

## The DIGeMERGE Forum on the Infrastructural Practices and Politics of Digitalising Emergency Communication

On August 15, 2024, the IT University of Copenhagen hosted a landmark event convened by the DIGeMERGE (Digital Emergency Communication) project and the Center for Digital Welfare (CDW), gathering stakeholders from academia, government, and emergency services. Titled The Infrastructural Practices and Politics of Digitalising Emergency Communication, the forum was a collaborative intervention into how digital technologies shape public safety, institutional trust, and democratic governance during crises.

The story of this forum begins with a recognition that emergency communication is not just a technical issue. As the research team emphasized, digitalisation must also be understood as a political and relational transformation. The project spans Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland – known for advanced welfare and digital integration. It is precisely in these settings that the stakes of digital transformation become clear:

*How does a society balance redundancy and innovation, transparency and security, individual needs and collective welfare?*

Keynote speaker Nina Blom Andersen emphasized that digital tools are reshaping practices within

emergency response, – altering not only how authorities communicate, but also how citizens perceive and trust them. She highlighted that public trust depends on both the content of warnings and the credibility and relational history of the institutions delivering them.

This theme carried into the practitioner panel, featuring representatives from the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish agencies for emergency management. Their presentations revealed both advancements and challenges. From the implementation of new mobile-based warning systems like S!RENEN to the complexities of cross-border interoperability, these discussions showed that progress is contingent on hardware, software and cooperation and socio-cultural reflection.

The DEMA simulation exercise constituted a pivotal moment, placing participants into a fictional snowstorm-induced communication blackout on the island of Bornholm, Denmark. Faced with failing infrastructure, compromised digital networks, and urgent public needs, participants had to strategize under pressure. The exercise underscored the necessity of communication redundancy and the fragility of digital dependencies.

The notion of “relational labour” emerged throughout the forum. Maintaining public trust, ensuring institutional cooperation, and designing resilient systems were seen as relational tasks – requiring both technical expertise and empathy, transparency, and adaptability. As one practitioner noted, “Trust is the only parameter when warning the public.” This sentiment echoed across discussions: technology alone cannot guarantee safety – the social fabric between state and citizen must be actively maintained.



Photo by: Luna Rasmussen

Another insight revolved around sustainability in regard to system longevity, institutional memory, and skill retention. Participants discussed the challenges of securing long-term funding, managing technological obsolescence, and training new generations of responders in systems that are constantly evolving.

By the end of the day, the forum had catalyzed a new understanding of digital emergency communication – one that sees it as a site of negotiation between technological possibility and democratic responsibility. Final group presentations synthesized wide-ranging perspectives into a shared commitment: to design inclusive, transparent, and adaptable systems, and to cultivate networks of trust that can endure technological disruption and societal stress.

The DIGeMERGE Forum was a prototype for the collaborative governance needed in a digital, crisis-prone world. By centering infrastructure as a political and social issue, and uniting those who build, manage, and rely on emergency systems, the forum marked a shift toward more holistic, culturally sensitive approaches to public safety. This convergence of disciplines, perspectives, and values will help shape the future of emergency communication in the Nordic region and beyond.