone who hadn't really followed swedish politics for eight years, it was a huge turn. The socialdemocratic programme now, was more or less the same as that of Moderaterna (the major rightparty), ten years ago.

Industries had had problems since the end of the eighties, and companies chose to move abroad to get cheaper workingpower and to pay less taxes. Unemployment followed and people who still had jobs were afraid of loosing them. The unions tried to hold on to their power, but lost it little by little. The social security system got weakened, and you couldn't rely on getting unemployment-money or other benefits. Homeless people was part of the picture in almost every city.

All this has led to a growing competition at the labour market, also connected to a speeding change of technology where you always have to be up-front and learn the latest computer-programs etc.

The words "burned-out" as a term of an illness, popped up in the late nineties, with big headlines in the media. But pretty soon the discussions faded. This term of a new illness had become part of a common vocabulary.

The first job I had when I got back to Sweden was in a big office, built in the 60:ies. As I walked around the building, I saw a door with the familiar sign VILORUM.

I opened the door and found it transformed into a storage room for toilet paper and cleaning materials.

This was such a strong picture of how efficiency has won over humanity in the labour market. There was no space for taking a break in that market anymore.
If you got a headache at work you took an aspirin and stayed quiet about it.
You'd better not let anyone know of your weaknesses.

It was so sad to see that such a short-ranged thinking was now the common practice for so many people.

From this point of view I built my first Resting place.
It's a shed in the gallery with three dogs and one cat filmed while they are sleeping.
I made the space that I personally think is the most peaceful. As I often find it difficult to get to rest when I'm stressed up, I need another creature to show me the way. For me it's soothing to take a nap on the sofa together with a purring cat or a snoring dog.

I have showed my Resting place in museums and galleries in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany and France.
My greatest wish has been to also install it at working sites where people would have the chance to use it "for real".

After a long time of research and discussions around architects and commissioners of building projects, I installed my first "Ruheraum" at Krypton, a company for research and production of wind-energy in Bremen, january 2003.

This time the room is not a temporary shed, but a real room among others at the corridor. It has an institutional black sign with white text on the door saying "Ruheraum". The room also has a key.

The way a permanent installation of VILORUM/RUHERAUM/RESTING PLACE will work is not the same as the gallery/museum version on the pictures below.
As a permanent installation the room must be easy to clean and it's not optional to have the carpet and mattress directly on the floor. Therefore I make the room in two levels. The first level is the normal level of the floor which is a few square meters just inside the door. The rest of the room I build half a meter higher, with two steps up.
On this level the cream-colored carpet covers the floor where the mattress, blanket and pillow is laying. On both walls on each side of the mattress two flat-screen monitors are placed showing the sleeping dogs and cats. They are placed all the way down at the carpet, so it really feels like the animals are sleeping on the same carpet as the floor is covered with. It feels like they are in the room.

With this higher podium-level the individuals using the Resting place will probably feel natural about taking their shoes off before taking the two steps up to rest. That will make the installation cleaner. The flatscreen-monitors are also easier than normal monitors to keep clean.

The dvd-player (one that can play four dvd:s at the same time) is placed at the door.
This way the person entering the room, can turn on and turn off the dvd:s as wished.
Maybe someone needs the room to be absolutely dark to be able to sleep, then he/she just doesn't turn the dvd:s on.

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