



Article from Prime Minister's Office

State Secretary Maja Fjaestad on algorithms and their impact on society

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“Algorithms in Society” is the name of a report presented at a seminar on Friday 11 March. To gain a greater understanding of algorithms and their importance to society, the Prime Minister’s Office’s Secretariat for Strategic Development for the Future tasked researchers Jutta Haider and Olof Sundin from Lund University’s Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences to find out more about algorithms and their social impact. The report was presented to State Secretary Maja Fjaestad.

At the seminar held at the Government Offices, the authors presented the results of the report and discussed related issues together with Darja Isaksson, member of the Government's National Innovation Council, and Marcin de Kaminski, Policy Specialist on Freedom of Expression and ICT at Sida.

Ms Fjaestad is State Secretary to Kristina Persson, Minister for Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation, and has received the report.

Maja Fjaestad, what are algorithms?

"Algorithms consist of instructions on what is to be done, with what and in what order. Information algorithms in e.g. software for search engines often

control the news and information that meet us in digital streams and create what are called 'filter bubbles'. In other words, only certain information reaches us. This results in different people having separate news streams and search results, based on previous use, and so also different perceptions on the state of society. An interesting question is how we can encourage public debate, a diversity of opinions and the potential for scrutiny that includes source criticism despite this – how do algorithms affect democracy?"

Why did you order this report?

"The Secretariat for Strategic Development for the Future is tasked with identifying long-term issues of strategic interest. Algorithms and control of internet content are matters that, in the long-term, affect our absorption of information and thus the public debate and, ultimately, democracy. We ordered the report in order to build up knowledge, but also as background data for an expanded discussion on the interaction between standards and information management."

You personally took part in the seminar. What do you hope will come out of it?

"I hope that the report contributes to a broadened discussion of the interaction between technology, values and democracy. Technology is an integral part of a social context, which means that we need a dynamic discussion on how we want to use it. To meet the future, we need to embrace the potential of technology at the same time as we evaluate its social impact."



Article

Government to strengthen Arctic environmental policy

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The Government is now strengthening the Swedish environmental policy for the Arctic. As an Arctic country with high environmental ambitions, Sweden has an important role to play internationally.

A whole world is affected when the Arctic environment is threatened. The Government is now strengthening efforts to protect the natural environment in the Arctic. We want to see stronger climate efforts, legal protection for sensitive natural environments and prevention of the risks involved in drilling for oil and overfishing. This new focus for environmental policy in the Arctic is being presented today by Minister for Strategic Development Kristina Persson at the Arctic Frontiers conference.

The Arctic acts as the planet's refrigerator. Its enormous white expanses of ice and snow reflect large parts of the sun's rays back into space, thus stabilising the Earth's climate. The area is home to millions of people, including indigenous peoples, and ecosystems of global importance. The Arctic environment and its fate concerns us all, directly or indirectly.

Today, the natural environment in the Arctic is largely unprotected. Just a few decades ago this was not considered to be a major problem. The greenhouse effect was not yet making itself clearly felt and the northernmost expanses were difficult to access. But the situation has worsened in a short period of time.

The snow and ice in the Arctic is melting increasingly rapidly due to global warming. This increases accessibility and thus opportunities to exploit oil, gas, minerals and fish in this sensitive environment. At the same time, the fact that the ice is shrinking means that the reflection of solar radiation is

decreasing, fuelling global warming. The consequences could be catastrophic.

The new global climate agreement from Paris marks the start of a substantial increase in climate efforts in all countries. The agreement states that the global rise in temperature must be kept well below two degrees Celsius and that measures must be taken to keep the temperature below one and a half degrees. In order to achieve this goal, further decisions need to be taken in international climate work, including in Arctic cooperation.

The Government is now strengthening Sweden's environmental policy for the Arctic. As an Arctic country with a high level of environmental ambition, Sweden has an important role to play internationally. While we are making demands of other Arctic countries, the Government is taking responsibility at home. This is a basic premise for our proposals:

1. Stronger climate efforts

The Arctic countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Russia, Canada and the United States, all members of the Arctic Council) are responsible for a large proportion of global greenhouse gas emissions and have a major responsibility to reduce emissions. Sweden has pushed for a reduction in emissions of short-lived climate forcers, such as soot and methane. This is still important, but climate efforts must be broadened. The Government therefore wants to strengthen measures in the Arctic Council concerning climate and renewable energy.

2. Legal protection for sensitive natural environments

There are serious shortcomings in the protection of the valuable Arctic environment. In particular, there is a lack of adequate protection of the marine environment, which is becoming increasingly accessible and vulnerable as the ice melts. This calls for efforts on a broad front. We are beginning this work to make progress. In the first week of February, all Arctic countries are invited to Sweden and the Government Offices to discuss the management of the marine environment in the Arctic. The Government is pushing for the Arctic countries to develop a network of protected environments, for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to be supplemented with a new protective agreement and for other decision-making bodies to be as active as possible in putting protection in place.

3. Preventing the risks of drilling for oil

Researchers have warned that offshore oil extraction in the Arctic is a high-

stakes undertaking. A large proportion of the world's oil resources must stay in the ground if we are to keep global warming as far below two degrees as possible. Extracting oil in the Arctic is both expensive and risky. An oil disaster could cause a great deal of damage to the sensitive environment. In recent times, a low global oil price has made drilling for oil in the Arctic an unprofitable business, but a low price in the short term is no lasting guarantee that the sensitive Arctic environment will be protected.

This is why it is crucial that we make demands of the oil companies, in terms of both economics and safety. Sweden wants to see robust regulations that ensure the highest level of protection. We want only companies that can assume the entire cost of a disaster to be granted permits to extract oil in the Arctic. The costs must not be shifted onto the environment or the world population through environmental damage, or onto the tax payers in the Arctic countries. In practice, these are requirements that together can protect the Arctic from the risks of drilling for oil.

4. Preventing overfishing

The parts of the Arctic Ocean and seabeds that have historically been covered by a permanent layer of ice must now be protected. The Government considers that commercial fishing in the central northern Arctic Ocean should not be permitted until a regional organisation for fisheries management is established to ensure that fishing is carried out in a sustainable way. Sweden believes that a precautionary approach should be taken and that consideration should be given to the ecosystems when designing this fisheries management. Good management is informed by decisions made on scientific grounds with a long-term perspective.

This is how the Government is taking the next step in the international arena to strengthen efforts to protect the Arctic environment. With legal protection of sensitive environments and clearer requirements in the area of oil prospecting and fishing, we can protect the natural environment in the Arctic – and by doing so improve the chances of today's children living a good life in the future. The world needs countries that move the environment further up the agenda. Sweden is one such country.

Åsa Romson, Minister for Climate and the Environment

Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Kristina Persson, Minister for Strategic Development



Article from Prime Minister's Office

Focus on Nordic strategic development

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The Government's Minister for Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation Kristina Persson is now in Reykjavik to take part in the Nordic Council session. She will also stand in for Prime Minister Stefan Löfven at the Northern Future Forum summit.

Kristina Persson, what's happening in Reykjavik?

“I am representing the Swedish Government at various meetings with the Nordic Council Presidium. I will also stand in for the Prime Minister at the Northern Future Forum summit, which aims to share experiences among countries and discuss the creative industries and how new, innovative industries and businesses can emerge. Participants include heads of governments from the Nordic and Baltic countries and British Prime Minister David Cameron.”

You are the government minister with responsibility for Nordic cooperation. What are the most pressing issues in the Nordic countries at this time?

“The refugee situation concerns us all, of course, and I am seeing very strong support for Nordic cooperation in this and other issues. Climate change, the Arctic, and security and defence are other pressing matters. We are also discussing how Nordic embassies could improve cooperation and coordination in third country capital cities through the embassy of another Nordic country than one's own.”

What are you looking forward to during the discussions at the Northern

Future Forum?

“Many important issues will be discussed and many experts will take part. This is why I see it as a good opportunity for knowledge acquisition, as much of what will be discussed concerns important issues for the future, tying in with my other area of responsibility – strategic development – and particularly ‘Mission: The future’, the Government’s collective efforts on long-term idea and policy development to address the challenges of the future.”



Article from Prime Minister's Office

“Policies have to change from within”

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In late February, Minister for Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation Kristina Persson appointed three working groups that make up the core of the Government’s work on issues of future importance. In mid-April, the working group participants met with the Minister for Strategic Development, with the aim of drawing up guidelines for their future work, and sharing their experiences and ideas.

The three working groups – ‘The future of work’, ‘The green transition’ and ‘Global cooperation’ – consist of representatives of the business sector, the trade union movement, civil society and academia. Their task is to take a holistic approach to key challenges facing Sweden over the next 20 years. The groups will work independently within the framework of their instructions and resources.

“I am very pleased and satisfied that the work of the analysis groups is now under way. It is important to point out that they are working with full freedom, and that the conclusions the groups arrive at will be taken on board,” says Ms Persson.

How were the members of the analysis groups selected?

“The individuals were selected to provide as broad a perspective on the policy areas in each group as possible, with no particular attention paid to party affiliation or similar considerations,” says Ms Persson.

What expectations do you have of the groups' future work in the short term, i.e. this coming year up to spring 2016?

“The groups are working independently and I hope they will deliver both sound proposals and good analyses during the course of their work,” says Ms Persson.

Ms Persson's mandate is to increase knowledge about a range of cross-sectoral challenges facing society and to present proposals jointly with other government ministers on how best to tackle these challenges. The working groups will generate input that leads to procedures, which in turn will form the basis of government bills that will impact actual decisions. Broadly speaking, it is about transforming good proposals and ideas into practical policies, measures and changes.

“Policies have to change from within. Sweden has been doing well, and this may be the greatest risk. There is a need to see any dangers in time and create a narrative that holds together and makes this comprehensible to communicate,” says Ms Persson.

In concrete terms, what will happen now following the kick-off in April?

“The three groups are independent, with different approaches and agendas, and I am looking forward to a lot of exciting input into the political process,” concludes Ms Persson.



Article from Prime Minister's Office

Green transition part of the big picture

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The analysis group ‘The green transition’ will set out from the visions of a fossil-free vehicle fleet by 2030 and a carbon neutral Sweden in 2050, and will describe the political and market changes needed to realise these goals. This is one of three analysis groups within the framework of the Government’s future-oriented project ‘Mission: The Future’, led by Kristina Persson, Minister for Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation.

“We need ideas and opinions from outside to speed up strategic development work at the Government Offices. So we’re enlisting the help of experts in the field who have great expertise and long experience of green growth and sustainability issues,” says Ms Persson.

What she envisages are concrete proposals drawn up by people who themselves are keen to see results, in both the short and the long term. The time perspective for ‘Mission: The Future’ covers three electoral periods. “This makes it important to choose the right people for these analysis groups,” says Ms Persson.

Maria Wetterstrand and Jonas Karlsson lead the analysis group

‘The green transition’ will be led by Maria Wetterstrand, former Spokesperson of the Green Party, and Jonas Karlsson, Head of Administration and Municipal Commissioner in Örebro. The analysis group will set out from the visions of a fossil-free vehicle fleet by 2030 and a

carbon neutral Sweden in 2050, and will describe the political and market changes needed to realise these goals. The project spans several of the Government's areas of responsibility, including the environment, energy, the climate, the economy and international cooperation.

The task of the analysis group will be to analyse problem areas and provide ideas, before going on to sketch out concrete proposals that the Government can translate into policies for adoption by the Riksdag. The intention is to help give practical and visible form to the ambition of Sweden and the Nordic region to lead by example.

The interplay between the business sector, research and civil society is particularly important, in the opinion of the Minister for Strategic Development, who also points out that it is important to consider that many factors and policy areas are involved and interconnected.

“The big picture is important. I therefore believe early dialogue with other political parties is valuable to create long-term agreements, just as it is important in manufacturing to make products that are durable and good for the environment,” says Ms Persson.



Article from Prime Minister's Office

"Work is the cement of the Swedish welfare state"

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'The future of work'. This is the name of one of the three thematic areas that the Government's new Secretariat for Strategic Development for the Future will work with. The Government's objectives of high employment and low unemployment will be the focus of an analysis group by the same name, led by Annelie Nordström, Chair of the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union (Kommunal), and Klas Eklund, economist and writer with previous experience of political assignments in the Government Offices.

Expectations are high and enthusiasm likewise when Annelie Nordström and Klas Eklund meet in February to talk about how they want to tackle their part of the Government's work on future issues, which will take shape in cooperation with the business sector, researchers and civil society. Kristina Persson, Minister for Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation, has overall responsibility for the Government's work on future issues.

"We really want to set out from the present and all that has already been done to develop thinking about the future shape of work and working life. We want to dig a bit deeper into what work actually is all about. The objective must be a society of social and gender equality," says Annelie Nordström.

"Work has been the cement of the Swedish welfare state. If the labour market doesn't work, Sweden won't work," Klas Eklund adds.

Proposed policy measures

The purpose of the analysis group is to define challenges and problems, develop strategies and propose priority policy measures in the medium and longer term. The group that Annelie Nordström and Klas Eklund will lead will analyse and describe the conditions, challenges and opportunities associated with the goals of high employment and low unemployment in the medium term, which is defined here as 10–15 years. The idea is that the analysis group will indicate possible ways of achieving these objectives.

What challenges do you see ahead?

“The Swedish model is based on work and we have succeeded in creating a social infrastructure in Sweden with universal childcare, which means that everyone can work. This is a quite unique achievement that allows us to offer everyone the chance to take part in working life. We also provide universal elderly care in Sweden. One major challenge will be to ensure that the social infrastructure can survive and develop so as to support an active working life in various ways,” says Ms Nordström.

Digitalisation will replace jobs

Turning to internationalisation and globalisation, Klas Eklund sees several challenges that are relevant to the Government’s work on the future.

“Mining and manufacturing have long been the engine in the Swedish economy but this is starting to change. It’s difficult for a country as small as Sweden to be a leader in many different areas. How can we meet this type of challenge? Another challenge is technology. Unlike some countries, Sweden has traditionally been very pro-technology. But there is no guarantee that new technologies will create jobs in the way that old technologies did. Digitalisation and automation are replacing jobs in the labour market, both in manufacturing and in the services sector. Here we face difficult and exciting challenges,” says Mr Eklund.

Report to be ready in 2016

The analysis group will begin its work in early 2015 and will have a broad membership, composed of people with a wide range of expertise and experience. The group will work freely and independently within the framework of its instructions and resources. Several outreach activities are planned, such as hearings, seminars and conferences. A report is expected in

a year's time, presenting conclusions, strategic considerations and proposals for policy measures.

“We will indicate a number of ways forward, opportunities, challenges and threats, and then discuss in concrete terms how we can make Sweden as successful as possible,” says Mr Eklund.