#NORDEN2020

Young Nordic voices: HOW DO I SHAPE MY FUTURE?

Side-event during the Session of the Nordic Council

Monday, 30 October 2017, from **12** to **14**

Little Parliament, Visitor's Centre, Arkadiankatu 3, Helsinki

Report from the side-event

Part of the Finnish priority project "Norden 2020"

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH

Ministry of Education and Culture

norden
Nordic Council of Ministers
Finnish Presidency 2016

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND WELFARE
FINLAND

www.norden2016.fi

Introduction

The side-event "Young Nordic voices: how do I shape my future?" was organised on Monday, 30 October 2017 at Little Parliament in Helsinki in connection to the Session of the Nordic Council.

The aims of the side-event were

- to raise awareness of Nordic cooperation among the general public, and especially among young people.
- to include young people, and make young peoples' voices heard, in Nordic cooperation and in the discussion about current topical themes, in particular gender equality and youth welfare.
- to bring together young people and decision-makers.
- to promote the priority project "Norden 2020" and its themes, especially questions related to youth, gender equality, diversity, education, welfare, employment, research and crosssectoral co-operation.

The side-event provided a continuum to last year's Sillat-Broar-Bridges Youth Conference. The youth conference, held in Helsinki in September 2016, created a video with powerful messages from young people about easily accessible guidance for the young, youth as leaders of future change, education, (un)employment, youth participation in politics and culture, income and wellbeing, positive mental health, social inclusion and equality. This video was also shown at the side-event in order to create continuity between various activities and to bring the message, created at the conference, to decision-makers.

"This generation is the that needs to start calling things out and question issues."

The side-event attracted participants from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland and Greenland. Participants represented ministries, NGOs, Nordic institutions, municipalities, political parties and schools. In total, 80 persons signed up for the event, which ended up being fully booked.

participants

The side-event was advertised through Finnish and Nordic channels geared towards young people and the general public as well as participants of the session of the Nordic Council, especially MPs, civil servants and NGOs.

The side-event was arranged by the Finnish priority project "Norden 2020". The objective of the project, which was begun in 2016 and carries on to the end of 2018, is to discover and develop cross-sectoral welfare initiatives nationally and at the Nordic level as well as to strengthen the structures of Nordic cooperation. The project is managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the National Institute for Health and Welfare. It is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Findings and conclusions

Breaking myths about young people: facts vs. myths

Research Professor *Sakari Karvonen* from the National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland, spoke about the multitude and variety of individuals, life situations and circumstances existing under the umbrella term "youth". For example, young people are often labelled as alienated from politics. However, this is a simplistic approach with a narrow definition of political activity which fails to take into account political activism beyond voting. Indeed, according to Karvonen, young people are willing and conscious to take a stand on important topics and their political activism ranges from boycotting and signing petitions to actions via social media, consumption decisions and being active in NGOs. Instead, when it comes to young people, political action has become highly individualistic. Karvonen noted that it is political parties young people feel alienated from, not politics in itself.

Similarly, societal moral panic about young people as perpetrators of crime is also uncalled for. Young people are not just over-represented as perpetrators of crime, but also as victims of crime. In fact, in Finland, the amount of young people as perpetrators has decreased significantly.

*Research Professor **Sakari Karvonen***

Furthermore, when it comes to substance abuse, youth is either portrayed as vulnerable or as seeking endless, hedonistic pleasure. In fact, statistics show that the use of intoxicants is decreasing significantly and young people are becoming increasingly moderate and even abstaining completely. They are also increasingly concerned about the consequences of over-use. And while young people are healthier than earlier, many simultaneously also suffer in increasing degrees from diseases such as allergies and diabetes.

When it comes to the job market, millennials are often portrayed as choosy. Karvonen pointed out that evidence actually points to the contrary. Most millennials hope to a have a steady job but also prefer accepting a temporary one to living on welfare benefits. Many are also ready to move in order to get a job.

And while young people are generally considered natives of the digital world, research indicates that there exist large divisions in how young people use digital media.

twitter 10 "facts" about young people: violence, drug abuse, healthy, diginatives... from Sakari Karvonen **THLorg** **#norden2020** **#youngvoices**

Georg Henrik Wrede @GH_Wrede

Nevertheless, the Finnish Youth Barometer does indicate that young people feel less optimistic about the world and many have experienced a steep decrease in trust in regards to their personal economic situation improving. Especially young women worry about how they will survive in working life.

Young people also feel increasingly alienated from the standardized social services system. They tend to have individual expectations and life situations which do not always neatly coincide with the system.

Karvonen concluded that the term "young" is a fluid and variable concept when discussing biological and social categories. For young people, many physiological changes are occurring earlier than before, but simultaneously, from a social point of view, young people are ageing later. Youthful life choices are also more permanent among adults, so many be defined as young people.

"Our lifestyle encourages competition, financial

d juggling lots of things becoming *neously] being* adults could instead *e face*

is being

In conclusion, many of the popular views about "young people" can be considered conflicting, even untrue, when looking at research and statistical evidence.

When discussing young people, it is important to be aware of broad generalisations and stay away from othering them as a category. "Young people" consist of highly variant individuals and subgroups.

The challenges of the Nordic welfare states: the perspective of young people

The side-event brought up a number of challenges facing young people in the Nordic region today. The discussion focused on how young people are able to shape their futures in welfare states in flux and whether young people face the same challenges across the Nordic region.

Inequality, in regards to, among other things, socio-economic differences, gender and age, was high on the agenda. Domestic violence, forced sterilization of trans-people and the strong division of genders into simple binaries of male/female were also discussed.

Panel discussion with, from left to right: ***David Ling****, welfare and economic policy officer of Green Youth of Sweden,* ***Karolina Lång****, chair of the Youth League of the Finnish Norden Association,* ***Fredrik Vaaheim****, secretary general of KANDU - Creative Active Norwegian Computer Youth, and* ***Panda Eriksson****, president of Trasek ry, a Finnish association for transgender and intersex rights*

The speakers highlighted a need for both personal and societal responsibility in tackling gender inequalities. Furthermore, the speakers hoped that the Nordic social security systems would not be dismantled or altered. Children from disadvantaged families and migrants were seen as especially vulnerable groups who need as much protection as possible.

Education also featured heavily in the discussion concerning the future of young people. The fact that education is free was considered extremely positive, creating equal opportunities and strengthening equality. However, there are nevertheless many who fall outside the system, with accompanying skills mismatch and an overreliance on formal education. And the panellists expressed a wish for young people to be able to find their way and succeed also outside the traditional education system. Many skills can instead be learned on the job. Better training in programming and technology was also called for. Overall, the Nordic lifestyle was seen as encouraging competition and creating a stressful environment with too large an emphasis on performance.

> *”Men shouldn’t take a ’male joke’. Men have to shut the discussion down and not accept shitty behaviour.”*
>
> *One of the participants*

In setting the Nordic region in a global context, the speakers noted that having a global culture makes moving easier and more attractive. Indeed, perhaps the Nordic region feels a bit *too* familiar and not exotic enough for those pining somewhere else. In addition, the Nordic region was seen as possessing a number of unattractive traits, such as a “fairly uptight bureaucracy”, a lack of cosmopolitan megacities and a negative attitude towards migrants. Equality was also cited as a possible problem since persons with high ambitions were seen as perhaps not being satisfied with a playing field trying to level everyone into equal boxes.

twitter Vars.nuoret tytöt ja naiset huolissaan "miten tulen pärjäämään työelämässä". Miten voimme huoleen?

Heidi Enbacka @EnHeidi

Overall, the discussion tethered between optimism and pessimism, with the panellists expressing both hope for the future, but also acknowledging the insecure world they currently inhabit.

tulevaisuuden vastata tähän

The journey of one young person

Vlogger ***Sita Salminen***

Vlogger *Sita Salminen* described finding her own path. Salminen gave up her dayjob in a bank and now studies and works as a lifestyle vlogger. Her videos deal with everyday questions facing young people, such as welfare, health, workouts, family relationships and diets. She started her YouTube channel in April 2016 and, less than a year later, she was awarded the Newcomer of the Year Award at the Finnish Inspiration Blog Awards.

Salminen explained that being a writer had been her dream since a child. However, this presented some problems as being a writer did not come with the same clear-cut and precise study paths or degrees as some other occupations. Instead, she eventually decided to get a "safe job with good pay". However, this instead materialised into a gap year during which she decided to follow her childhood dream of becoming a writer and ended up starting her own vlog. In the first three months, she acquired 10 000 followers. At the age of 23, she was contacted by a Finnish bank and asked to help them set up a social media programme. She was amazed that her vlogging experience "could help me get a job without [having] proper education and qualifications."

She eventually resigned from the bank because "I was hoping to do something I loved. I don't want to settle for something that's just okay, and money [as a motivator] isn't enough." Since then, she has gone on to work as a lifestyle vlogger and has not regretted it.

"With work, things are mostly in your own hands."

Sita Salminen

Salminen's speech highlighted how new technology and new forms of media have enabled a new generation to carve out new paths of employment away from the traditional and straightforward route of degree and nineto-five-job. It also brought forth the role of motivation and the importance of non-economic gains for young people planning their futures.

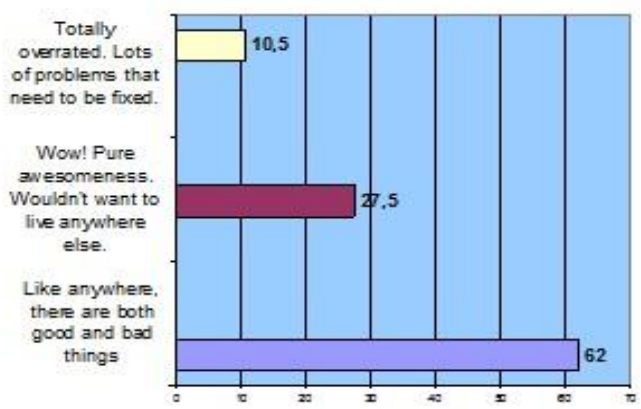
Results

The side-event brought together young people, NGO's and decision-makers to discuss current topical themes regarding the Nordic welfare state. It provided a forum for young people, from various Nordic regions and representing different organisations and viewpoints, to make their voices heard. The focus was cross-sectoral, providing different sectors, such as health, social issues, welfare, employment, education and gender, an opportunity to mingle.

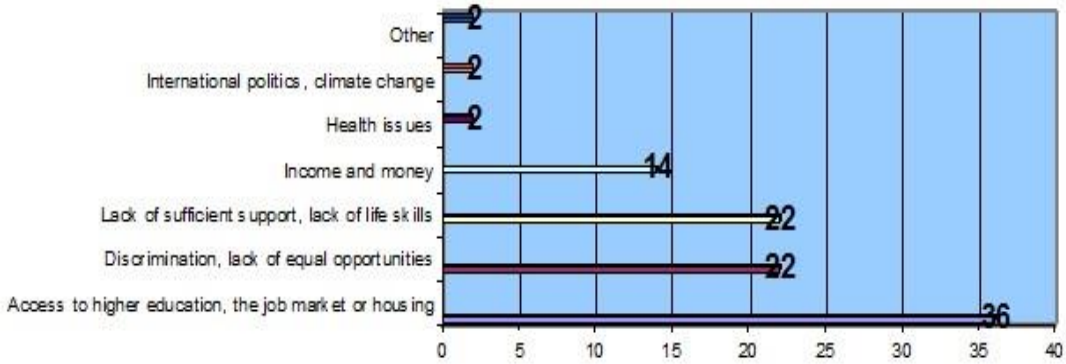
The event contributed to broadening the understanding and perceptions of young people, their lives and the role of the Nordic welfare state. In live polls conducted during the event, 62 % of respondents saw both positive and negative sides to the Nordic welfare state. Furthermore, respondents saw access to higher education, the job market or housing, discrimination or lack of

equal opportunities as well as lack of sufficient support or lack of life skills as the biggest challenges facing young people planning their futures in the Nordic region today. Economic inequality, equality between different groups in society and climate change similarly also figured prominently in the overall discussion as themes needing to be addressed.

How do you see the Nordic welfare state? (Replies in %)



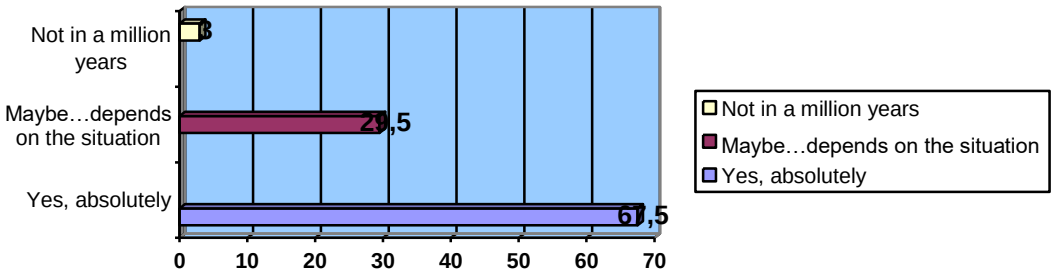
What is the biggest challenge facing young people planning their futures in the Nordic region today? (Replies in %)



International topics and Nordic cooperation also figured in the discussion, which called for strengthened cooperation in dealing with the migrant situation and for ending hate speech. Similarly, there were wishes for simplifying freedom of movement and for decisionmakers to look more closely at their neighbours to learn from each other. As a practical example, the panellists expressed hopes for a common app for higher education in all the Nordic countries.

> *"We need to make the region grow together."*
>
> *One of the participants*

Could you imagine moving to another Nordic country/self-governing region to live, study or work? (Replies in%)

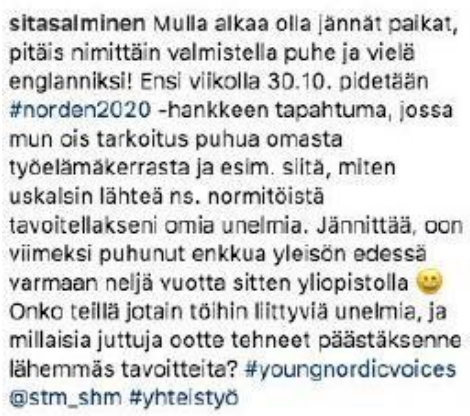


In addition, short videos presenting the viewpoints of young people were also created by the Norden 2020 project. The aim of the videos was to provide a forum for young people to make their voices heard concerning the Nordic welfare states and to expand and find new audiences for the project themes.

Five participants of the side-event were interviewed about the following questions:

- What does the Nordic welfare state mean for me? - What challenges do our welfare societies face?
- Where do I see myself in 20 years' time?

The videos can be viewed here: https://youtu.be/kcFEFWS6_J0, https://youtu.be/vtr7K_Veuow and https://youtu.be/EJ0c0FqVbzs.



Instagram post by vlogger Sita Salminen

The event also reached new target audiences by initiating cooperation with vlogger Sita Salminen. Salminen has around 89 000 Youtube subscribers and over 45 000 followers on Instagram (October 2017). Salminen produced a YouTube video, two Instagram posts and 12 Snapchats about the event and her involvement. They can be viewed here:

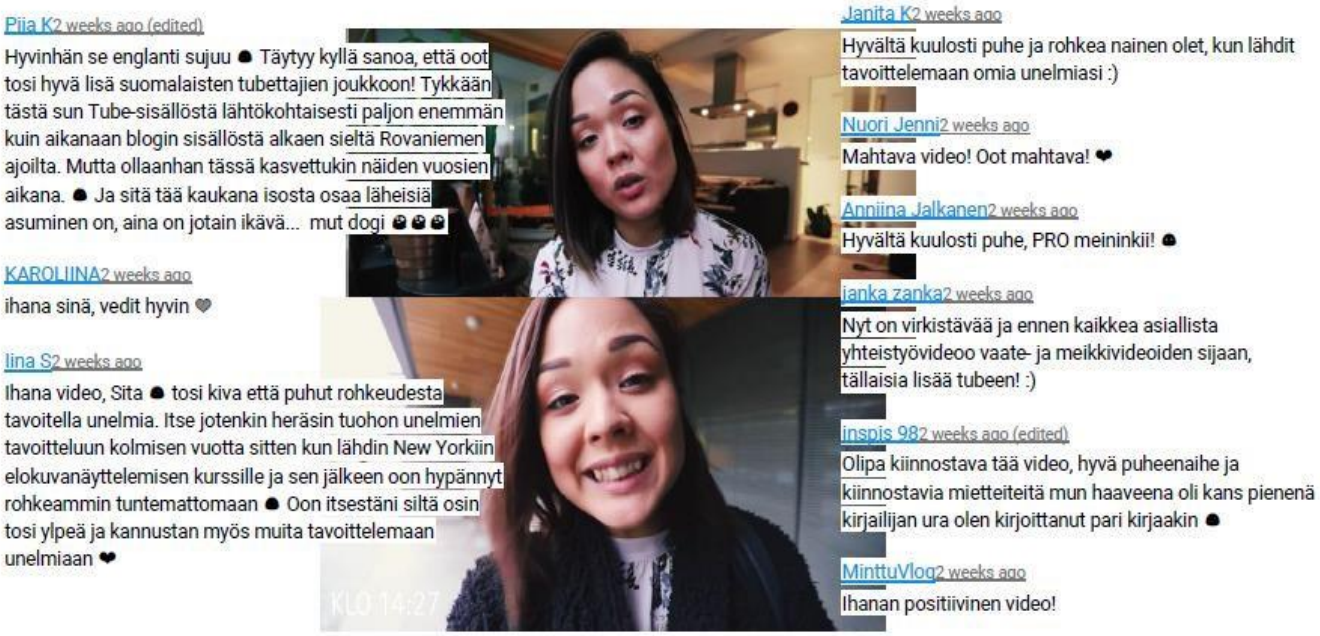
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0JfjuAnt8Y
Instagram:

https://www.instagram.com/p/BbCDesRH3hh/?hl=en&takenby=sitasalminen and https://www.instagram.com/p/Bao_PlUHQKA/?hl=en&taken-by=sitasalminen

In total, the campaign reached 296 400 persons, with 58 % being in the 18 to 24 age bracket and 92 % being female. The YouTube video was watched over 35 000 times during the first week immediately following its publication. Comments to the video focused on career choices, finding one's voice and courage to make decisions about one's future and being a role model for young women. The Snapchats, which were viewed 150 000 times in total, provided behind the scenes shots from the event and raised issues related to Sita Salminen's speech.

> *"We shouldn't settle in and be comfortable."*
>
> *One of the participants*

Comments to the Youtube video (in Finnish):



The side-event ended on a high note with one panellists noting that “there is no time for political depression because we have so many existential problems that we need to deal with. That is a heavy burden for people in my generation. Our job is pretty much to save the world and to reform the welfare state. It is a pretty big deal.”