

Societal risks and risk society:

A cross-disciplinary and cross-stakeholder dialogue perspective

Some general information about a Samrisk-funded networking project, arranged by the Centre of risk and insurance research Norwegian School of Management BI in Oslo, Norway (www.bi.no/roff)

24 April 2009 – 12 April 2010 (cf. below)

Where?

- Norwegian School of Management – BI Oslo, Nydalen (all dates except June 2009)
- Faculty of Law, University of Oslo (15 and 16 June, 2009 only)

The project idea:

Risk and uncertainty, and insurable and uninsurable dangers are addressed by different academic disciplines and by different societal actors in different ways. These different actors aim for precise description, holistic understanding, good enough prediction on the one hand, and proper risk and uncertainty management on the other. However, good cross-disciplinary and cross-sector communication seems to be the exception rather than the rule.

Our networking project aims at helping to address and to transcend such communication barriers, using responsible handling of large scale threats to societal safety and security as a reference.

The seminars as a whole aim at presenting state-of-the art reports and research work in progress about how different disciplines suggest approaching these issues, by progressing from breadth to depth and from theory to application in practical cases.

In short, risk and uncertainty research is a broad, both theoretical (sometimes super-theoretical) field and applied field of research with multiple disciplinary foundations.

The seminars are organized in such a way that most PhD students with interest in such topics should be able to obtain course credits for their participation ¹

The seminar titles and dates:

1. Interdisciplinary perspectives on societal risk and risk management (24 and 25 April 2009)
2. Societal risk in a legal perspective (15 and 16 June)
3. Societal risk in an insurance and re-insurance perspective (23 and 24 August)
4. Societal risk, risk and crisis dialogue (20 and 21 Nov)
5. Societal risk: Responsible and competent leadership in crisis situations (12 and 13 Apr 2010)

**Seminar 1:
Interdisciplinary perspectives on societal risk and risk management;
24 and 25 April 2009**

Responsible for the content:
Assoc. Professor Jens Zinn, University of Melbourne

The Samrisk programme, of which our network building project is a part, puts forward topics such as vulnerability of societal infrastructure, humanitarian relief and international coordination, man-made accidents, international threats to public health, terrorism, as examples which should be focused on (cf. www.forskningsradet.no/samrisk).

A key purpose of this first seminar is to set an agenda for all five network meetings, by discussing common themes of the Samrisk programme, promises made in our application, and the special interests and perspectives of the participating individuals and their diverse working contexts and disciplines. This meeting will begin an exploration of possible interdisciplinary contributions to understanding societal risk management, taking stock of state of the art knowledge in behavioural biology, psychology, risk governance and regulation, risk communication, law, economics and sociology, to set the stage for further workshops on specific topics such as law, insurance, and risk communication).

Keynote lectures by Jens Zinn, Aaron Doyle, Bridget Hutter.

**Seminar 2:
Societal risk in a legal perspective, 15 and 16 June 2009**

Responsible for the content:
Professor Johannes Brinkmann (Norwegian School of Management BI), research fellow Heidi Lomell, PhD candidate Tobias Mahler, Professor Ragnhild Hennum (all Faculty of Law, Oslo University),

The relationship between law and risk can be addressed through two perspectives: First, a large amount of research, e.g. within sociology of law, has concentrated on analysing how the law should deal with risk. A second perspective, with less literature coverage, has analysed risk management as a proactive method to be used by lawyers.

The two perspectives are complementary rather than incompatible, and an analysis on the relationship between law and risk should relate them. A natural starting point for such an analysis would be a discussion on the definition of risk. What, if anything, can be done to better relate the two approaches? For example, would it be possible and useful to carry out a practical risk analysis in order to draft new legislation which can be analysed in the perspective of the risk society?

Keynote lectures by professors Pat O'Malley, Peter Wahlgren, Alexandros Kyrtsis, Barbara Hudson, Petri Keskitalo

**Seminar 3:
Societal risk in an insurance and re-insurance perspective
23 and 24 August 2009**

Responsible for the content:

Assoc. Professor Aaron Doyle (Carleton University, Ottawa and Norwegian School of Management BI, in cooperation with re-insurance companies)

This is the third out of five seminars/network meetings in a series entitled 'Societal Risks and Risk Society in a Cross-Disciplinary and Cross-Stakeholder Dialogue Perspective', which is funded by the SAMRISK initiative of the Norwegian Research Council. The series is aimed in part at building a sustainable network of interdisciplinary researchers, and public sector and insurance/safety industry experts, in Norway and internationally.

This seminar focuses on the key role of insurance and reinsurance in governing societal risks in the shifting contemporary risk environment. Evan Mills wrote in the journal *Science* recently that if insurance was a country, it would have the third biggest economy in the world (Mills 2005). We live in an age of risk. The public, policymakers and academics are increasingly concerned with risks, both natural and humanmade, from cancer to car crashes to earthquakes to global warming to terrorism - and with developing ways to measure and to control these risks, so much so that key social theorists like Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens now say we live in a "risk society". Unlike other key institutions, the insurance industry and reinsurance in particular have rarely been studied by social scientists, apart from several new key works. Insurance and reinsurance also remain largely invisible to the general public. Insurers and reinsurers have a hidden yet central importance, and considerable expertise and resources, in their efforts to know and control societal risks. This seminar brings together academic and industry perspectives on the role the insurance and reinsurance industry can and should play in managing contemporary risks.

Keynote lectures: assoc. professor Aaron Doyle, Carleton University and BI, Professor Tom Baker, University of Pennsylvania, Dr Martin Johanntoberens, Munich Reinsurance, perhaps NN, Swiss Reinsurance

**Seminar 4:
Societal risk, risk and crisis dialogue
20 and 21 November 2009**

Responsible for the content:

Stiftung Risikodialog, St. Gallen together with Professor Britt-Marie Drottz-Sjöberg, NTNU

Risk communication and risk perception have become a large, influential and international research area. It emanated around issues of social acceptability in the late 1960's and developed into a multidisciplinary field of vital importance to understand and facilitate communication on risks and hazards. Psychology, as one of the central disciplines providing significant contributions to the theoretical frameworks of the research area, collaborates today not only with other areas of the social sciences and the humanities, but with engineering, the natural sciences, medicine and with practitioners from multiple fields of work. The course aims at providing a solid theoretical basis for working in the fields of risk communication and risk perception research.²

Keynote lecturers: Matthias Holenstein, Stiftung Risikodialog and Britt-Marie Drottz-Sjöberg

**Seminar 5:
Societal risk: Responsible and competent leadership in crisis
situations, 12 and 13 Apr 2010**

Because of such a summary and conclusion function we won't determine the detailed and final agenda before the end of November 09 (application for PhD course credits likely, at a later stage)

Responsible for the content:

Assoc. professor Magne Aarset, Professor Johannes Brinkmann (Norwegian School of Management BI), senior lecturer Rune Glomseth, Police University College)

Envisaged keynote lecturers:

Professors B H Johnsen (UiB), research fellow T.-O. Nævestad (Tik, UiO), W Brun (UiB), G Larson (Försvarshögskolan) - and/or others from previous meetings

Project summary (slightly adjusted form the application text)

Our project, "Societal risks and risk society in a cross-disciplinary and cross-stakeholder dialogue perspective", aims to develop, arrange and promote five network meetings on topics of joint interest for the SAMRISK programme target groups, for the programme community itself and for the BI centre for risk and insurance research, with its insurance business target groups. These meetings are aimed in part to help build a sustainable network among interdisciplinary researcher, public sector and insurance/safety industry environments, in Norway and a few other countries. The network meetings will typically start with a few keynote lectures by international or national experts, designed in a way to maximize participation from our target groups, and to trigger good and relevant media coverage. The workshop part of the network meetings (assumed to take between a half and full working day depending on the number of presenters) will offer an opportunity to present and discuss research in progress, hopefully as a step towards scholarly publications.

Endnotes

¹ In such a context, we'd be willing to tailor parts of the seminar for typical PhD student needs, for example analyze and discuss foundational books and related articles in detail, offer reading lists with major contributions to the field of interdisciplinary risk and uncertainty research, taken from the disciplines of sociology, psychology, law, business ethics, applied insurance research (as a combination of actuarial science, insurance law), insurance business management, applied organization and leadership research, accepting papers in typical PhD student paper formats etc.)

² This seminar description is more or less identical with the text describing Britt-Marie Drottz Sjöberg's PhD course, Spring 09, with the title "RISK PERCEPTION AND RISK COMMUNICATION", Dept. of Psychology, NTNU..