

## Exploring Doctoral Networks: Should There Be a Nordic One?

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NordMedia Network's first **webinar for doctoral students and junior scholars** on 5 February dealt with PhD students' networking skills. As a spin-off to this webinar, an idea came up: why not start a Nordic doctoral students network?

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Doctoral students will be the focus of 2021 at NordMedia Network. Nordicom will arrange a **pre-conference** in association with the **NordMedia Conference** in Reykjavik, Iceland. We are also exploring what kind of resources individuals pursuing a doctorate would need.

Doctoral students are by no means a homogeneous group. They are affiliated to universities in different ways, for instance, by employment in doctoral schools, which means a monthly salary and a work contract with a university. Some doctoral students also work as part of externally funded projects. There are also PhD students at universities who have been awarded with a scholarship by a foundation for a certain period, called *stipendieforskare/-forskere* or *apurahatutkija*, often in a more vulnerable position, as they may not always have funding for the whole 4–5-year period it takes to complete a PhD.

Doctoral students are also of different ages and, in an increasingly international academy, from various backgrounds. A "Nordic junior scholar" may thus have another ethnic and linguistic background than Nordic, and a junior scholarship is not equivalent to biological age.

However, the challenges are often shared: how to make an entrance into the academic world. It typically requires peer support and feedback, as well as knowledge about the possibilities and restrictions available at the academic labour market.

### International networks

There are plenty of online PhD support communities on Facebook and LinkedIn, and many of these span across other social media as well. Academic Twitter – with hashtags such as #academictwitter, #PhDlife, #PhDchat, and #Academiclife – is a common place for mutual exchange and support. However, as the university infrastructures and academic cultures vary from country to country, as well as from one discipline to another, it would be appropriate to chase a common platform for junior Nordic media and communication scholars.

The major international media and communication research associations have junior scholar networks, such as ECREA's **YECREA – Young Scholars' Network**, the **IAMCR Emerging Scholars Network**, and **ICA's Student & Early Career Community**. The Nordic NordMedia Conference has long been regarded as an attractive entry into international cooperation for young scholars, but it still does not have a young scholars' network.

There are also national junior scholar networks. In Sweden, universities' doctoral programmes run a nationwide network called Train (as the students used to meet at train stations – crossroads that could be approached from different directions). The University of Oslo has a university-wide **PhD Forum** for doctoral candidates. The national media research associations are regularly targeting doctoral students, and there are even specific national associations promoting doctors' position in society and the labour market, such as the associations **PAND** in Denmark and **Tohtoriverkosto** in Finland.

We are curious about your ideas if you are a doctoral student located in the Nordic countries, or a person aspiring to become one. Is there space for a Nordic emerging scholars network? What topics should the next PhD student webinars address? Please let us know.

Thinking outside the academic box

### Informational interviews for networking

Informational interviews can be a fruitful method of learning about the requirements of jobs, both within and outside the academy. Take a look at NordMedia Network's first webinar for doctoral students with Christopher L. Caterine, the author of *Leaving Academia* (2020), from New Orleans as our guest. The webinar can be watched as a recording on the site. If you have any questions or suggestions regarding future directions, please don't hesitate to contact us via the feedback form available at the site.

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