



Nordic Societal Security in Times of Crises

Key takeaways from the seminar





Prologue

We are in a time when crises seem to be queuing up.

The Nordic countries are facing an entirely new security situation caused by, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate changes causing extreme weather events and we are seeing an explosion in the use of artificial intelligence with all its consequences, good and bad.

The situation places high demands on crisis management in the Nordic countries and begs the question; How can we find common solutions and learn from each other in the Nordic region?

This was the focus at a societal security event hosted by NordForsk addressing some of the major themes of societal security in the Nordic region. Participants included Finnish politicians, our Nordic sister organisations, Nordic research funders, national authorities, embassies, Nordic researchers, etc.

In order to be strong and able to stand up to all threats and challenges, we must strengthen our preparedness and resilience.

And this must happen through co-operation and increasing research based knowledge within the Nordic co-operation. NordForsk has a very important role to play in this context.

We have since 2013 funded 21 research projects focusing on various aspects of societal security. They all aim at producing knowledge, enabling our societies to strengthen their preparedness and resilience.

Arne Flåøyen,
Director of NordForsk



Anna-Maja Henriksson

Minister for Nordic Co-operation in Finland

It's important to bring together researchers and key actors to discuss different aspects of societal security from a Nordic perspective.

The exceptional times we have been experiencing in recent years, has intensified the discussion on societal security also in the Nordic countries.

Our societies face many similar challenges, and the best way is to find solutions together in the framework of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Multi-sectoral Nordic co-operation is guided by Vision 2030. It aims to make the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030. The three key areas where this aim is pursued are a green, competitive and socially sustainable Nordic region.

Only a prepared region is a sustainable region, and we must be able to manage disturbance to normal everyday life, be it due to national disasters, pandemics, or other serious disruptions.

Co-operation between the Nordic countries makes us stronger, better prepared, and more secure.

In our view, promoting comprehensive security is the key to strengthening the Nordic region's resilience and preparedness for crisis.



Part 1

Pandemics

Keynote by: Antoine de Bengy Puyvallée, Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Oslo

International solidarity on the one hand and national self-interest on the other. The vaccine diplomacy of the COVID-19 pandemic is raising the question: How did the Scandinavian countries safeguard the lives and safety of their own populations while ensuring the equitable distribution of vaccines to the world's poorest countries?

This is what the research project "Strategic solidarity: Scandinavian countries' COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy" is focusing on.

When the Nordic countries were vaccinating its population with a third dose, in low income countries, especially in Africa, there were 8.5% of the population that had received only one dose. This raised a question: are we in solidarity or are we vaccine hoarders?

We always need international co-operation, whether that is for getting vaccines for ourselves or for the rest of the world, stated Antoine de Bengy Puyvallée. All Nordic countries ended up buying vaccines through the European Union. It had some very clear advantages because by pulling a whole region you get larger purchasing power, stronger cards when you negotiate with pharmaceutical companies, regulatory approvals that are valid across countries, and you lower the competition between countries.

The Nordic co-operation really kicked in when Sweden found a solution for Norway and Iceland to take part in the European purchasing agreements. No countries can get vaccines on their own. We need international co-operation, and we need vaccine diplomacy to get vaccines. We were dependent on the co-operative climate internationally, he said.

A part of societal security is to preserve our values in terms of crisis. We cannot forget who we are. Nordic citizens would have trouble living with themselves if they saw the rest of the world was dying when they were protected.

There needs to be some humanitarian values taking into account when making for future preparedness plan. The second is that we have economic interests. Our Nordic countries are very export driven. We have open economies, we depend on the rest of the world, and we cannot pretend as if nothing happens in the rest of the world. If you leave viruses running wild in the rest of the world, you might get variants, you might get, new waves that hit you afterwards.



Panel discussion on pandemics with Mika Salminen, Professor of virology, Director THL, Institute of health and welfare, Finland, (left) and Antoine de Bengy Puyvallée, Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Oslo (right).

The panelists discussed how the pandemic challenged the Nordic countries in several ways that we should learn from before the next pandemic hits.

Among the lessons learnt, it was mentioned that there was a strong national focus in many countries, which became visible with closed borders, but there was also co-operation across the Nordic countries. However, even more Nordic co-operation would have been beneficial.



Part 2

Climate Changes

Keynote by: Rico Kongsager, University College Copenhagen

Climate change is affecting the Nordic countries in several ways. The region is vulnerable and will be affected by an increasing number of devastating natural events threatening our societal security.

Most of the big cities as Helsinki, Copenhagen etc. will take care of this themselves. There's too much value to protect, and they will do so, they will mitigate these impacts, but many small remote communities don't have the same resources and focus. So that's our concern. We wanted to look into these small remote communities, how they can handle extreme weather events.

The CliCNord research project funded by NordForsk has examined how small remote communities:

- understand their situation
- handle adverse events and build capacity
- need help from the established system and civil society organisations and under what circumstances

The research project focus on storms in the Faroe Islands, flooding and cloudbursts in Denmark, wildfires and temperature extremes in Sweden, landslides and flash floods in Norway and avalanches in Iceland.

In the Faroe Islands they are having more intense storms. In the remote areas they have limited access to authorities that can assist them. They live in a very troublesome terrain. A storm can hit all over the Faroe Islands, at the same time. So people are prepared to mainly take care of themselves, at least for some hours.

Panel discussion on climate changes with Niklas Vaalgamaa, Finnish Red Cross, Paula Kivimaa, Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE), Rico Kongsager, Emergency and Risk Management, University College Copenhagen.

The panelists discussed the importance of building capacities in the Nordic countries to mitigate the climate changes we face. Both on a national and local level, and also focus on those living in more remote and vulnerable locations. Nordic countries can enhance the co-operation even more in the time to come by sharing experiences and best practises in order to build resilience and preparedness against climate changes.





Part 3

Artificial Intelligence

**Keynote by: Vasilis Galis, Associate Professor, IT University
Copenhagen**

Vasilis Galis is in charge of the research project called CUPP. The Danish team of the project has worked on an empirical case on the digitalisation of the Danish police, focusing on a software that the Danish state purchased by the American big tech company, Palantir.

In the poly-crisis era, the role of policing within our democratic structures becomes both pertinent and ubiquitous. But talking about policing today, this can no longer be about the narrow field of maintaining law and order.

Many Western governments have decided that prediction and predictive techniques is the solution to a wider set of problems. Once exclusive to medicine, meteorology, and seismology, prediction is now everywhere from policing and labor to public space.

Reactions to crisis have become more dependent on digital systems and legislative interventions.

Many of the contracts from big tech companies are covered by so-called non-disclosure agreements, which bypass public sector transparency requirements, and, somehow challenge what we identify as Nordic values. Big tech companies also aspire to be in the room of policymaking. They claim to provide consultancy to state agencies beyond technical issues.

This is what Galis calls "the Silicon Valley ideology".

The Silicon Valley ideology anticipates that legal frameworks are barriers standing in the way of innovation. Data is safer in the hands of companies than in the hands of governments. Tech startups are agents of social change. These narratives of disruption ascribe credibility to the doings of big tech and have been used in regulatory clashes. This is the ideology or the ethos brought by Silicon Valley to governance, in a nutshell. The question is, how is this compatible to what we define as Nordic political culture?



Panel discussion on artificial intelligence with Anders Hansen, President of the Nordic Youth Council, Linda Man-
nila, Associate Professor at the University of Helsinki, Karoliina Snell, Helsingfors University, Finnish Centre for
Artificial Intelligence (FCAI) Ethics Advisory Board and Vasilis Galis, IT University of Copenhagen.

The panelists discussed both the pros and cons of using artificial intelligence and how it can be used to improve
efficiency and utilise resources in an even better way. On the other hand, care must be taken to ensure that the
technology is used in an ethical and responsible way that also ensures the safety of the citizens. From a democra-
tic perspective, it is especially important that all decisions are made on an informed and knowledge-based foun-
dation.



Epilogue

Ann-Sofie Stude, Head of the secretariat for Nordic Co-operation, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, and Arne Flåøyen, Director of NordForsk

There has been a severe focus on societal security for quite some time within the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

It started intensifying with the pandemic, and the Nordic prime ministers have emphasized that we need more co-operation on comprehensive security, including for instance preparedness, resilience and security of supply.

The floor is ours for civil servants and the secretariat of the Nordic Council and ministers and the institutions to tap down on all the areas of societal security and do some concrete work.

The consequences and the handling of the pandemic also scared us a little bit and made us realise that we can't take Nordic collaboration for granted. We really have to work on that and develop it.

It's very clear that we can benefit greatly if we collaborate more. And, we can share experiences and practices. And of course, we have to train more together in peace, time to create trust, and also methods for collaboration that can be used when a new crisis occurs.

NordForsk has three calls coming up related to societal security. One of the calls is on sustainable development of the Arctic, where we focus on security, natural resources and societal changes. There's also a smaller call coming up on Nordic research networks for preparedness and resilience research and one call on the microbial resistance.

Finland will hold the presidency next year and is currently preparing the presidency programme. It is too early to say which topics will be included in the presidency programme but societal security is definitely high on the agenda in Finland today.

All photos: NordForsk

Programme, information and the full seminar video can be found on [the conference event page](#).

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