Åbo Akademi University

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# The Tree We Heard Fall

## Analyzing the Societal Processes Following Focusing Events

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Åbo Akademi University Press
Tavastgatan 13, FI-20500 Åbo, Finland
Tel. +358 (0)2 215 3478
E-mail: forlaget@abo.fi

Sales and distribution:
Åbo Akademi University Library
Domkyrkogatan 2–4, FI-20500 Åbo, Finland
Tel. +358 (0)2 -215 4190
E-mail: publikationer@abo.fi

Portrait photo: Jonas Udd
Cover: Lindholm & Högväg / Parliament house photo: Johannes Jansson/norden.org

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Åbo Akademis förlag | Åbo Akademi University Press
Åbo, Finland, 2016

**CIP Cataloguing in Publication**

**Lindholm**, Jenny.
The tree we heard fall : analyzing the societal processes following focusing events / Jenny Lindholm. - Åbo : Åbo Akademi University Press, 2016.
Diss.: Åbo Akademi University.
ISBN 978-951-765-812-6

ISBN 978-951-765-812-6
ISBN 978-951-765-813-3 (digital)
Painosalama Oy
Åbo 2016

# Förord

*To dare is to do.*

Denna historia börjar kanske på en parkeringsplats i Petalax. Min gymnasierektor ropade "skicka mig din avhandling sen", och jag antog att han menade doktorsavhandling. Eller möjligtvis under de kandidat- och magistersemiarier som jag tyckte var ovanligt roliga (!), och där jag insåg att jag hittat ett tema jag ville lära mig mer om. Även om det fortsättningsvis finns stunder när jag funderar över *varför* jag skriver en doktorsavhandling, så vet jag i alla fall *hur* man på bästa sätt genomför ett sådant åtagande. Man omger sig med personer som är briljanta, kreativa, generösa med sin kunskap, samt som besitter en någorlunda bra humor. Människor som tror på dig och får dig att bli bättre än vad du någonsin drömde om att vara. Jag har lyxen att vara omgiven av precis sådana människor.

Jag vill rikta ett särskilt stort tack till min handledare, professor **Göran Djupsund**, som är expert på att se helheter, samt att erbjuda uppmuntran i precis rätt ögonblick. Om design är att skapa lösningar är jag speciellt glad för att du gav min forskningsdesign möjligheten att få en experimentell lösning. Det är tack vare dina idéer och din hjälp som detta projekt alltid har känts genomförbart. Tack för att du är mittfältsmotorn som alltid slår den öppnande passningen! Det underlättar också att i korridoren på B4 jobba sida vid sida med docent **Tom Carlson** och docent **Kim Strandberg**. Era alltid lika insiktsfulla kommentarer levereras snabbt och har fått arbetet med avhandlingen att flyta på – och plötsligt en dag var allt klart. Tack för att ingen fråga är för liten eller för stor och för att ni alltid tagit er tid!

Avhandlingens förhandsgranskare, professor emerita **Marie-Louise von Bergmann-Winberg** från Mittuniversitet och docent **Fredrik Bynander** vid Försvarshögskolan i Stockholm, poängterade många viktiga lärdomar som jag tar med mig, men gav mig också ett självförtroende gällande det arbete jag gjort. Ett ödmjukt tack för er kunskap!

PM **Janne Berg**, utan våra dagliga diskussioner av varierande vetenskaplig grad hade livet som doktorand varit bra mycket ointressantare. Du är fantastisk på många sätt och jag uppskattar att du alltid säger ja till nya äventyr, diskuterar allt från metodik

till doktorandångest och gärna skålar i rödvin då det har behövts. Tack för att du hejar på mig de dagar då solen inte skiner ända till andra sidan av korridoren!

Till alla kollegor i Vasa, i Åbo, på Försvarshögskolan och i den finlandssvenska forskarskolan – ni har förgyllt mina dagar såväl intellektuellt som imponerat på dansgolvet. Jag är djupt tacksam för all hjälp och uppmuntran! Så många personer har bidragit till att förbättra avhandlingen, och jag vill speciellt lyfta fram PM **Joni Kyheröinen** och språkgranskare **Paul Wilkinson**. Joni var den bästa forsknings-assistent man kan tänka sig, med exemplarisk noggrannhet i kombination med roliga diskussioner under långa arbetsdagar i labbet. Paul bidrog förtjänstfullt till att det engelska språket i avhandlingen flyter smidigt.

Slutligen vill jag lyfta fram min stora och fina familj, utan *er alla* vore livet tråkigt. Tack **mamma** och **pappa** för att jag alltid fått gå min egen väg. **Jona**, du som har läst min avhandling flest gånger av alla och hållit mig nere på jorden gällande alltför invecklad akademisk jargong, samtidigt som du är den person som alltid, alltid får mig att skratta. Tack för att du tror på mig, det hade aldrig gått utan din hjälp. **Jocke**, inledningsvis förtjänar du (och Sören!) en applåd för all assistans i labbet. Du är extremt bra på att förklara hur saker hänger samman och det är till stor del din förtjänst att jag tycker att experimentell forskning är det roligaste man kan hålla på med. Vi är båda lika nyfikna, så jag ser det som en enorm styrka att kunna diskutera forskning, Solex 32/32 TDID-förgasare, såväl som universums mysterier hemma i soffan. Tack för att du finns i mitt liv.

* * *

Arbetet med denna avhandling har möjliggjorts genom ekonomiskt stöd från Victoriastiftelsen. Ett innerligt tack för att jag kunnat jobba heltid med min forskning! Jag har också uppskattat de resebidrag och stipendier från Högskolestiftelsen i Österbotten, Makarna Eks fond, Rektorn vid Åbo Akademi och Svensk-Österbottniska Samfundet som gett mig möjlighet att berika min forskarvardag genom att delta i nationella och internationella konferenser.

Vasa, 12 januari 2016

*Jenny Lindholm*

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# I. INTRODUCTION

# 1. Appetite for destruction? Introducing the research field

Virtually every aspect of politics has a potential negativity bias. This means that information about negative events plays an important role for political communication and forms our political behavior. A never-ending stream of events occurs on a daily basis; however, limited resources, information intake, or agenda space filter out some events, while emphasizing the importance of others. The whole process of recognizing a problem, evaluating the different dimensions of the dilemma, and sorting out potential solutions is about making choices. It all boils down to the allocation of attention; we can attend to only a limited amount of issues at one time (Jones & Baumgartner 2005, 275).

However, neurological processes are greater when dealing with negative events, in comparison to positive events (Soroka 2014, 8–9). From a neurological and biological perspective, this can be explained as an evolutionary feature – it has been more important to develop attention systems that give preference to stimuli such as fear and danger (*ibid.*). From a social science perspective, issues that are important for the general public, issues related to serious societal problems and issues receiving extensive attention in the media are all plausible issues that will rise onto the formal political agenda (Wolfe, Jones & Baumgartner 2013, 2). When combining these three criteria, as well as the importance of negative events, we encounter a focusing event. This is an event that is sudden, unusual, and has negative consequences to a large number of people. Citizens favor negative information, media reports on negative events (often using a negative tone) and politicians sometimes indulge in negative campaigning (Strömbäck 2008). Although such negativity bias is a biological necessity for human beings, as mentioned earlier, it can also be derived from how we have built our society and designed the political institutions. For example, the media's role is to

monitor errors and problems, and to search for the negative – a function also present in the design of many political institutions (Soroka 2014, 108).

But why are focusing events so important? A key aspect is that focusing events raise emotions, and emotions are essential in the allocation of attention (Jones & Baumgartner 2005, 12). A limitation to political behavior is our cognitive lack of responsiveness, and the gateway to gain awareness is through emotions. If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? This phrase is a common philosophical thought experiment.[1] The question as to whether objects of sense only exist when perceived is perhaps an infallible conjecture. However, the question does point to an important aspect of politics – the importance of attention. In this light, a re-writing of this phrase was made by Goss (2001, 8) – "a focusing event is the tree we heard fall, not the hundred that we didn't". According to this reasoning, the importance of a potential focusing event is greatly diminished in a political sense if no one is affected by the event. Some events, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami, receive massive global attention, while the 2013 Asian floods (with 7000 deaths) never make it to the global spotlight (Yan & Bissell 2015, 2). Another aspect that points to the importance of disaster research is the increasing amount of vulnerability in societies. Physical, social, cultural, economic, technological, and political factors are contributing to, as well as creating, a world where the possibility of disasters and crises are here to stay (McEntire 2001, 192).

Focusing events are important for "the legitimacy of the authoritative allocation process" (Olson 2008, 158), which is ultimately the existence of a political system. As such, focusing events are virtually impossible to keep away from societal agendas, and the more attention they receive, the more difficult it is to deal with them. Furthermore, these events create a fruitful environment for change. The vast majority of the actors in a system have an understanding of the event and the problems related to it (Birkland 1997, 25–26).

[1] The concept is mentioned in a similar phrasing by George Berkeley (1710) and William Fossett (1754).

There are three questions of importance in the aftermath of a focusing event, and these questions explain the politicization process of an event. The first one is: What happened? This starting point defines the event (Olson 2008, 154), which can be understood as the meaning-making process or framing of the event (e.g. Boin et al. 2005, 13). However, we should keep in mind that the cause of an event is often constructed rather than found. When Pekka-Eric Auvinen killed eight people in the first Finnish large-scale school shooting, was it because he had access to a weapon? Alternatively, maybe it was because he idolized Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, two previous school shooters? Perhaps the school shooting was a result of the shooter being bullied? The construction of a cause is about identifying the necessary conditions for the observed effects to be able to occur (Hollnagel 2004). As such, the framing and contextualization affect citizens' perceptions of the event and determine the level of institutional attention (Fry 2003, 84). The second aspect in the politicization process highlights the losses and responsibilities following an event, and is often framed in a negative way as too high losses or an inadequate response (Olson 2008, 154–155). Thus, the second question concerns who is accountable or responsible? Thirdly, political leaders provide the answer to the question: What will happen now? The attention turns to discussing how the problem can be prevented in the future, and how to best recover from inconveniences – namely, the solutions presented to the problem and how to allocate resources to solve it. Disasters are of key interest since they deal with questions of agenda control together with the question of accountability; they place new issues on the agenda and raise demands. This combination of questions is essentially what politics is all about (Olson 2008, 155).

In March 2011, an earthquake and tsunami swept over the coast of Japan, killing tens of thousands of people and destroying entire towns. At the same time, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear facility experiences a meltdown in three of its nuclear reactors. Tokyo Electric Power (Tepco), the plant's operator, said that the meltdown was initiated solely by the 14-meter waves; however, the parliamentary investigation panel concluded that:

> Although triggered by these cataclysmic events, the subsequent accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant cannot be regarded as a natural disaster. It was a profoundly manmade disaster – that could and should have been foreseen and prevented. (The National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission 2012, 9)

If we revisit the three questions of politicization: 1) the framing concluded that the event was not a natural disaster. Rather, it was a man-made event exacerbated by a natural phenomenon. This framing of the problem leads us to the question of responsibilities: 2) the losses are seen as too high, since the responsibility lies on the company and the political institutions that could have prevented the issue, but did not. The safety measures conducted were not adequate with the risks of earthquakes or tsunamis hitting the area. The question concerning what will happen now is stated in the report as follows: 3) new safety regulations, a permanent committee overseeing the regulations as well as an independent investigation commission and a reformation of the crisis management system. All in all, the first question is of vital importance for the politicization process, since a different answer to that question would have given the subsequent discussion another twist.

Early research on disasters and crises was often initiated by the occurrence of a specific event; hence, there was a lack of a systematic approach to the research in question (Birkland 2006). Although progress has been made in recent years – disaster research has exploded in a wide range of scientific approaches and research questions, from crisis communication to designing resilience – unanswered questions still remain. Today, this interdisciplinary field brings together both new insights as well as challenges. Previous research, to a great extent, has only been carried out in an American context; typical examples of events that have been studied exhaustively are 9/11 (e.g. Birkland 2006; Entman 2003; Leffler 2011) or the Columbine school shooting (Haidel-Markel & Joslyn 2001; Muschret 2007).

A common approach in disaster research is to study either the media agenda or the political agenda, or to use a combination of both (e.g. Birkmann et al. 2010; Birkland 1997; 2006; Boin 2009; Fleming 2012; Nohrstedt 2007; Nohrstedt & Weible 2010;

Wood 2006; Worrall 1999). Moreover, other researchers have looked at aspects of disasters affecting the citizen arena, e.g. public opinion (Goss 2001; Vane & Kalvas 2012). However, there is still a need for political scientists to study other aspects of disasters than the "policy" problems (e.g. Olson 2008, 167), since disasters offer a clear insight into the political processes and the priorities of governments when layers of semantics, symbolism, or processes are stripped away. In this respect, Olson (2008, 156) asks: "Why has it been so difficult to gain sustained, systematic attention to the political aspects of disasters?" Even though there is a political aspect to most policy domains, for instance welfare or pollution – somehow the politics of disaster is neglected. Firstly, this might derive from political scientists perceiving disasters as engineering problems, or political epiphenomena, in combination with disaster research previously being perceived as a subject for sociologists or geographers. Secondly, it is only in the last two decades that the political science community has accepted crises and disasters as "political occasions", albeit mostly through a policy study lens. One interesting explanation for this is the existing view that there *should not* be any disaster politicization, since this subject has a negative connotation (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, when a political system responds to an exogenous shock, the leaders must not only explain what has happened, but why it happened. Hence, focusing events are always part of a framing contest; i.e. "crises are political at heart." (Boin, et al. 2005, ix).

Although studies that combine all the three arenas have been made (e.g. Soroka 2002), they are few in number. Hence, Wolfe et al. (2013, 4) argue that studies involving all the three arenas are still needed and that such a research area will gain valuable insights by looking at the relationship between them. Furthermore, looking only at legislative proposals and policy change, which have been the dominating approach during the 21st century, might not capture the understanding and (re)definition of a problem. In this respect, Birkland (2006, 21) acknowledges that signs of political learning must include the news media coverage of the event as well as interest groups' appearances at congressional hearings, albeit the importance of the citizen arena is left out. At the same time, it can be difficult to say that a policy change was initiated by a particular focusing event, as previous events or the particular goals of actors might have influenced the process, alongside other factors. Moreover, the

contextualization of an event – the perception as to whether a problem can be solved, and what the best solution is – precedes legislative documents. This means that the process preceding potential change is of high importance in disaster research.

In the early 21st century, there was an interesting turn in the academic use of the term "focusing event". This was seen as a broadening of the concept, whereby US state elections (Walker & Waterman 2010), the tobacco master settlement agreement (Wood 2006), and poor school performance by Danish children (Jensen 2011) were also seen as focusing events, with a reference to Birkland's (1997; 2006) definition. The broad appliance is understandable in the sense that the linguistic concept is very clear and easy to grasp, i.e. it is an event that is highlighting a certain problem. Nevertheless, there is a grey zone in the definition, with no clear line concerning whether an event can or cannot be considered as a focusing event. Instead, it becomes more fruitful to discuss the potentiality and magnitude of focusing events. This means that although it is difficult to tell which event will have a major focal power, we can still define the potential characteristics of an event to receive extensive political attention. As such, we see researchers using the concept in the broadest form on one hand – as events drawing attention to a specific problem or issue (e.g. Vánê & Kalvas 2012), while, on the other hand, there are those who accept Birkland's (1997; 2006) narrower criteria mainly focusing on disaster research (e.g. Farley, Baker, Batker, Koliba, Matteson, Mills & Pittman 2007). When using the broad definition, it is possible that almost any event can be defined as a focusing event in some aspect; i.e. any event may receive attention or be framed as an important and highly interesting question. Still, although many researchers use the concept and the theory of focusing events, the theoretical aspect is not always the central point in previous research. If the starting point is to contribute to a theory that says something about focusing events and their influence on political processes in general, it is impossible to adopt a broad definition. In such cases, we end up with events that have nothing in common and are virtually impossible to compare.

## 1.2 Research interest and aims of the dissertation

The following chapters will shed more light on the unanswered questions highlighted in the previous section. Specifically, the chapters concern how focusing events are defined and the discourse surrounding them. Moreover, as the subject of this thesis concerns the influence of focusing events on political processes within three societal arenas, the goal is to address the suggestions raised in earlier research by McEntrie (2001, 192) and Wolfe (2012), who state that a broader approach is needed in disaster research. Here, a broader approach refers to not limiting the studies to natural or technological hazards, and to include all actors, including the public. Furthermore, in this thesis, a broad adoption of the politicization of events in society is emphasized, ranging from the citizen's perspective to the parliamentary discussion.

A focusing event is understood as a phenomenon that has suddenly achieved public attention and is being discussed in the media, which increases the pressure on decision makers to do something. As such, focusing events pinpoint the importance of agenda setting; i.e. which issues are up for debate, who gets to speak, and who is held responsible. It is worth noting that in social sciences, disasters and crises are deemed important for many reasons. However, one of the most important aspects is the ability to loosen up the policy-making processes – allowing change to happen. Moreover, these events are undesirable, and society is interested in mitigation and in preventing similar events from happening in the future. As such, a focusing event will become the catalyst for a debate on how to perceive social problems. It is in this light that researchers have studied focusing events and subsequent policy change (Birkland 2006; Fleming 2012; Soroka 2002). Thus, political learning can draw from previous events, either by making the focusing event in question the "tipping point" (Wood 2006), or by contributing to the event with a spillover effect from other policy domains, i.e. a major change in one domain influences other domains (Kingdon 2003). In this respect, focusing events can create pressure and force politicians to "do something", adopting policies with little connection to the problem at hand (Birkland & Lawrence 2009, 148). In other cases,

a careful analysis of the situation is made, albeit with no policy change, perhaps as a result of economic or bureaucratic realities (*ibid.*, 149). Additionally, all the groups, with their own agendas and pre-existing goals, try to influence the aftermath of a focusing event (Wood 2006, 433–434). Clearly, there is more to the big picture than just an event taking place, followed by policy change.

In view of the above, I suggest that we now take a step back and initially look at the processes preceding potential change. Although it can be virtually impossible to find an x → y relationship between a focusing event and a policy change, we can establish that in order for a focusing event (x) to lead to a policy change (y), the event must be defined and framed in such a way that (y) is a possible solution. This is in line with recent calls made by Yan and Bissell (2015, 21–22), as well as Birkland and Warnement (2013, 21). In this regard, Yan and Bissell call for studies that identify the details of the stories presented in the media – how focusing events are framed and how the framing connects to societal attributes. Likewise, Birkland and Warnement point out that previous research lacks a careful textual analysis of the discourse surrounding focusing events. In this regard, Alexandrova (2015, 5) makes an important notion: in a European context, the overall analysis of the extent that focusing events influence political agendas is extremely rare, even though "40 % of the large punctuations in attention are related to focusing events (whereas elections and leadership change seem not to matter)" (van Assche 2012).

Since the great majority of studies are performed in a US context, it is of interest to further test the ideas in a European setting[2]. A third aspect pointing to the importance of the subject is the confusion of concepts – on the one hand there is the use of a "focusing event", as discussed in the introduction, while on the other hand there is a huge variation of similar concepts, such as crises, disasters, or exogenous shocks (see Chapter 2.2). Therefore, it is important to continue to develop the theoretical and conceptual understanding of focusing events.

[2] However, a recent study by Alexandrova (2015) analyzed the prioritization of focusing events on the European Council over a period of 20 years.

The overall aim of this thesis is to reach a deeper understanding of how focusing events influence societal processes. This is done through a discussion of the definition of focusing events, as well as through studies of how these events influence the citizen arena, the media arena and the parliamentary arena. The starting point is that focusing events are of interest due to the characteristics of the events, and not because of the processes following the event. Moreover, focusing events are not inherently dichotomous, in the sense that they are focusing or not focusing. Instead, they vary in magnitude; events have a stronger or weaker degree of focus. Likewise, the origin of focusing events differs; some events are created by natural phenomena while others originate from human actions – which possibly influence the subsequent discussion of the event.

## 1.3 Disposition

A brief outline of the disposition of the thesis is presented here. The first part, *The Introduction,* consists of three sections. Here, a mapping of the research problem and a general introduction to the subject are presented. This is followed by Chapter 2, which begins by introducing a theoretical discussion of the concept of focusing events and ends with a presentation of the general research questions.

The second part, *Defining the context,* outlines the three societal arenas that are studied. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 address the main contributions from previous research and conclude with a discussion of how to study the effects of focusing events within the citizen arena, the media arena and the parliamentary arena.

In the third part, *Design, methods and studies,* the research design is presented as well as methodological considerations, followed by the three studies.

*Study 1: Citizens' Emotional and Cognitive Responses to Focusing Events – An Experimental Study*

When focusing events occur, it is essential that citizens trust that their society can provide credence toward managing these situations. In this study, the citizen arena is examined through a controlled laboratory experiment. The research questions investigate the manner in which the origin and strength of focusing events affect the emotional and cognitive reactions of citizens. The emotional reactions are studied through self-reported emotions as well as psychophysiological reactions, and the cognition dimension consists of questions about societal responsibility in the wake of a focusing event.

*Study 2: Media framing and blame attribution of focusing events*

The media coverage of focusing events plays an important role in the sense that comprehensive coverage can be linked to increased attention both on the political arena and among citizens. Moreover, the coverage affects the framework used to understand and explain the event in terms of what happened, who is responsible and how the problem should be solved. The aim of the second study is to compare the media coverage following four focusing events with a varying degree of strength and origin, by way of a content analysis of news articles and images. The research questions investigate the basic characteristics of the coverage along with framing and blame attribution in the media coverage.

*Study 3: Threat or opportunity? The politicization of focusing events in the parliamentary arena*

A focusing event provides an opportunity for change because of the emotional impact of the event. The aim of the third study is to analyze the politicization of focusing events within the parliamentary arena, and the research questions investigate whether there are differences between events with a varying degree of strength and origin. Parliamentary debates during plenary sessions are studied according to four main themes: 1) the framing, 2) the blame attribution, 3) emotions used in the argumentation and 4) solutions presented to the problem.

In the final part, *Conclusion,* the results are summed up and concluding remarks discuss the overall importance of focusing events in a society.

# 2. Jigsaw puzzle – Defining focusing events in a societal context

> Indeed, the problem of "what is a disaster" will never be solved by more fieldwork. The real work to be done with respect to definitions of disasters has to do first with conceptualization: one needs to decide what disaster means. (Perry 2007, 15)

## 2.1 A crisis of definition?

A focusing event represents an exogenous shock to the political system with the ability of pushing issues onto societal agendas. Naturally, there are many different concepts used to represent such events, and in contrast, there are also many definitions for each of the concepts. In the following chapter, I will discuss the concept of focusing events on a theoretical level. Moreover, I will address and define other reoccurring concepts in this dissertation, for instance the concepts of "crisis" and "disaster", and how they are related to the debate on focusing events.

Disaster research is a broad subject that can be approached from many different angles, and the "what is a disaster?" question is a fundamental academic discourse as well as a research area of great importance to societies trying to reduce the impact of such events (McEntire 2001, 189). As a review of the whole field would be a formidable task, this review will instead briefly introduce the different areas, albeit emphasizing the political context. In a historical perspective, the perception of the disaster concept has evolved over time. In past cultures, many disasters were seen as acts of God. As such, the physical destruction or deaths of people were seen as a punishment from a higher power (Drabek 1991). However, when a deeper understanding of the environmental processes behind many natural phenomena (and resulting disasters

and catastrophes) became the prevailing belief, natural hazards emerged as the definition of a disaster (Cannon 1994). Yet, the role of humans in the disaster discourse was still downplayed, that is until the field of disaster research moved toward the social construction of events (Quarantelli 1998). Nevertheless, this also resulted in researchers sometimes downplaying the importance of natural phenomena, and McEntire (2001, 190) advocates the importance of a holistic perspective on disasters, taking into account multiple sources, as well as the physical, technological and social processes that interact in society. This means that the concept of crises and disasters also includes events such as unintentional disasters created by humans, e.g. accidents, or intentional human acts, such as terrorism, alongside natural hazards (*ibid*.).

Looking at disasters from a political perspective, three research traits emerge (Enander 2010). However, the first division concerns the research subjects; risks on the one hand and crises on the other. Risks and threats have a prominent role in today's information society, and there is a demand for better risk resilience (*ibid*., 4). An effect of this is seen in the high expectations citizens have toward political leaders concerning the management of negative events (Pidgeon 1998; Renn 2008). The first research trait deals with the individual's ability to manage risks, and citizen behavior during crises and disasters (Enander 2010, 6–10). This type of research concerns both the early risk stage, as well as the aftermath of a focusing event. The second trait focuses on the professional actors dealing with crises and disasters (Enander 2010, 11–14). Hence, both municipal and regional actors all the way up to the formal political agenda are studied in a leadership perspective. Interestingly, the need for the study of emotions and their impact on disaster management is brought up as an understudied aspect (Enander 2010, 12), since there are relatively few studies on the use of emotions by leaders during crises, and the impact on the media and citizens (e.g. Olofson & Öhman 2009; Madera & Smith 2009). The third and final research trait is the interaction between professional actors and citizens. On the one hand, there is the communication between the societal arenas and how to integrate citizens into risk and disaster management (Enander 2012, 15), while on the other hand there are the expectations, as well as myths, concerning the interaction in emergency situations. This dissertation aims at involving all three traits to some degree. It will do this by

focusing on how crises and disasters affect citizens, communications (media arena) and the response from the professional actors (parliamentary arena).

The concept of a *focusing event* was brought forward by Kingdon in the mid-1980s, defined initially as crises and disasters that bring attention to a problem (Kingdon 2003, 95). These events work as powerful symbols, since many problems are not self-evident in a societal context. In a broad sense, the basic starting point for the discussion of focusing events is how "sudden, unpredictable events […] influence the public policy-making process" (Birkland 1997, 1). These lines of thoughts were not new, rather, they had been formulated by Cobb and Elder (1972, 19), discussing how demands must be converted into concrete issues to visualize a problem and mobilize actors, and within the theory of punctuated equilibrium stating that politics (at least in an American context) was characterized by longer periods of stability, "punctuated by short bursts of institutional change leading to important changes in outputs" (Baumgartner, & Jones 1993, 102). In the early life of the concept of focusing events, the idea was discussed because these events were seen as important factors influencing the political processes. Nevertheless, a specific theory and a more profound definition were elaborated by Birkland in the late 1990s.

In the books *After Disaster* (1997) and *Lessons of Disaster* (2006), Birkland explains the reasoning of what a focusing event is, and how these events influence political processes. He does this by bringing together elements from many different theoretical disciplines like agenda-setting, media logic and competition between different groups in the political arena. An important aspect of the early work by Birkland is also a new dimension of focusing events – "the potentially focusing event". Indeed, not all events containing the characteristics that classify a focusing event *become truly focusing*. Hence, we need to discuss the potentiality of events. By creating a definition of events that include the potentiality aspect we eliminate a problem present in previous disaster research, specifically, earlier work often used post hoc constructions of what was or was not a focusing event (Birkland 1997, 21–22). The thoughts behind the potentiality discussion were to (1) find policy domains where these events were important, and (2) rely on a definition and description of these events instead of picking random events over a broad spectrum and relying on heavy empirical analysis (*ibid.*). At the same time, this means that despite the fact that an event has all the characteristics of a

focusing event, ultimately it is not always focusing. In light of the above, the definition of a potential focusing event is constructed as follows:

> A potential focusing event as an event that is sudden, relatively rare, can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms, inflicts harm or suggest potential harms that are or could be concentrated on a definable geographical area or community of interest, and that is known to policy makers and the public virtually simultaneously. (Birkland 1997, 22)

For an event to have the potential to become focusing, it needs to happen suddenly, and be somewhat different from the everyday constant flow of events. At the same time, the event has to affect many people to obtain political attention. Another definition of focusing events relates to the four characteristics identified for man-made events, with a specific focus on terrorist attacks: novelty, unpredictability, criminality and intended use of violence (Worrall 1999, 320). Hence, here we see a consistency between the two definitions concerning the first two characteristics of novelty and unpredictability, even though criminality and violence can be seen as causing harm to a community – there is a difference in the origin of an event. When all these aspects are taken into consideration, we can conclude that the magnitude of an event, or the focal power, might vary in intensity – albeit that it is not a dichotomy variable. An example could be how an earthquake happening in India would never get the same focal power as an earthquake destroying Los Angeles. (Birkland 1997, 23; 2006, 2). The other important notion is that the origin of the event affects the definition – a discussion that I will return to in more detail.

As pointed out in the beginning of the chapter, focusing events are of interest because they highlight certain issues, and push them onto agendas. For example, Worrall (1999, 335) found that a criminal and violent event receives more attention in the media; and more attention means higher demands for policy change. Another aspect that makes these events intriguing is the "window of opportunity" they offer (Kingdon 2003, 165—196), i.e. a legitimate and relatively quick way of changing policy. In Finland, there are 45.3 civilian guns per 100 residents, which is the fourth highest in the world (Karp 2011). The firearms act and laws attached to it were changed in

2011, following two school shootings in Finland in 2007 and 2008. However, the debate in the parliament and in the media raised concerns from hunters and sports shooters (HE 106/2009 vp). When the second school shooting occurred, less than a year after the first, not much had been done in the parliamentary arena, which sparked a critique. Hence, the question was quite controversial. Even though a focusing event might not always be enough to create policy change, an event might bring the perception of earlier problems to the surface and demonstrate the existence of problems in a society (Kingdon 2003, 98), as seen in the Finnish cases. Although focusing events generate attention in different arenas, for policy change to occur, the discussion needs to mobilize actors like the media, public opinion and politicians. However, strong focusing events, like deadly terrorist attacks, need no assistance to go high on the formal political agenda, as such issues are often self-evident in the political debate (Worrall 1999). For the most part, however, it is virtually impossible to say whether a particular focusing event is the only trigger for a specific policy change – a political crisis might have been waiting under the surface for a long time. Nevertheless, we cannot disregard the fact that "social change and conflict are often punctuated by sharp, sudden events" (Birkland 1997, 2).

Accidents, natural disasters or crises are often imprinted into our memories, and many people remember exactly what they were doing when they learned that two planes had flown into the World Trade Centre or when they heard about the school shooting in Jokela. This is because the picture in our head is most likely created by the images and texts presented to us by the media (e.g. Lippmann 1922), and the media tries to explain why and how something incomprehensive has happened, and how society can learn from its mistakes, especially if we are dealing with a man-made disaster. As a result, focusing events introduce issues, and the media or the public agenda might put forward demands for policy change (Birkland 1997, 2).

## 2.2 Risks, crises, disasters and catastrophes

The use of the terms crisis, disaster and catastrophe is common in everyday life and in the media's jargon – and since these terms are used frequently in this dissertation, I will provide several attempts by previous researchers to define the concepts, and discuss how they relate to focusing events. Besides the "normal" crises and catastrophes, researchers are dealing with "external events" (Sabatier & Jenkins 1993), "external shocks" (Albright 2011; Ostrom 2005), "focusing events" (Birkland 1997; 2006; Kingdon 2003), or "critical junctures" (Hogan & Doyle 2009). Thus, we are studying a wide range of phenomena. One difference between these concepts is that external events, shocks and perturbations often aim at broader processes, with no specific focus on the behavior of different actors. Conversely, focusing events and critical junctures seek to understand societal and political processes (Nohrstedt & Weible 2010, 5). As such, studying politics in the form of policy change is dealing with complexity; the challenge is "how to simplify, what to emphasize, and what to ignore?" (*ibid.*).

A simple place to start when exploring the relationship between crises and disasters would be the following: in today's world we encounter a constant flow of risk. A risk can be seen as a perception or consciousness about a possible threat that has the prospect of affecting individuals, groups or societies. A catastrophe is the condition where the risk has materialized, which can subsequently turn into a crisis (Jarlbro 2004, 10). The main difference between a crisis and a disaster is that a crisis occurs through the actions of organizations or actors, while a disaster has its origin in external human actions or natural phenomena (Birkland 2006, 3). Crises can be seen as heavily produced by the media and society, looking for scapegoats or attributing blame (Nord & Strömbäck 2005). Furthermore, there is a difference between the English words "disaster" and "catastrophe", wherein a catastrophe is more profound and affects society to a greater extent than a disaster (*ibid.*, 4). Another distinctive difference concerns how catastrophes and disasters occur suddenly, while a crisis might build over a longer time period, e.g. as the result of political leaders not solving the aftermath of a natural disaster in a satisfying way. Nevertheless, since it is most likely that

disasters and catastrophes occur in the near future, it is essential that policy makers handle these situations in a way that reduces the likelihood of a political crisis (Birkland 2006, 6).

Disasters can be divided into natural disasters (such as hurricanes or floods), disasters related to technique (such as airplane crashes or nuclear accidents) and man-made violence (such as terrorist attacks and school shootings) (Saylor, Cowart, Lipovsky, Jackson & Finch 2003, 1623). Hence, disasters are, on the one hand, man-made and, on the other hand, dependent on natural phenomena (Kroll-Smith & Couch 1993, 79–80). Other researchers (e.g. Leivik Knowles 2001, 3), point out a confusion of ideas when too many events are characterized as disasters, or even more frequently as crises, when a more suitable concept could be "extraordinary events". Depending on how much the event differs from the normal state, we can speak of either serious disturbances, accidents, catastrophes or an extreme stress on societies (*ibid*., 4–5). Hence, focusing events are by definition extraordinary events since they differ from the normal political routine. Another concept used to describe this is "a serious event" (allvarlig händelse), which is an event that differs from the everyday routine and challenges society's functions (Wall 2011, 5). The different semantic concepts represent a variation in magnitude. However, it is still not relatively clear what separates a disaster from a catastrophe or an extraordinary event. Thus, instead of using a wide variety of words, trying to explain a variation in magnitude, I find it more fruitful to use the same concept – a focusing event – and then discuss in detail how there are "weaker" or "stronger" degrees of focus.

Crises, in contrast to disasters, can be defined as situations where societal structures and values are threatened, and policymakers have to make fast decisions with a degree of uncertainty (Boin et al. 2005, 2). "No country in the world is free from hazards and risks, disasters and calamities, conflict and turmoil, revolt and revolutions, riots and terrorism" (Rosenthal, Boin & Comfort 2001, 5). This means that we cannot avoid crises and disasters in today's society; rather, such focusing events are a distinguishing feature of today. History is filled with dramatic events, affecting and changing our systems. Earlier, some events and crises were seen as "an act of God" (Rosenthal et al. 2001, 5), virtually impossible to influence. Defining an event as an act of God, meaning outside the possibility of human control, is

convenient since the extension is that political accountability is perceived as low and blame attributions is not present (Olson 2008, 160). Today, it is hard to separate a crisis from a society, thus, a fruitful definition is "periods of upheaval and collective stress, disturbing everyday patterns and threatening core values and structures of a social system in unexpected, often unconceivable ways" (Rosenthal et al, 2001, 6). From this definition, it follows that crises receive attention on the political agenda quite quickly, but that it can be difficult for actors to find consensus concerning which actions should be taken and how to define the event. Using this definition, we include the disaster concept into a crisis. As such, natural disasters and terrorist attacks can both be seen as crises on a societal level. This means that a crisis situation, for instance the aftermath of a natural disaster, can be seen as a threat against prevailing values – or as an opportunity to bring about change (Boin et al. 2005, 4). In summary, what defines a crisis is that it contains some kind of threat to society's cornerstones: security, welfare, health or integrity, and includes an aspect of uncertainty. Furthermore, as many forms of crisis are trans-boundary (such as the financial crisis or natural disasters), sometimes it is hard to tell the beginning and the end of a crisis situation (*ibid*.).

Crisis situations can be divided into three types (Boin, McConnell & t' Hart 2008, 19). *Incomprehensible crises* are types of mega-crisis like 9/11 or the tsunami catastrophe of 2004. Such events create a big confusion in society, thus allowing different actors to frame the crisis according to their own preferences. *Mismanaged crises* take the form of failures inside the bureaucratic machinery, either as an indication of a problem or as a real problem. This second type of crisis exposes weakness and shortcomings in the management, which often serves as an opportunity for the media or opponents to try to change the status quo. Thirdly, *agenda-setting crises* are a type of crisis that can hit a sensitive spot in society, thus raising feelings of fear and vulnerability. Examples of agenda-setting crises are nuclear accidents and riots (Boin et al. 2008, 19–20). Furthermore, when an event has a clearer underlying cause, like a hurricane or a school shooting, it is easier for policy makers to avoid blame. Mismanaged situations or accidents, on the other hand, are harder to make excuses for. However, the common denominator for all crises is:

> The impossible conditions they create for leaders: managing the response operation and making decisions while essential information about causes and consequences remains unavailable (Boin et al. 2005, 4).

As stated above, it is possible to realize that a catastrophe can turn into a crisis. However, a question to now consider is whether it is possible to have a catastrophic situation without necessarily experiencing a crisis. The relationship between the two concepts is developed in Figure 1.

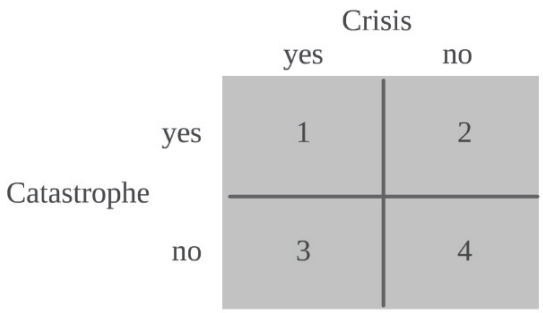


**Figure 1.** The relationship between catastrophes and crises.

The first box represents situations when a catastrophe has occurred and developed into a crisis. Policy makers have not been able to take sufficient actions to narrow the negative impact of the event. These situations bring about the important question of legitimacy, since citizens might lose confidence in their leaders. A good example of this is the Swedish handling of the Asian tsunami catastrophe in 2004, where the political actions, or inactions, turned into a prolonged political crisis that caused the Social Democratic Party to lose votes in the national elections (Henderson & Sitter 2007, 207; Jääsaari 2009, 57). The second box represents the occurrence of a catastrophe, but no subsequent crisis. Somehow leaders and policymakers have been able to avoid blame, for instance through the promise of policy change or by framing the event as a one-time phenomenon. In the third box, society experiences a crisis situation; however, no single event or catastrophe can be seen as the catalyst. An

example is how the economic situation might worsen over time – until we are suddenly talking about an economic crisis. As discussed by Nord and Strömbäck (2005), a crisis situation is often a result of the media coverage, which is drawn toward negative events (Soroka 2014). Hence, situation one, two and three, can be seen as potential focusing events, because of a crisis or catastrophe taking place. However, the actions of political leaders or responsible actors, the media coverage as well as public opinion are important in determining the result of the event, i.e. whether the framing of the event focus is on blame attribution or heroic actions.

In bringing the discussion of crises, disasters and catastrophes to a concluding remark, I take note of Perry's (2007, 1) points. Since the research is interdisciplinary, it is fully understandable that we confront a variation of different definitions of disasters and crises. The important task in this respect is to first specify the aim of the research and the audience in question. The second step is to then adopt a meaningful definition that responds to the context. Despite this, it is nevertheless important to remember that there are many different attempts of definition when it comes to crises and disasters within social sciences, all of which "represent a legitimate attempt to either capture the meaning or operate within the meaning of disaster" (*ibid.*, 4). Therefore, as the overall aim of this particular dissertation is to enhance the knowledge of how focusing events affect political processes, the definitions need to proceed from a societal context. My understanding of the way these extraordinary events affect society is as follows: first of all, we need to acknowledge the importance of threats and risks in today's world, since we are living with a constant flow of potential focusing events. The perception of these risks, together with actual events when the risks materialized, are brought to us by the media. A risk represents a potential threat that may develop into a catastrophe, disaster or crisis; the presence of nuclear power, for example, implies the possibility of a nuclear accident occurring, which, in turn, could develop into a focusing event of a strong magnitude.

The words disaster and catastrophe are used synonymously in this dissertation; the only difference between the two concepts being the degree of magnitude, i.e. a catastrophe is more profound than a disaster. However, although the exact difference between the two concepts is somewhat impossible to determine, this is not a problem

in this study. This is because I use the concept of focusing events to include both disasters and catastrophes, and then define the variation in magnitude within this concept. A disaster or catastrophe is a focusing event; sudden, rare and with negative consequences that can be caused by natural phenomena, or man-made actions – intentional or accidental (e.g. Birkland 2006; Saylor et al. 2003).

The term crisis is understood in the light of the theoretical discussion presented above (e.g. Birkland 2006; Boin et al. 2008; Boin et al. 2009; Nord & Strömbäck 2005; Rosenthal et al. 2001). A society experiences a crisis when prevailing values are threatened or questioned. Furthermore, crises can be created, at the very least aggravated, by extensive media coverage. The concept of a crisis can include everything from natural disasters to economic crises or terrorist attacks; however, the origin of a crisis is the actions of an organization, actor or institution. So even if a hurricane can be the starting point for a crisis, it is not the event per se that created the crisis situation, but the handling of the event by leaders or policy makers. A catastrophe may develop into a political crisis if the citizens lose confidence in the government and its ability to handle the situation. Additionally, there is a difference in the time dimension; whereas a disaster or catastrophe often occurs suddenly without any warning signs, a crisis may develop over a longer period of time – or even exist without being preceded by a catastrophe. The important common denominator between crises, disasters, and catastrophes, in a political science context, is that these events imply challenges as well as opportunities for decision makers, consequently affecting the framing, blame attribution and solutions presented to the problem.

## 2.3 The song remains the same? – Waiting for the next disaster

There have been several previous attempts to discuss the phases of disasters, and the variation sometimes depends on a different starting point. For instance, when discussing the societal impact of rapidly-evolving disasters; the (1) pre-impact, is the time preceding the event, leading up to (2) the impact, seen as the hours/days when

the direct physical loss on society takes place, followed by a (3) response, when trying to minimize the impact of the event, a (4) recovery, when basic utilities, for instance water and electricity, are repaired, and a (5) reconstruction or rebuilding of the society (Olson 2008, 156). When discussing disasters with a slightly slower onset, the first two phases could be defined as a pre-recognition and recognition. The point is to see the occurrence of disasters in society as a cyclical process, where the fifth phase of reconstruction is also the pre-impact of the next crisis or disaster (*ibid.*). Hence, we should see the political discussion about mitigation or preparedness not only in the light of the event in question, but as an emphasis on future, feasible focusing events.

Another attempt to separate the disaster phases is to distinguish the (1) preparation phase, where the forthcoming disaster is usually hypothetical, from the (2) warning phase, when the threat is impending and cautions might be given in the media (Nohrstedt 1999, 261–262). This existence of a warning phase is sometimes present during natural disasters, since many phenomena can be predicted; for instance warnings about heavy storms or floods in the media. However, when discussing other types of disasters, such as terrorist attacks or accidents, the risk of these events occurring sometime, somewhere, is real – albeit a similar warning phase, as with natural disasters, is not possible.

If we look at focusing events from a comprehensive societal perspective, two distinct phases occur. The first phase is characterized by the impact of the event and the media coverage that follows. This phase is important because a broad and extensive coverage is linked to more institutional attention. Another important aspect of media coverage is a detailed examination of social issues (Birkland 2006, 29). The second phase includes a lengthier discussion as well as policy implications. In this respect, different groups are mobilized, which is an opportunity for actors, who otherwise find it difficult to be heard in the political arena, to highlight issues of importance (*ibid.*).

## 2.4 Different kinds of focusing events

The definitions of a crisis, disaster and catastrophe are closely linked to the definition and understanding of focusing events. A disaster or catastrophe is clearly an important aspect of a focusing event as they always occur without warning. However, a crisis sometimes develops over longer periods of time. Nevertheless, a crisis situation often includes sharp turns and surprising punctuations that can be defined as focusing events. Finally, it is important to remember that even though a disaster, catastrophe or crisis occurs, it is not inevitable that the event will receive great attention. I find it most important to emphasize that a focusing event is defined according to characteristics of the event. Even though the subsequent political processes might influence the magnitude of the event in ways we cannot always predict, the starting point for an event with the potential to become focusing is tripartite (Birkland 1997; 2006; Kingdon 2003):

1. Sudden and surprising
2. Rare
3. Involve a threat or direct negative consequences for a large number of people

In the original definition, Birkland (1997, 22) emphasizes that information about the event reaches policy makers and the public at virtually the same time. However, in my opinion, the characteristic of a sudden and surprising event includes the aspect of citizens and politicians receiving information about what has happened at exactly the same time. The fourth aspect has certainly been important during earlier years, when the media coverage was a slower and more regulated process. However, in the internet age, when most people have a cell phone with a camera – it is hard to hide something affecting a large number of people. Thus, the first criterion is that an event needs to be sudden and surprising. As seen in the agenda-setting literature –the salience of problems rises and falls on the societal agendas, with a striking competition. However, an event that is unexpected and surprising is more likely to highjack the political processes and be less dependent on competition between actors and groups (Cobb &

Elder 1972, 84). The second criterion, rarity, can be understood through an example: if we compare car accidents and airplane crashes, the latter is much rarer, whilst we experience car accidents virtually every day. Hence, an airplane crash is more likely to be discussed on most societal agendas than a car accident, even if the same amount of people would be injured. Thirdly, a focusing event affects a large amount of people negatively. Logically, an event that affects only one or two people can be seen as a personal disaster, but for an event to be considered a societal crisis or disaster, core values in society must be threatened. (Birkland 1997, 23–27).

An interesting question to consider concerns whether sudden and rare focusing events can be positive– i.e. in terms of instigating positive outcomes for a large number of people. An example of this could be the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which brought about positive political change for many people. Such events are rare in history, which means that they are difficult to study on a general level, no matter how individually interesting they might be. Instead, we can discuss the deviance of an event, meaning the characteristics separating the event from other events (Shoemaker & Cohen 2006, 13); the deviance can be either positive, so-called good news, or negative, in the form of bad news. Hence, events can be framed as positive or negative. Another aspect is that the theory of focusing events highlights media logic – and the media, as well as politicians and citizens have a bias towards negative news (Soroka 2014).

The dimension of potentiality makes a definition of focusing events possible, while avoiding post hoc constructions. For instance, the geographical location and proximity to a specific political system influences the focal power of the event. This can be seen in the discussion of natural disasters – as long as they occur in densely populated areas, they are seen as more severe. However, the discussion of potentiality includes challenges, since it is almost impossible to measure or identify potentiality; instead, we can discuss expectations. In the light of previous research, we can formulate expectations concerning events that will have a high or low focal power; likewise, empirical studies will show which events actually became focusing. The combination of expected influence and actual influence can be constructed as follows (Figure 2):

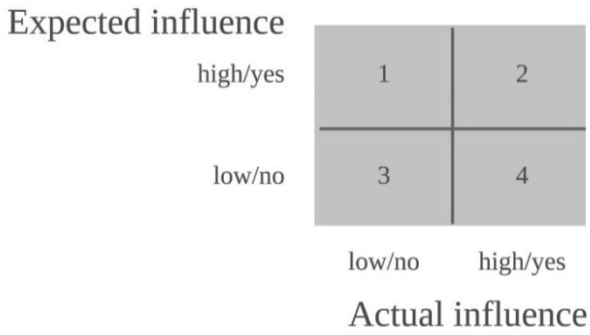


**Figure 2.** Expected and actual influence of focusing events.

The second box represents potential focusing events – events that, according to theory, should become focusing. In reality, the potential events will end up in both the first and the second box. Some events do receive focal power, while others fade away quickly. Furthermore, in the real world there is a fourth box for events that have a low expected influence – however, due to favorable actions, lobbyists or media coverage they reach a critical point where they are seen as societal problems that require actions. The difference between the second and the fourth box is the dividing line between focusing events that can be characterized according to properties of the event – and events with subsequent processes that resemble those of a focusing event. Hence, the process that follows a crisis or a catastrophe should not be the defining aspect of a focusing event. Instead, the three necessary variables: rarity, suddenness and negativity for a large number of people, are the distinguishing qualities of a focusing event, and not the fact that an event receives extensive attention on the three societal arenas. The attention is a result of the characteristics the event possesses.

Having discussed focusing events in a broad perspective, I will now turn to a more detailed discussion concerning the characteristics of focusing events and how they differ from each other. Starting from a policy process perspective, and how events influence these processes, focusing events can either be, "normal", "new", or "common events under uncommon circumstances" (Birkland 1997, 145–147). A normal focusing event is "normal" in the sense that it will most likely occur sometime in the near future, like most natural disasters do every year, or technical disasters –

even though we are not able to predict when or where. New focusing events are a completely new phenomenon, due to societal or technological changes in society – for instance, when the space shuttle Challenger disintegrated during take-off. A common event under uncommon circumstances is an event that possesses some kind of unique feature to make it more newsworthy and interesting for policy making, like accidents or violent crimes. However, after studying several different focusing events, Birkland points out that the mechanisms controlling policy change are often more complex, subtle, and contingent, than what first appears to be the case (Birkland 1997, 149). The problem with comparing different kinds of focusing events according to this tripartite model is that new events are very rare, making empirical investigation difficult. Another comment is that it could be hard to separate "normal" events from "common events under uncommon circumstances".

Even though we use the more narrow definition, the concept of focusing events is still broad, including everything from natural disasters to terrorist attacks. Hence, I will further discuss the importance between 1) the origin of events and 2) the magnitude of events. First of all, the origin of events differs – and the simplest classification is that it is either a natural phenomenon or man-made actions that cause or initiate the event, much like the definition of different disasters and catastrophes. On the one hand, we have natural disasters, e.g. hurricanes, floods or storms. These are predictable events occurring annually, albeit we are sometimes surprised by the magnitude of a particular event in this category. On the other hand, we have man-made events, both accidents and errors such as airplane crashes, and the intended use of violence, such as school shootings or terrorist attacks. On a side note, an interesting discussion to consider, that I will not elaborate on at this time, concerns how man-made actions may negatively affect the magnitude of natural disasters. In disaster research, there is a discussion suggesting that "natural" disasters do not exist (Boin 2008, xx), since it all boils down to human preparation failure (Quarantelli 1998). However, although we have years of experience, risk perception and research – it is virtually impossible to prevent all crises and disasters (Boin, Comfort & Demchak 2010, 3). Given this, I still find it fruitful to separate natural disasters from man-made disasters. Moreover, another reason for making the division between events originating from nature or from man is that when discussing what to do about heavy

rains or a school shooting, the blame attribution, responsibility, and solutions presented might be different because of the origin of the event. I use the word "might" because previous research sends a mixed message. After all, actor-based threats mean that a clear underlying factor can be identified and elucidate different problems that caused the event (Eriksson & Noreen 2004). Moreover, Alexandrova (2015) found that man-made disasters have a higher likelihood of reaching the formal political agenda of the European Council, compared to natural disasters. Conversely, disasters caused by natural forces can have a major impact on civilians because injuries are often visible and tangible, which, in turn, causes the question to be prioritized by decision makers (Williams 2008). This means that discussing natural disasters might be difficult because we cannot stop them from happening. However, sometimes the physical destruction following natural disasters makes them symbolic and easier to grasp. Natural disasters are sometimes discussed as more value-free than man-made disasters since these events are "blind to politics" (Keshishian 1997, 332), and not limited to a specific ethnic group or political orientation. This notion is supported by research on how the media cover natural disasters. In this respect, the pattern seems to indicate that the media arena adopt similar standards in the evaluation of natural disasters and their news value (Yan & Bissell 2015, 17). This means that it is the events itself and the effects on society that determine whether a natural disaster ends up in a news story. Another way of categorizing focusing events is to separate the different policy domains where focusing events occur (Birkland 1997, 148–150; 2006, 27). However, since I am interested in looking beyond the policy agenda, identifying broader societal and political processes, I choose to define events according to their origin, since the handling of these events (man-made versus nature) might differ. In conclusion, the origin of focusing events can be understood as follows (Figure 3):

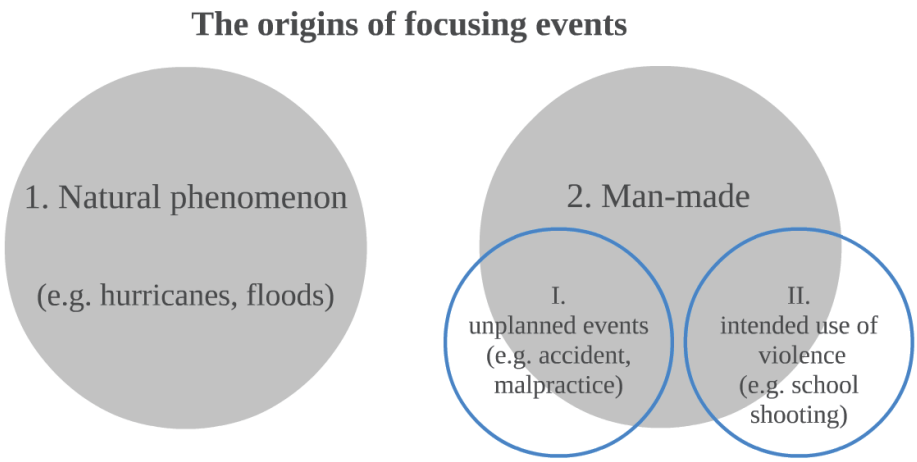


**Figure 3**. The different origins of focusing events.

The second important division between different kinds of focusing events is the magnitude of events. Discussing the magnitude of an event is important when thinking about the politicization of focusing events, i.e. the higher the magnitude, the higher the political stakes. The degree of severity of an event and the deviance it has from normal politics are important when determining which international and national disasters gain publicity (Yan & Bissell 2015, 17). For policymakers, it is important to "control the political stakes, to keep the events from crossing the thresholds to increasingly problematic political levels" (Olson 2008, 157), thus, avoiding an overload of the political system. Through Birkland's definition of a potential focusing event, we know that the degree of focus is not a dichotomous variable, but a floating index of events with the possibility of becoming mega focusing, or fading away with no political impression. Alexandrova (2015) makes an important contribution to the discussion of the determinants of attention to focusing events on the formal political agenda, and finds that both exogenous and endogenous factors are important, as with man-made events where many lives are lost or events occurring locally. However, she points out that further research is needed to locate the successful ingredients of potential focusing events to become "effective focusing events". In

particular, research should "concentrate on developing a more fine-grained measure of magnitude" (Alexandrova 2015, 23).

"The squeaky wheel gets the grease" is an American saying, which can easily be applied to focusing events and the following societal processes. What matters is to be heard and seen. Foremost, a focusing event must receive attention on different societal arenas. Secondly, a massive amount of attention increases the likelihood of demands saying that something must be done. The magnitude of an event can be discussed according to the response requirements (e.g. Birkland 2006; Quarantelli 1987). For example, an accident can be seen as only requiring the activation of established response organizations, while an emergency expands to the necessity of latent response organizations. Likewise, a disaster can be when expanded organizations such as search and rescue are included, while a catastrophe is when we experience the introduction of entirely new organizations. Using different words representing the magnitude of an event is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, we encounter a semantic problem. Birkland, for example, uses three different words representing the degree of focus: crisis, disaster and catastrophe, while in other languages, e.g. Swedish, the translation of the words disaster and catastrophe is the same. Secondly, Birkland gives no clear answer to the operationalization of the catastrophe concept, only that it is "more profound than disasters" (2006, 3). Another way to define the magnitude of an event is by the number of deceased (Oh & Oetzel 2011, 666), or by a combination of death tolls and economic losses (Yan & Bissell 2015, 5). Events become more powerful when the number of deceased increases (Alexandrova 2015). This becomes a problem, in a Nordic context, since many natural disasters have few, if any, deaths, in comparison to natural disasters on a global scale that might include hundreds or thousands of deaths. Another example is how the Jokela High School shooting in Finland resulted in the deaths of nine people, a death toll that is very small in a global comparison – albeit the school shooting is still a strong focusing event in a Finnish context. Therefore, one of the important theoretical discussions in this dissertation is how to define the magnitude of a focusing event. This is done by identifying characteristics found through previous research, combining them and creating an empirical instrument that measures the magnitude of a focusing event.

The first step in defining the magnitude is to look at the characteristics that are necessary for distinguishing between events that are focusing or not. According to the definition of a focusing event applied in this dissertation, three variables are needed for the existence of a focusing event: rarity, suddenness and negativity for many people (e.g. Alexandrova 2015; Birkland 1997; 2006). Beyond these necessary variables, I now introduce two more variables to further intensify the magnitude; geographical and cultural proximity (e.g. Alexandrova 2015; Birkland 1997; 2006; Nohrstedt & Weible 2010; Worrall 1999). Hence, I suggest that the magnitude of focusing events can be discussed according to a variation in the three necessary variables plus two intensifying variables. Starting from the definition of the focusing event, I have already presented the three characteristics; however, I will now briefly discuss their relationship to the magnitude of an event. If an event is sudden and surprising, and reaches the awareness of policymakers and citizens at the same time, the degree of focus increases. As pointed out earlier, events that are sudden and severe may reach an agenda rapidly and are more likely to remain there until solved (Cobb & Elder 1972). Likewise, if an event is rare and somehow distinguishes itself from the constant flow of information, then the event gains more attention, which increases the magnitude. The occurrence of a disaster or catastrophe is one of the most obvious indicators that an event will receive coverage on the media agenda (Johansson 2004). When discussing natural disasters, events are always rare in the sense that they do not occur on a daily basis. However, it can also be presumed that such events can occur almost every year. To explain this seeming paradox it is worth noting that, although the odds of certain types of natural disasters occurring on a specific geographical location vary across the continents and countries, it is still virtually impossible to predict when and where an event will take place, as well as the specific magnitude (Hyndman & Hyndman 2014, 5). Moreover, the same thing can be anticipated for man-made disasters, albeit we might not have as good an eye for what kind of disaster we will face. Nevertheless, it is possible to predict that there will be accidents or the intended use of violence. If we revisit the thoughts of Birkland, presented at the start of this chapter, it is possible to realize that, although we face new focusing events as well as common events under uncommon circumstances, we seldom encounter totally new focusing events. Thus, the discussion of rarity is based on the notion that these

events will happen eventually, or as Holt (1878) puts it, "it is found that anything that can go wrong at sea generally does go wrong sooner or later, so it is not to be wondered that owners prefer the safe to the scientific". The third criterion, that an event is negative for a large amount of people, affects the magnitude in two ways. Firstly, the larger the amount of people affected by the event, the greater is the pressure to do something (Alexandrova 2015), especially if there is violence or death involved (Worrall 1999). Secondly, a negative event has a higher news value (Galtung & Ruge 1965; Maguire et al. 2002). When all these three necessary variables are taken into account, the result is an event that is likely to generate attention on different societal arenas. A high score on all three variables increases the magnitude, thus making the event harder for decision makers to ignore.

When the three necessary variables are present, and we are indeed dealing with a focusing event, there are certain other aspects still to consider that might affect the magnitude of the event. If citizens and decision makers can identify, culturally or geographically, with the problems and issues brought forward by the event, the degree of focus increases (Nohrstedt & Weible 2010). In other words, we are more affected by the event when there is the feeling that this is something that could happen to my loved ones or me. An emotional response may, for instance, cause citizens to learn more about a particular issue, demand policy change or perhaps distance themselves from the problem (e.g. Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Graber 2007, 265). Moreover, if an event takes place in the immediate proximity, the society experience a feeling that crucial societal values are threatened, or economic interests of location and trade are affected (Alexandrova 2015, 22). Not surprisingly, studies have found a negative correlation between geographic distance and the amount of media coverage (Wu 1998). However, recent studies point to a disappearing role of geographical proximity, as more objective news standards are adopted in the coverage of natural disasters (Yan & Bissell 2015). One reason for the diminishing importance of geographic space is the removal of physical barriers in global communication (Yan & Bissell 2015, 19). Although neighborhood geographical location appears to have an effect on the magnitude (Alexandrova 2015, 22), this is more so concerning man-made events. For example, man-made intentional acts of violence in a neighboring country can motivate a political response, since there is a threat that the conflicts can be

transferred. Although geographical proximity is easily understood, cultural proximity, on the other hand, can be more difficult to comprehend. Nevertheless, regarding cultural proximity, a common language, socio-cultural and historical proximity have been shown to be important determinants of the relevance of an event (Volkmer 2008). As such, when the importance of an event is manifested through either geographical or cultural attributes, the magnitude grows.

## 2.5 General research questions

The theoretical discussion on focusing events places emphasis on two aspects of crisis and disaster. Firstly, events differ in origin; while some events are created by natural phenomena, others originate from human actions. As discussed earlier, this division can potentially affect the framing and blame attribution of the event, as well as the discussion concerning possible solutions. Secondly, as the magnitude of such events differs, this dissertation distinguishes between events with a stronger versus weaker degree of focus. It achieves this by adopting the empirical tool developed in the previous section. A stronger degree of focus is connected to more attention being given to the issue, which has possible political implications in the handling of the event. The differences between focusing events are emphasized in the two main research questions:

1. How does the magnitude of focusing events affect societal processes?

2. How does the origin of focusing events affect societal processes?

When studying the effects of focusing events on societal processes, two research areas can be identified. On the one hand, there is the initial, often unconscious, response among citizens in the form of emotions (Soroka 2014). Focusing events are nearly always negative, which triggers an initial biological response in the brain, in the form of affection. People might experience anger, fear, sadness or hope – feelings that are relevant for motivating, directing, as well as prioritizing (Neuman

et al. 2007, 12–15). After the initial response, we talk, discuss, evaluate, make predictions and try to find solutions. This is done through the use of a complex interaction of emotions and cognitive abilities. There is a broad consensus in the areas of psychology concerning the importance of emotions for our social and mental life (Oatley 1999, xviii), and this notion is finally reaching the field of political science with the study of affective intelligence (e.g. Altheide 2002; Brader & Valentino 2007; Marcus et al 2000; Marcus et al. 2011; Neuman et al. 2007). Emotions relate to our personal state in the form of goals and concerns, and to our interaction with the world through events, people or things. Moreover, emotions have an effect on memory, reasoning and attention (Oatley 1999, xviii). Connected to our emotions is cognition, which stimulates the capacity for deliberation, an important aspect of political processes (Neuman et al. 2007, 15). When studying how focusing events *affect* political processes, it is therefore profitable to include both an emotional and a cognitive dimension. Thus, this dissertation emphasizes the importance of including affective analysis units, since previous research has focused mainly on the cognitive aspects of political processes. Nevertheless, the initial response in our body is an emotional one, and in crisis situations, the media and political leaders use emotional attributes to encourage or downplay the framing of an event. Hence, a fearful event brings other policy solutions than an event emphasizing pride and hope. This means that in order to study the effects of focusing events on the political processes, we need to look at two aspects: 1) the emotional reactions and 2) the cognitive reactions.

# II. DEFINING THE CONTEXT

# 3. When the levee breaks – Focusing events on societal arenas

This chapter focuses on defining the important concepts in the research questions. Specifically, the chapter will focus on how political processes are expressed in different arenas, what a political issue is, and how agenda setting works. The theoretical starting points define the three scenes where politics are played out: the citizen arena, the media arena and the political arena. The concluding section of this chapter will bring together the insights regarding how focusing events are expected to affect different domains in a society.

## 3.1 On the premise for societal processes

What is politics and how is it expressed and shaped in different societal arenas? A formulation that still stands today even though it was coined back in 1936 is: "who gets what, when, how", together with: "who says what, in which channel, to whom, and with what effect?" (Lasswell 1936). What a political issue is can be defined by the surrounding society. In other words, political processes exist within a society, and are affected by the surroundings and different systems. The concept of a society can be understood as all the interactions between individuals, as well as systems to combine the activities (Lundquist 1971, 14). Thus, we often speak of a political system, consisting of political activities, an economic system, or a cultural system. When talking about the political process where political decisions are made, firstly, there is a contextualization of the problem. This is followed by alternative solutions, and in the end, an implementation of a chosen policy (Sabatier 2007, 3). We can revisit Easton's model of the political system, or "those interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society" (Easton 1965, 21). The starting point for the understanding of politics, according to this model, is that the citizens

have to consider that both the government and the policy decisions made are legitimate – resulting in a constant interaction between the different parts of the surrounding society. Mainly, a political system is a process where citizens' demands and support for a certain kind of value allocation lead to political decisions (Easton 1965, 17). For a system to survive, it is important that flexibility in the occurrence of disturbances is permitted. In this respect, inputs from the surrounding society are filtered by gatekeepers, i.e. those who decide which issues should reach the media agenda, while outputs are the resource allocations or policies implemented. Easton's model includes a feedback loop from society with information about how the civic arena perceives the system (*ibid.*, 26–32). According to this model, a major demand overload might be the result of an excessive volume stress or content stress. Focusing events are interesting because they simultaneously cause both types of stress. Crises and disasters cause physical harm as well as social disruption (Kreps 1989, 219). Moreover, they cause a huge amount of demands while making it hard for the system to respond (Olson 2008, 156).

Undoubtedly, the transfer of inputs and outputs in an ideal process works smoothly. Nevertheless, during a normal process, the interest articulation is done by groups and individuals situated between the citizen and the policy makers (Lundquist 1971, 15–18). Although demands or support gain a more profound form through the works of interest groups, political parties or the media, this process might still be influenced by power structures or affected by the actors' own interests. As Lundquist (1971, 13–14) points out, it is important to be aware of actors' power distributions as well as social, cultural and physical patterns. One of the important conclusions is therefore that a political system is dependent on its surroundings and is embedded in the society. Hence, studying a political process separated from the rest of the societal context is problematic (*ibid.*, 13–25). The same thought can be applied to focusing events, i.e. if we only study the political processes on the formal political arena, we might miss important connections to the way the media contextualized either the event itself or the demands presented by the citizens.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the importance of emotions, especially negative attention, as a driver for individual information processing, political

behavior and policy making (Maor 2014; Soroka 2014). Although studies show that citizens are drawn to negative information, and political institutions are designed to favor negative information (Soroka 2014), previous research has mainly focused on institutional or cognitive factors. The model of agenda setting becomes even more vital if we consider that citizens favor negative information, and that negative feelings affect the evaluation of leaders. In this light, it is worth remembering that the media is designed to serve as a watchdog, looking for someone to blame. Furthermore, policy making and discussions about solutions to problems are a mixture of the framing, blame attributions, and emotions used to contextualize the event. Some researchers now claim that we are experiencing a revolution when it comes to decision making and the influence of emotions (Kahneman 2011; Mauer 2014, 3). Hence, we are not only looking at real-world indicators affecting the political processes; we are also looking at a strong societal appetite for all that is negative.

Initially, there is a distinction between focusing events and non-focusing events in a societal context. For example, the distinction between normal day-to-day media coverage and disaster news is that the latter is embedded with emotion (Pantti 2010, 222). Both global and national news coverage on focusing events can have a strong emotional effect on a huge amount of people (Scherer 2001, 136). Mega disasters (like the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident), terrorist attacks (like 9/11), or natural disasters (like Hurricane Katrina), are typical examples of focusing events discussed and studied in the literature of crisis and disaster research (e.g. Birkland 2004; Gomez & Wilson 2008; Lawrence & Birkland 2004; Malhotra & Kuo 2008; Wittneben 2012). At the same time, there are examples of how events with a much weaker magnitude can be the starting point for a political discussion and raise issue attention on the parliamentary arena. For instance, in the late 1980s, dead seals started drifting onto shores in Sweden, sparking an environmental debate that exploded on the media agenda and created an opportunity for the Green Party to enter the Parliament (Strömbäck 2000, 158). On a global scene, the environmental movement, as well as the civil rights movement, has often grown in importance whenever a particular crisis or disaster has highlighted certain problems in society – creating a mobilization that

is punctuated by "sharp, sudden events" (Birkland 1997, 2). In order to understand why focusing events are important in society, we must first comprehend how issues gain access to the civic, the media and the formal political arena. As will be discussed later in this chapter, focusing events are important to everyone from your next-door neighbor to the political leaders of a country. Hence, it is of interest to discuss the societal processes following such events.

### 3.1.1 On the concepts of arenas, agendas and salient issues

The occurrence of a focusing event draws attention to specific issues or problems. During this process, a struggle often develops between different perspectives on how to understand the reality of the situation at hand (Lawrence 2001). There are different *arenas* in a society where the understanding of problems, issues and events is constructed. One example of this is the media discussion on gun legislation following a school shooting. In this case, the media arena becomes the scene where the debate is taking place. A fundamental definition of an arena is that we are dealing with "a scene of action, a field where events take place, or a sphere of intense social activity" (Hjerpe & Linnér 2006, 9). On the one hand, an arena is the venue where the interactions between citizens, actors, organizations, or institutions take place, and on the other hand, the concept of an arena can be understood as the interaction itself (*ibid*.).

The concept of *agendas* is of vital importance in today's political sphere. However, it was not until the late 19th century and an increase in legislative work in Europe and America that agendas were emphasized in social sciences (Riker 1993, 1). The complexity of today's political processes makes agenda formation a significant part of politics. An agenda can be understood as "a general set of political controversies that will be viewed at any point in time as falling within the range of legitimate concerns meriting the attention of the polity" (Cobb & Elder 1972, 14). Although the number of issues that are important and interesting to different actors in a society is huge, not all issues can be dealt with at the same time. At any given moment, there are always issues that are more salient than others – and determining which issues are important at a given moment is the result of a dynamic interaction (Dearing & Rogers 1996, 2).

Hence, issues rise and fall in importance on agendas. One reason for this is simple, as humans, we cannot pay attention to all issues and problems at once (Princen 2009, 20). The limitation derives from factors like time, energy, knowledge and attention – and the result is the construction of agendas. Simply put, an agenda consists of the issues that are deemed important over a given period of time. However, as pointed out by Hinnfors (1995), there is width and variation in the definitions of the concept of an agenda that might be problematic. Specifically, when discussing a specific agenda, questions arise as to what, whom, when and where. Hence, Hinnfors (1995, 79) argues that it is important when defining an agenda to include answers to these questions: what – statements about specific issues that should be the subject of society's value allocation; whom – by specific actors; where – on specific arenas; and when – at certain moments in time during the allocation.

In social science, there is a main classification of three types of societal agendas – a formal political agenda, a media agenda, and a general public agenda, understood as the agenda on the civic arena (Princen 2009, 21). For instance, the civic agenda concerns issues that citizens consider to be of importance to themselves (intrapersonal agenda) and discuss with each other (interpersonal agenda), together with important social issues (Strömbäck 2009, 104). The media agenda pertains to the questions that the media collectively pay a lot of attention to. Moreover, the formal political agenda is divided into an institutional agenda and a system agenda. The institutional agenda consists of the specific issues that are salient at that moment, while the system agenda is more abstract and includes all the issues in the political sphere deemed important by the citizens as well as for the maintenance of the government's legitimacy (Cobb & Elder 1972, 14). A further development of the formal political agenda is discussed by Kingdon (2003), who specifies the institutional agenda as a governmental agenda containing the issues that officials are paying attention to, and the decision agenda, consisting of issues that are moving into position. Moreover, Olson (2008, 160) includes an agency-level implementation agenda.

"Just what is a political issue is itself a political issue" (Riker 1993, 3). On the one hand, a political issue can be understood as a reflection of the objective problems that exist in a society; these are issues that extend over a long period of time. On the

other hand, there are issues brought forward by interest groups or lobbyists – actors are working hard for a specific issue to gain salience. At other times, it is the occurrence of a disaster, for example, or an economic crisis that highlights certain problems (*ibid*., 5). Political issues are often bisectional, representing some kind of conflict between different viewpoints in addition to a struggle concerning power and resource allocation (Dearing & Rogers 1996, 2). Even if an issue is unilateral, as for instance with environmental issues where there is no clear pro or con division, there might be actors working for a decrease in attention on different agendas, instead of raising a clear voice against the issue. Nevertheless, exposure and attention on the media agenda is connected to the legitimization of the problem by the general public (*ibid*.). Moreover, there is a difference between events and issues (e.g. Shaw & McCombs 1977, 7; Soroka 2002, 5–6). Events are always bound to one moment in time, whereas issues are part of a cumulative debate. A focusing event, such as a school shooting, might be discussed in terms of gun legislation. However, the issue of gun legislation and the debate that follows may include many other events where guns are involved.

In this dissertation, the understanding of the concepts of arenas, agendas and issues are closely related, as discussed in the sections above. However, an agenda consists of issues that are prioritized during a specific moment in time (e.g. Cobb & Elder 1972; Dearing & Rogers 1996; Princen 2009). Furthermore, issues are defined as social problems, often including some kind of conflict or power struggle. Attention to an issue is an important part of legitimizing the issue and moving it up or down an agenda. Likewise, as Hinnfors (1995) points out, it is fruitful to define other aspects of an agenda, namely the "where" aspect. The places where the construction of the salient issues in the studies of this dissertation take place are the civic, media, or parliamentary arenas. The "who" part consists of the interactions between different actors, and the "when" aspect is defined more closely in the different studies, but often concerns the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

Agenda setting, or issue salience, can be understood as a constant interaction between the media agenda, the public agenda and the formal political agenda (Dearing & Rogers 1996, ix). Setting the agenda is part of a political process, where different

amounts of attention from the media, the public, and politicians are paid to certain issues. Hence, the process is not neutral, objective, or rational, but a struggle to define problems and ultimately create what are seen as possible solutions (Birkland 1997, 11). Advocates for different issues try to push some issues higher up on the agendas, while downplaying others. Agenda setting is therefore a question of the rise and fall of issues over time (Soroka 2002, 5). Naturally, the more attention an issue receives, the more likely it is to enter the formal political agenda (e.g. Smith 1996). A definition of agenda setting can thus be constructed as follows:

> Agenda setting is an on-going competition among issue proponents to gain the attention of the media, professionals, the public and policy elites. […] Agenda setting offers an explanation about why certain issues, and not other issues, are available to the public in a democracy; how public opinion is shaped, and why certain issues are addressed through policy actions. (Dearing & Rogers 1996, 1–2).

Nevertheless, in agenda setting research there is an immense use of dependent variables (e.g. Soroka 2002, 7). In public agenda setting literature, following the seminal work of Lippmann (1922) and Cohen (1963), and in communication and media research, the concept of agenda setting is discussed as a theory of the impact of the media agenda on the public agenda, concerning which issues are salient (first level of agenda setting). In addition, attribute agenda setting, or the salience of the attributes of objects of attention (second level of agenda setting), and a networked agenda setting (the third level of agenda setting), is furthermore identified (e.g. McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver 2014, 782). The concept of media agenda setting emphasizes how an audience adopts the issues that are seen as important depending on which issues are prioritized on the media arena. Protess and McCombs (1991, 2) explain the process as: "a relational concept specifying a positive connection between the emphasis of the news media and the perceived importance of these topics to the news audience." This does not imply that people blindly believe all that is said on TV or displayed on the internet – but that people "co-construct what they see, read, and hear from the media with information drawn from their own lives" (Dearing & Rogers 1996, 5). However, for an issue to reach the media agenda it has to be considered a

social problem. Sometimes spectacular events or tragedies affect the agenda setting on the media arena (Dearing & Rogers 1996, 29), as seen during the aftermath of a focusing event. Furthermore, citizens play an important part in legitimizing governmental actions. If citizens have faith in the political leaders, it helps provide the government with political capital to take action (e.g. Hetherington 1998), which is especially vital in the wake of a crisis. For instance, positive emotions of hope and pride in the aftermath of a crisis have a positive relationship to confidence in government, as well as support for policy measures (Gross, Brewer & Aday 2009, 120).

Another aspect of agenda setting is the theory of "agenda building" (Cobb & Elder 1972), explaining how the formal political agenda is influenced by the media and public opinion. The theory tries to explain how different issues reach the formal agenda and why there is a difference in the amount of attention given to certain specific problems while others are quickly forgotten. A conflict between two opposing groups or extensive media coverage can often make an issue reach the formal political discussion (*ibid.*). Sometimes, issues are discussed on many different political levels simultaneously, which might be the case especially when a focusing event occurs (Princen & Rhinard 2006). An example of this is how the subject of bioterrorism was discussed in Europe following an anthrax attack in the US in 2001. Since the event in question was a highly dramatic focusing event, the issue concerned both the top leaders of the EU, members of the European Parliament, and different regional political institutions, who all interacted and worked together (*ibid.*). Therefore, focusing events might initiate a new dynamic concerning how issues are treated on the formal political agenda.

All in all, we are dealing with a complex issue. When discussing how the three societal agendas create and are created in interaction with each other, we might even have to expand the model of agenda setting (Soroka 2002, 270). The three primary societal arenas are defined according to their agendas and the causal connections between them. The media agenda (news media, influential media, polling agenda and entertainment media), the public agenda (interest groups, influentials, family and friends) and the policy agenda (president, political parties, government, parliament, bureaucracy) all have arrows running in both directions, displaying a mutual influence in the expanded agenda setting model. However, no connection is visible

from the formal political agenda to the public agenda, since politicians are most likely to affect the citizens through the media or through real-world factors. Besides emphasizing the interaction, real-world indicators are important, an example being single-variable indicators such as the unemployment rate. These indicators are often seen as an index of how severe social problems are (Dearing & Rogers 1996, 18) and how they are affected by the formal political agenda. Moreover, such indicators are able to affect all three agendas. (Soroka 2002, 11)

## 3.2 Emotional rescue? – The civic arena

The concept of a general public can be seen as non-private actions taking place in the public domain, where everybody should have an opportunity to participate in political processes (Grossberg et al. 2006, 378). However, there is skepticism towards the public and citizens' engagement in politics in western democracies, expressed, for instance, through a low participation in elections (e.g. Cobb & Elder 1972; Grossberg et al 2006). Nevertheless, the understanding of the concept of the civic arena is evolving as society changes; some researchers see an opportunity for change as internet and social media provide new forms of political participation (*ibid*., 384). At the same time, political actors have adopted media logic and organizations such as Greenpeace arrange deliberately spectacular events (Jansson 2004, 380). Hence, the opportunities for citizens and organizations have blurred the boundaries between the media producers and the media audience (*ibid*., 381). The media arena is closely connected to the public since it is the media that provide a vast amount of the information, as well as a forum for debate. However, sometimes the media reporting on political news lacks a deeper understanding of how society works (Grossberg et al. 2006, 382).

Discussing a "public opinion" is a philosophical question concerning how democratically elected representatives should work for the people and follow the will of the people (Dye 1987, 325). Unsurprisingly, the answer to this question is different depending on where you start. When defining a public opinion, the opinion implies

subjectivism and cannot be considered a fact. Furthermore, public opinion is seen as a prevailing state, i.e. something that always exists (Strömbäck 2000, 93–95). However, there is no natural group that can be called a public opinion, rather "publics have to be created, they do not just arise" (Grossberg et al. 2006, 379). As such, although the discussion of a public opinion is seen as important for a democracy, a true and coherent public opinion seldom exists. Do politicians follow public opinion and translate it into policy change? Or is it instead the political actors who try to stir up public opinion (*ibid.*, 393)? For instance, when natural disasters occur, politicians choose to argue for a greener agenda (Bishop 2012, 17). According to the spiral of silence, humans are more prone to adapting their opinions to the surrounding climate; the willingness to express an opinion is easier when you share the views of the majority (Strömbäck 2000, 121). At the same time, an opinion that receives strong support from media coverage is often perceived as the majority opinion, even if this is not always the case. Public opinion can also be unstable and oscillate over a period of a few weeks (Dye 1987, 326), making it very difficult for policy makers to know what the public opinion actually is.

According to Abelson et al. (1982), emotions are important in determining political attitudes as well as in response to information (Kühne & Scheme 2015). People will often forget the content and detail of a news story, but their emotional reactions may be more permanent (Soroka 2014, 29). We remember what we did, how we felt, or what happened, after reading or hearing about a mega catastrophe. Hence, the emotional reactions as well as the cognitive ones are important for the information processing (e.g. Conover & Feldman 1986). Negative stories get citizens' attention, as well as keep the interest going. Indeed, "the negativity biases in politics and political communications are a product of biases in the ways in which humans react to positive and negative information" (Soroka 2014, 96). Concerning citizens' reactions to both negative and positive news stories, psychophysiological reactions show that people are more activated and show greater attentiveness when watching a negative story (Soroka 2014, 104). Intense media coverage of an oil spill with wildlife and nature soaking in oil, for example, can create a strong emotional response in people, which can result in a mobilization of the public (Bishop 2012). However, negative emotions are not the only emotions visible in the aftermath of a

crisis. Positive emotions of gratitude, interest or love can also emerge (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waughn & Larkin 2009), e.g. feelings of gratitude for someone's safety. In this light, positive emotions can broaden people's thoughts by strengthening intellectual resources. Hence, the ability to have positive thoughts is important for trait resilience (ibid.).

What kind of expectations do citizens have on politicians and social institutions in the wake of a focusing event? And moreover, are their demands always realistic? Perhaps it is the perception of how citizens believe politicians will or will not act that affects the citizens' actions in connection to a focusing event (Chamlee-Wright & Storr 2010, 254). Most citizens are aware of the threats, risks, crises or disasters that can affect a society, since the media often emphasize coverage of such issues (Boin & t' Hart 2003, 545). However, while citizens are aware of the focusing events taking place, they often have a rather simplistic approach to the complexity of today's crises and the idea that decision makers can protect us against all threats (*ibid.*). The expectations on politicians are connected to trust in the political system and institutions, which have declined due to demonstrations of mismanagement and incorrect policy decisions in the past (*ibid.*). Hence, there is a contradiction in the expectations following focusing events. On the one hand, there is the expectation that our leaders will make everyday life return to normal, while on the other hand, crises and disasters are sometimes portrayed as an opportunity for change and reform (Boin & t' Hart 2003, 545). Moreover, many crises today are complex due to societal modernization processes, i.e. the speed of information and communication as well as the rapid rates and distances that people travel.

### 3.2.1 Citizens' political power

A question worth consideration when contemplating the relationship between the three societal arenas and agendas concerns the influence citizens have over the media or political decision-making (Jansson 2004, 367–372). Although the articles or the programs one chooses to consume can be an ideological positioning, many of the choices we make are subconscious, or dependent on a high education correlating to a higher consumption of political news (*ibid.*). On the other hand, people chose content

they can identify with, and popular culture can be a social resistant against unattainable political ideals (*ibid*., 375). Therefore, the influence over the media agenda through consumption can be both passive and active. In previous studies of agenda setting, it is often assumed that the media influences public opinion by placing more attention to certain issues (e.g. McCombs & Shaw 1972; Dearing & Rogers 1996). However, could the relationship be reversed? Originally, the media's role in society has been to create good citizens. Today, however, the economic situation, as well as intense competition, has forced the media arena to focus on issues that the audience wants to read about (Uscinski 2009, 811).

The lack of empirical data concerning how the public agenda influences the media agenda is partly because the theory of agenda setting is not designed to control for this issue (Uscinski 2009, 797). Previous researchers have not been able to investigate the relationship from two angles simultaneously. Thus, we might have overestimated the power of the media agenda (*ibid*.). In other words, although the media covers events that are spectacular, such as focusing events, it also reports on events because they are relevant to citizens, which indicates that the public influences the media agenda (*ibid*., 798). Nevertheless, the media choose issues that will attract a large audience. Therefore, "the type of events that comprise issue arenas will determine why the issue is covered and what type of causal impact that issue will have" (Uscinski 2009, 811). Instead of discussing who influences whom, it is of more interest to analyze the coverage from the starting point of the nature of the event. Moreover, when discussing focusing events, the reality is that the event will most certainly receive extensive attention, as well as be considered important on the civic arena. The combination of issue salience on both arenas can advance demands for policy change and influence the formal political agenda.

Looking at the influence over the formal political agenda, citizens can influence decision making through different channels, such as elections, interest organizations, political parties, the media (Lundquist 1992, 221), or in rare cases through violence (Mitchell 1962, 281–284). Nevertheless, a political system with violence as the dominant way of expression will have troubles surviving. In the aftermath of a focusing event, citizens can use the various channels to influence politics; by voting in elections, providing feedback to politicians and organizations,

by taking part in protests, demonstrations or direct actions (Almond, Powell, Dalton & Strøm 2008, 62–63), or by using the media channel. The influence can be divided into a positive or a negative approach, where a positive approach means that politicians advocate certain issues because they know that many voters are interested in the issue, and a negative approach advocates demands from the public towards taking political actions (Kingdon 2003, 66). Thus, dissatisfaction amongst citizens can initiate an issue on the political agenda. However, citizens seldom have any power over what solutions and alternatives are discussed, rather, public opinion can merely help to initiate a discussion on the political agenda (*ibid*., 66). Furthermore, although citizens have the opportunity to initiate decision-making, there are some researchers that have a more skeptical view toward the power of the public (Dye 1987; Kingdon 2003), e.g., by emphasizing how it is mostly well-known politicians and experts who make up the issues, and people "come aboard" (Kingdon 2003, 67).

### 3.2.2 How problems reach our awareness

People rarely focus on one question for a very long time, even if the problem is a serious social issue. Most questions reach the agenda very suddenly; stay there for a short time, and fade away, even though the problem may remain unsolved. Moreover, this is true for both the public and the media agenda. The cycle of issue attention can be identified through five phases (Downs 1972):

1. *The pre-problem stage*. During the first phase, there are unfavorable social conditions, known to experts and interest groups, but not to the general public.
2. *Alarmed discovery* follows when one or several focusing events raise the public opinion and create anxiety and other emotions. The initial debate is often enthusiastic concerning how society should solve the problem(s).
3. *Realizing the cost of significant progress*, means that both policy makers and the public realize that solutions often imply a high price, sometimes in terms of financial input, but also in sacrifices for some groups in society.

4. *Gradual decline of intense public interest*. If solutions to the problem are viewed as expensive and difficult, the public might lose interest in the question by becoming discouraged, threatened or tired of the problem. At the same time, there is probably a new crisis gradually gaining more attention.

5. *The post problem stage* occurs when the issue no longer receives attention, but sporadic interest. The difference between the first and the last phase is that policy changes might have been created or set in motion. Once the problem has reached the public agenda, it is likely to capture the attention of the public, "therefore, problems that have gone through the cycle almost always receive a higher average level of attention, public effort, and general concern than those still in the pre-discovery stage" (Downs 1972, 39–41).

An important feature that makes issues likely to pass through the issue-attention cycle is sensationalism (*ibid.*). One example of this is that as long as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) were able to create exciting and spectacular events, such as men walking on the moon, the public support for NASA was strong. Nevertheless, as time went by and no new dramatic events occurred, the interest declined. Focusing events are important reminders of social problems. Yet, intense media coverage might cause the general public to become emotionally numb and tired of issues (*ibid.*, 41–43). The idea of the issue attention cycle relies on the same theoretical starting points as agenda setting. There are situations when news media strongly influence public opinion during the so-called "alarmed discovery" phase. For instance, during the 1990s, the fear of crime rose in Texas and polls showed an increase from two to fifteen percent of worried citizens, during one year. The real problem of crimes committed showed that a negative trend – fewer crimes were taking place. However, an increased reporting of crime-related news in the major newspapers affected the public opinion (McCombs 2004, 22–29).

### 3.2.3 Mobilization of citizens in the wake of focusing events

Mobilization of groups is often seen as a necessity for issues to receive greater attention on different agendas, especially when focusing events occur (Birkland 1997; Goss 2001). The situation during a crisis or disaster creates opportunities for groups that usually do not get as much attention on the mainstream agenda to bring forward their messages (Birkland 1998, 54). However, this also means that groups can use focusing events to draw attention to their own purposes and agendas.

In the theory of focusing events, the importance of mobilization was initially highlighted. However, the question to now consider is whether mobilization is always necessary for the success of focusing events on the formal political agenda. Originally, Birkland (1997) pointed out that mobilization was an important part of event-related policy learning and policy change. Conversely, when studying different disaster domains, such as airplane accidents, hurricanes and earthquakes, he found that mobilization does not always take place (Birkland 2006). This holds true especially in domains where citizens are not as involved, for instance hurricane mitigation, where expert opinions are needed. Instead, citizens become involved during oil spills, or nuclear accidents that cause widespread public resistance (*ibid.*). The starting point is that the more attention an event gets, the more opportunities there are to influence political processes. Hence, group mobilization can be an excellent advance for policy change. However, when discussing natural disasters, it is not always obvious how these events are connected to citizens' political decision making. The problem is that "there are few conditions under which reasonable people can actually believe that the government was responsible for a flood, an earthquake, or a tornado" (Arceneaux & Stein 2006, 43). Citizens might choose to attribute responsibility, especially on a local level, if the government is not doing enough after a disaster or not providing protection (*ibid.*, 44).

When Birkland (1997; 2006) discusses group mobilization in connection to focusing events and political learning, the main emphasis is on the formal political arena. Group mobilization is seen namely as various proposals by interest groups on how to solve a problem. However, many disaster policy domains require expert knowledge, which citizen groups might not have. If group mobilization is seen on a more general level, for example on the civic arena, citizens write letters to the editor,

sign petitions, or engage in different groups. A more broad form of mobilization was present after the first large school shooting in Jokela, Finland, where journalists and the media arena received major criticism for the coverage of the crisis. The criticism in the form of a petition was aimed at pictures and videos showing too much information, and journalists pressing shocked adolescents for information. Two newspapers were found guilty by the Council for Mass Media in Finland. This decision influenced the coverage following the school shooting in Kauhajoki a year later, which was much more cautious (Raittila, Haara, Kangasluoma, Koljonen, Kumpu & Väliverronen 2009; Raittila, Johansson, Juntunen, Kangasluoma, Koljonen, Kumpu, Prenu & Väliverronen 2008).

As a summary, it is somewhat difficult to know what the public opinion on the civic arena is. Is there a general opinion amongst citizens? Or is the public opinion merely influenced by the media or elite opinions? Issues move up and down the agenda in cyclical movements (Downs 1972), and especially when dramatic and unexpected events occur, the emotional impact causes citizens to react and be aware of problems. It can be difficult to find solutions to problems because of high economical costs, or new problems wanting attention (Downs 1972). At the same time, citizens' expectations of decision makers in times of crises might be too high (e.g. Boin & t' Hart 2003). The emotional framing of an event can be an important contributor to how citizens evaluate leaders and whether policy solutions are viewed as legitimate.

The media agenda has a strong influence on the citizens' agenda, or more specifically, which issues are perceived as important (e.g. McCombs & Shaw 1972; Uscinski 2009). Hence, the combination of issues gaining attention on both the media agenda and the public agenda should, according to democratic foundations, result in attention on the formal political agenda. Politicians need to address issues and demands in order to avoid a crisis of confidence.

## 3.3 Paint it black? – The media arena

> *Making* is the primary activity of media: making money, making everyday life, making meaning, making identities, making reality, making behaviour, making history. And it is in these various activities of making the media themselves are made. (Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney & Wise 2006, 7)

A fundamental aspect of politics is how to legitimize and enforce decisions. The media arena plays an important part in this activity, especially when it comes to building images and selling policies (Louw 2010, 8–15). In this light, the media arena is a central starting point when a focusing event occurs, since these events have a high news value and will gain publicity and attention. Media attention is of particular importance, since a comprehensive reporting can be linked to increased attention on the parliamentary arena and among citizens (e.g. Smith 1996). This chapter discusses the media's role in society and the media's influence over the public agenda and the political agenda according to theories of agenda setting, framing and priming. Furthermore, media logic and news values are discussed with concluding remarks on how focusing events are perceived on the media arena, and what effects they generate.

### 3.3.1 Defining the media arena

The Latin word "medium" means an intervening agency or instrument for publishing (Nieminen & Pantti 2009, 14). On the one hand, the concept is used for individual media companies or platforms, while on the other hand, it represents an umbrella term for mass communication, including everything from production and distribution to interpretation. Hence, the concept of media includes the press, radio, television, internet and social media, as well as photographs, films, audio and video recordings (*ibid.*). Media has a technical ability to convey information, which includes social and cultural patterns of how we use media, even though new technology forms offer new ways to communicate (Berglez & Olausson 2009, 10). This means that the definition of media is becoming increasingly fluid and elusive as a result of technological developments. In this dissertation, the use of the concept pertaining to

media and media arena is two-fold. Firstly, media represents the technical aspect of conveying information through communication. Secondly, this communication occurs in an interaction with the rest of society. As such, although the media affects the public cognitively, the media is also affected by social and cultural patterns in the system, and by different actors.

As a society, we need information and different opinions. Therefore, the media exists to make us aware of risks and dangers and entertain us – all in all, we live in a mediatized world since most of our knowledge and understanding is based on what is in the media (Nieminen & Pantti 2009, 15–16; Louw 2010, 194). Media actors are especially powerful when deciding what information is given to the public, as well as which issues reach the agenda (*ibid.*). Consequently, the use of the concept mediatization is widespread, and the definitions are numerous (see e.g. Hjarvard 2008). A comprehensive definition that summarizes the arguments presented in this chapter is provided by Hjarvard (2008, 113):

> By the mediatization of society, we understand the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic. This process is characterized by a duality in that the media have become *integrated* into the operations of other social institutions, while they also have acquired the status of social *institutions in their own right*.

Society is permeated by communication processes taking place at different levels in the political system and in all forms of politics (Strömbäck 2000, 31–34). As such, communication can be understood as a transfer of content using some kind of means; there are several theories attempting to explain communication on the media arena (*ibid.*, 34). An early departure was the notion that communication is transmitting a message from one person to another or from one place to another (Grossberg et al. 2006, 17). As an example, the media coverage following the school shooting at Columbine High School could be interpreted as follows:

"who says" – Marilyn Manson or violent video games

"what" – the songs or the video games

"through what channel" – music or computer games

"to whom" – the impressionable youth
"with what effect" – the murder of 13 people and two dead offenders

Another important aspect affecting communication is the result of sharing a common culture (Strömbäck 2000, 39). People are constantly trying to give meaning to their experiences and the cultural model sees "communication as the construction of a shared space or map of meaning within which people coexist" (Grossberg et al. 2006, 22). This notion has common points of reference with agenda setting theory; whereas the media does not tell us what to think about a certain issue, it gives the issue salience in our mind. Likewise, recipients are not merely at the mercy of the media, but are active in the construction of an understanding of the message (*ibid.*). Lastly, communication can be commercial or directed at a certain issue or be produced to gain attention for certain causes (*ibid.*, 39).

Clearly, the media arena faces a variety of constraints and challenges. It is impossible to report on everything that happens in a society. Instead, media actors pinpoint what they consider to be of greatest importance in the information surplus. A second challenge is a deficit of attention amongst the public, resulting in a constant competition for the audience and their attention (Nord & Strömbäck 2004, 15). The world is experiencing hostility between different cultures and different ethnic groups, an increase in focusing events, and a crisis in trust and confidence in decision makers (Nieminen & Pantti 2009, 11). Research shows that our bodies respond more attentively to negative events than positive events; one explanation for this is that evolution favors this kind of behavior since our attention systems need to prefer signs of danger (Soroka 2014, 8–9). It is also well documented that the media prefer a negative viewpoint and negative events (Soroka 2014, 72). The negativity bias can be measured according to real-world indicators. Yet, even when the negativity is measured and compared between different domains and countries, the same patterns emerge: "there is roughly twice as much negative information in news content as there is in reality" (Soroka 2014, 95).

The media arena is often *the* source of information that people use to gain knowledge about society and politics; a fact that applies to citizens as well as to journalists and politicians (Nord & Strömbäck 2004, 14). This notion means that political actors reach out to citizens through the media; i.e. politics is played out in and through the information flow on the media arena (Wheeler 1997, 1). Hence, the media can be seen as one of the institutions in society; an important communicator between the state and the rest of society, influencing the public's perception of the world (Drotner, Bruhn Jensen, Poulsen & Schrøder 1996, 348; Strömbäck 2001, 35; Wheeler 1997, 2), while blurring the line between political institutions and the media arena (Strömbäck 2001, 37).

> To try to isolate the media from other parts of lives – as if we could talk about media *and* politics, media *and* culture, media *and* society, media *and* economics, or media *and* audiences – even for the purpose of study is an oversimplification. For the media are already implicated in these other realms: The media are already involved in making them what they are, even as these other realms are involved in shaping the media. (Grossberg et al. 2006, 7)

The term "media making" (Grossberg et al. 2006) can be understood as the media producing information, while simultaneously being affected by societal influences. Comparable to Easton's (1965) view of the political system – it is not possible to study the media as being separate from the rest of society, since the media is influenced by social, economic, political, cultural, and historical conditions (Grossberg et al. 2006, 7).

Three tasks are often attributed to the media. Firstly, the media arena is an accommodator of information. Secondly, the media arena is about monitoring the social life, and thirdly, the media arena provides a forum for open debate and opinion formation (Nord & Strömbäck 2004, 11). This means that the media produces a dialogue between policy makers and citizens, which is important for the formulation of opinions (Nieminen & Pantti 2009, 26–27). Hence, the media arena has two overall roles – the first is to provide information to participants in society, and the second is to monitor those in powerful positions – to be a watchdog for democracy (*ibid.*, 25).

In light of the above, questions are inevitably raised concerning how society can ensure that its citizens have equal opportunities to participate in public debates, or that the information provided is versatile enough. Many western democracies today have applied a neoliberal approach, whereby the media market should be free from societal influence (Harvey 2002), which can be difficult to combine with the media's role in society (Nieminen & Pantti 2009, 13).

### 3.3.2 Why are focusing events important in the media?

As established, there are huge amounts of events taking place every day, which means that the media have to be selective concerning what to cover. Hence, there are certain characteristics that generate wide publicity. The media tend to increase their reporting when an event is violent, unusual and dramatic (Johansson 2004, 225; Maguire et al. 2002). Hence, negativity is important since accidents, disasters or terrorism involving injuries and fatalities will increase the news value. Moreover, negative issues or conflicts are also easier to absorb (Galtung & Ruge 1965, 69; Johansson 2004, 226). Although crises and disasters occur frequently, they are still anomalies, and therefore newsworthy. However, it is important that the issue is relevant to the audience. Meaningfulness, both as a geographic and cultural proximity, increases identification as well as *clarity* and coherence with prevailing norms. In other words, the story must be representative to the audience. Moreover, events relating to a large number of people obviously receive a great deal of media coverage (*ibid*., 228;); visible damage also works well in the media arena (Birkland 1997, 33–34).

Another type of unexpected event covers situations created by different actors; e.g. groups performing actions they want the media to report on (*ibid.*), terrorist attacks or school shootings. Therefore, there is a division between news originating through accidents and disasters and news created by actors with a specific purpose. Consequently, it is no surprise that studies show that any increase in media coverage is proportional to the amount and time an issue stays on the agenda when the magnitude of an event is greater (Yan & Bissell 2015, 12). However, due to limitations in terms of attention and space, most of the media resources are often monopolized by only a few big events, leaving only a fraction of remaining space available for the

majority of other events (*ibid*., 17). For example, the Indian Ocean tsunami received abnormal coverage, taking into account that Indonesia is often hit hard by natural disasters. One explanation for this is that many Westerners were affected by the disaster.

When focusing events occur, the media face several dilemmas. Firstly, there is a conflict between the media's two main tasks: to inform and to review (Nohrstedt 1999). On one hand, the media is expected to act as an information channel, which is of the utmost importance during emergency situations. On the other hand, the role of the media (as the fourth estate) means that the media should critically and independently review the state, which can do more harm than good during the emergency phase. The second dilemma is quick versus accurate information (*ibid*.). In worst-case scenarios, if the information is reviewed carefully, the time for action can be too late. A third dilemma is newsworthiness versus evaluation (*ibid*.). During a disaster, the acute phase receives the most attention, while the recovery phase and evaluation of solutions is uninteresting, since new newsworthy events have already taken place. Hence, sometimes a careful evaluation of disaster preparation and management is lacking in the media coverage (Nohrstedt 1999).

### 3.3.3 The media's power position

How do the media respond when a disaster strikes? There is a distinction between those who portray the media as "naive lambs" that believe anything, and others who see the media as "lions" wanting to create opinion (Boin et al 2005, 75). Are the media merely "responding to their surrounding environment" (McCombs 2004, 21)? Or, are the pictures in our head simply a pseudo reality (Lippmann 1922)? Since it is impossible to capture and report on everything that happens, journalists and media agents use various techniques to decide on what is important when it comes to providing us with a limited view of a multifaceted reality. This means that the media has the power to choose which issues to pay attention to, together with the power over who gets to speak up (Berglez & Nohrstedt 2009, 25–26). Especially in the event of a disaster, actors normally not having great power can sometimes be given space in the media (Birkland 2005, 92).

Media policy can be defined as "the systematic attempt to foster certain types of media structure and behaviour" (Freedman 2008, 1), and the media arena is a battleground over both material advantages and ideological legitimation (*ibid.*, 3). One of the most important factors regarding the media and political processes is therefore the media's influence as an agenda setter, since there is a positive correlation between news coverage and institutional attention (Birkland 2005, 91). However, the media do not only highlight problems; as they are able to reach out to a broad audience, they can also increase the pressure on policy makers to deal with an issue. A side effect of the economic situation – news media have to make a profit – is that the media increasingly tends to report on dramatic events, such as murders, accidents and crimes (Birkland 2005, 92). This can be exemplified with Soroka's (2014) study, where a positive tone made newsstand sales drop by more than half, compared to using a negative tone. Negativity in news content is also dependent on consumer interest (*ibid.*, 99). Nevertheless, although the media are often very selective, three characteristics can always generate widespread media attention (Maguire, Weatherby & Mather 2002): violent events, unusual events, and high death tolls. The media's preference for dramatic and negative content has been shown in a large number of studies (for a review, see Soroka 2014, 19), and in different forms of media, print as well as television.

Still, there is no clear answer as to why the media – as well as all other aspects of politics – favor negative information. Perhaps the answer can be found in the fact that we are dealing with financial structures or journalist behavior and priorities, which might result in an increase in the use of a "problem frame" (Altheide 1997). This, in turn, may create certain expectations in the audience. Another explanation is a bias in the human brain; we are more interested in negative news. Or a design factor; the media's institutional function in the political system is to operate as a whistleblower and identify problems (Soroka 2014, 21). Moreover, media coverage regarding focusing events is influenced by political ideology, prevailing policy preferences and reporting styles and traditions (Boin et al. 2005, 75). Political factors, such as the proximity in time to elections or institutional factors, influence the agenda setting (Walgrave & Van Aelst 2006; Van Aelst, Brants, Van Praag, De Vreese, Nuytemans & Van Dalen 2008). The danger of media coverage focusing on negative news is that the

public's risk perception can be distorted. The more intensive and negative the coverage is, the more likely it is to result in some kind of public pressure (Birkland 2005, 93–94). Another problem is that a simplified or polarized picture of reality can distort the perception and undermine a deeper understanding of the problem (Birkland & Lawrence 2009, 1406). To conclude, while some researchers suggest that the media do not tell us that to think, but merely control which questions get agenda space (Birkland 2005, 94), other researchers point out that since the media represent the public's primary source of information about politics and politicians, the influence over the perception and attitudes is considerable (Strömbäck 2001, 185).

### 3.3.4 Setting the agenda

> For the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it. (Lippmann 1922, 11)

Agenda setting can be described as the media giving the audience clues on which issues are important right now. If the audience receives the message and incorporates it into their thoughts, the agenda setting is deemed successful (Wanta 1997, 1). The media arena is our window to the world, and influences our cognitive maps. Hence, public opinion is created not (only) by reality, but by the reality we perceive through the news. Namely, the media arena can be a servant of democratic institutions or exploit social disorganization (Lippmann 1922, 229). Firstly, politicians use the media to reach out to people, and secondly, the journalists produce the information – when taken together, citizens use this information to make political decisions (McCombs & Shaw 1972, 176). The more often a message is repeated, no matter what the forum or form is, the more powerful the message becomes and the significance of the issue rises (McCombs 2004, 8). This means that the news media is important in influencing the

public agenda; not in determining how people think, but what they think about (*ibid.*, 2). This should obviously be the case in reasonably open and democratic systems.

There are certain general characteristics regarding agenda setting (Dearing & Rogers 1996). One such characteristic is the fact that there are always certain issues having a more prominent role in the media at any given moment in time. However, this does not mean that different media actors emphasize exactly the same things about the issue (*ibid.*, 91). Another characteristic is the fact that the connection between real-world indicators – the variable that measures the severity of a particular social problem – and media coverage is often negative. One famous example is how the media reports on drug abuse increased, although actual drug abuse decreased (Iyengar 1994). More important than real-world indicators are powerful actors or triggering events (Dearing & Rogers 1996, 91–92). In addition, the placing of a news story on the front-page and the graphic design are important. Although some research shows that television and newspapers have different agenda setting effects (Walgrave & van Aelst 2006, 92–93), it is almost impossible to answer the question as to which form of media has the greatest influence on public opinion. In contrast, in disaster situations, the coverage of an event will be fairly equal in most media forums – which increases the agenda setting effect (Paletz 1998).

Agenda setting works because people have a need to understand and organize their environment, especially in unfamiliar situations or when facing a dilemma. We often turn to different media sources to find information, especially if the issue is relevant to us or contains uncertainty (McCombs 2004, 53). This is because the media construct various social problems when emphasizing specific aspects of reality (Birkland & Lawrence 2009). The theory of framing is derived from psychological studies (e.g. Iyengar & Kinder 1987), discussing how a certain frame highlights some aspects, while downplaying others. Although this construction is needed if we are to understand a diverse and complex world, there are usually several ways to explain a problem, how to resolve it and who to blame. The framing of a problem is the starting point in the search for solutions (Birkland 1997, 11). Sometimes the overrepresentation of dramatic events undermines a more long-term and holistic analysis of various phenomena. Political processes and decision making is about

framing issues in a certain way, which is especially visible when dealing with controversial issues (Birkland & Lawrence 2009, 1406). Framing is a problem if the media coverage distorts the public's perception of an event and discourages a deeper understanding of various problems (Muschert 2007, 65). The media arena and the political arena is a competition on which issues are considered important (Lawrence & Birkland 2004). Although both arenas pay attention to exceptional events, it is not clear that a problem will be defined in the same way on both arenas Foremost, it is not clear how much the two arenas influence each other; both arenas receive feedback from the other and follow each other. Secondly, the media arena is merely a stage for discourse, while the formal political discussion is followed by actions. Hence, the parliamentary discussion does not always deal with the problem formulation brought forward on the media agenda, since it cannot be realized by laws and directives. Therefore, the parliamentary debate is more often limited, and less outspoken than the medial discussion (*ibid*., 1194–1195). Moreover, the media arena is more concerned with the newsworthiness of events, rather than the public policy actions. The politicians perspective might be that the domains and areas hit most often by disasters require more actions than the few mega events that receive the most attention (e.g. Yan & Bissell 2015, 21).

Priming is another central theory concerned with the relationship between external stimuli, such as media content, and assessments made by people (Strömbäck 2000, 207). The theory highlights that prior knowledge and beliefs can influence the formation of opinion. Priming can be defined as the media paying more attention to certain issues and not to others, which helps to activate and emphasize some cognitive schemas over others (*ibid.*, 208). This means that the media influence the standards by which citizens judge politicians, public officials, and political parties (Iyengar & Kinder 1987, 63; Strömbäck 2000, 208). As the issues receiving the most attention in the media are those that citizens consider to be important, thus the political struggle over the media agenda is of importance (Strömbäck 2000, 208). An example of this is a political party emphasizing environmental issues; as long as the media mainly focuses on environmental policies, other issues play a minor role. Overall, citizens'

views of politics are based on thoughts that are convenient and close at hands (*ibid.*, 209).

### 3.3.5 The attention struggle

An agenda cannot usually contain more than five issues during the same period of time (McCombs 2004, 38). This limitation is due to limited resources in the public's perception – time wise, in terms of cognitive capacity and the result of a gigantic flow of information (Ghersetti 2004). The exception is the internet, with a theoretical possibility of an unlimited flow of information; however, the public's attention span has the same limit here (McCombs 2004, 50–51). Given the restrictions of the audience and the media arena, media content must capture the readers interest (Ghersetti 2004), as well as be profitable – resulting in the tabloidization of news (Nieminen & Pantti 2009, 21). A general trend, due to the commercialization of the media, is an increased focus on entertaining the audience, providing an oversimplified picture of the reality (*ibid*, 22–23).

In order to capture the audiences' attention, there are a number of journalistic approaches used by the media (Asp 1986; Hernes 1978; Nord & Strömbäck 2002, 34–35). Sharpening or aggravating an issue is important; otherwise there is a risk of the news story drowning in the information flow. Simplification is important since everyone should be able to understand the meaning of an article, even if the issue is complex. Polarization maintains the attention and evokes emotions, especially if the issue emphasizes a conflict. Intensification, concreteness, impersonation and stereotyping are other approaches used by the media to connect the audience to the story in the first place, and maintain the attention. Contrary to the more negative view on emotions in media coverage, research shows that emotions can facilitative citizens' information intake (Bas & Grabe 2015). Emotions are important in news stories for different reasons; firstly, because of sensationalism and the attentive aspect of emotions, as discussed above. Secondly, arousing and negative events are often associated with negative news, which has been shown to stimulate information seeking (Brader 2005), and memory consolidation (Hamann 2001; Cahill & McGaugh 1995). Research has even shown that emotional and personalized news increases the

encoding, memory and retrieval of news information for citizens from both the higher and lower education groups, with especially strong benefits for the lower groups (Bas & Grabe 2015, 176).

### 3.3.6 The media response to a focusing event

Every day, an extensive amount of events occurs – with some events having an advantage in being considered as important news. The media favors certain types of issues – such as those that are rare and unpredictable, dramatic, or negative events affecting large numbers of people (Asp 1986; Hernes 1978; Maguire et al. 2002; Nord & Strömbäck 2002). This concludes that focusing events are important due to news values, which influence how much attention the issues receive on the media agenda.

Overall, the impact of the media's influence on political processes is due to the media's role as an agenda setter. Media actors decide which issues are brought up for discussion in the community, and by extension, this often means that the media shape which issues citizens contemplate. At the same time, the media have the power to act as a watchdog in society and review policies and decisions, putting pressure on the politicians. In conclusion, the media's influence derives from several aspects (Berglez & Nohrstedt 2009, 16; McCombs & Shaw 1972): the media arena can influence our perceptions of power and issues, as well as determine which power struggles are seen as important. Hence, the media arena takes part in the reproduction of power relationships in societies. However, the media arena is influenced or controlled by other actors, such as shareholders, advertisers or the state.

Journalists contribute to the framing of an event by using certain approaches, such as simplification or conflict frameworks, to catch the audiences' attention. However, with this approach there is a danger that if the media coverage presents social problems in an oversimplified or polarized way, a deeper understanding of the problem will not take place (Birkland & Lawrence 2009). The contextualization of social problems is an important fight for audience attention, because most citizens as well as politicians acquire their information from the media. As such, the framing and priming of an event in the media lays the basis for the political dialogue and which solutions are viewed as possible. The role as a critical reviewer of society is a task that

is especially problematic and important during crises and disasters; it is a challenging task to present correct and fast information as well as to know when to scrutinize the actions of decision-makers (Nohrstedt 1999).

## 3.4 All Apologies? – The parliamentary arena

How do different issues reach the formal political agenda, and how come some are successful, while others fade away quite quickly? This is the overall important question when discussing the formal political agenda (Mitchell 1962). As defined earlier, the formal political agenda consists of an institutional agenda with concrete and specific issues debated at a particular moment in time, and a system agenda with all questions important to the political system (Cobb & Elder 1972, 14). The ability to cope with problems is vital for the existence of the formal political agenda (*ibid.*, 15); when a disaster strikes, politicians quickly have to deal with demands arising from the public or from the media arena.

When defining the formal political arena, important aspects to consider are the organization, power distribution, decision-making processes, and how they are all influenced by different groups. As pointed out earlier, the political system and the formal political agenda exists in interaction with the surrounding society, where demands, support and feedback are central variables to the survival of the system. However, there is not always a clear path between demands and attention on the political agenda – instead, demands must be transformed or explained according to substantial issues to visualize the problem and mobilize actors (Cobb & Elder 1972, 19). The process where demands either succeed or fail in the quest of reaching the formal political agenda is affected by gatekeepers, in the form of persons, institutions and groups (Easton 1965, 133–137). Thus, a central part of agenda building is "occurring at the boundaries of the system and its subsystems" (Cobb & Elder 1972, 22). The problem is not the existence of many different groups inside the political system, but that "each group reinterprets its interests to be synonymous with the general interest" (*ibid.*, 33). Thus, conflicts between different groups arise, since actors have diverse interests and goals (Sabatier 2007, 3). Consequently, focusing events, as

well as actors around the formal political agenda are of importance when discussing the formal political agenda. Inside this equation lies a discussion about power – who has control over what information reaches the agenda, how are issues defined and who decides which solutions are discussed (*ibid.,* 26)? According to the theory of "disjointed incrementalism" (Braybrook & Lindblom 1963, 83–98), only those policy suggestions following the prevailing values in a society are considered on the formal political agenda. Few alternative solutions that would reformulate a problem completely are discussed (Cobb & Elder 1972, 26). However, even though the political elite want to maintain the status quo, focusing events might provide an opportunity for change (Boin et al. 2005, 123). Firstly, this is because such events loosen the structural constraints, making policy change easier. Secondly, crises and disasters allow the discussion to deal with alternative solutions, to a higher extent than during normal politics. In addition, deeply rooted mind-sets might soften throughout the whole policy chain. Taking these three aspects into account, the politicization of focusing events on the parliamentary arena provides opportunities for change (*ibid.*, 125–126). Hence, to a certain degree it is an ideological struggle that determines whether focusing events are handled by a conservative or a reformist approach. A conservative approach implies a lower risk for the political elite, making it a popular way to go (Boin et al. 2005, 128). An example of how the political context affects the outcome of focusing events is found in the differences between Canada and the US when dealing with school shootings (Fleming 2012). The Canadian system provides the parliament with more influence, meaning that policy-making processes are faster and more efficient, in comparison to the US, which has a strong presidential influence. Hence, we find that momentous policy changes concerning gun legislation took place in Canada, whereas no real policy changes took place in the US (*ibid.*). Another aspect is that many societal problems are perceived as unsolvable to some degree; we cannot eliminate unemployment, or natural disasters for that matter (*ibid.*, 29). Policy processes are thus often extended in time, and require that different levels of the political system have to cooperate (Sabatier 2007, 3–4).

### 3.4.1 Political processes

There have been several academic attempts to define the *policy process*. Initially, many definitions emphasize different stages of the process; *initiation* of an issue on the political agenda could be followed by *preparation* if the issue is deemed important enough. A third stage could be *decision making* followed by *implementation* of the arrangements, and finally *feedback* or control (Lundquist 1992, 12–13). Then again, the world is usually not as simple as it may seem at first. The process is often described as a cycle, which refers to the notion that decision makers should learn from previous events and problems (Cairney 2012, 23). As such, previous knowledge should be incorporated when making future decisions. Early policy researchers emphasized that policy is conscious actions *or* inactions (Heclo 1972; Smith 1976); while later researchers point out that the policy process consists of decisions that can be understood according to networks (Easton 1965; Jenkins 1978). The policy process is a complex affair that includes many different actors, such as politicians, citizens and lobby groups. Policy can be understood as a deliberately chosen course of action related to a societal problem (Smith 1976), referring to particular actions (Heclo 1972), as well as a resource allocation between different groups in society (Easton 1965). The simplest summarization would be "whatever government chooses to do or not to do" (Dye 1978, 3).

However, many of the definitions used when discussing the policy process are difficult to apply to the real world (Danielsson 2010, 113). The critique brought forward highlights that broad definitions are virtually impossible to employ when studying a specific mechanism – especially if a single decision is understood as being interconnected to several other decisions over time. A better approach would be to adopt Pressman and Wildavsky's (1984) foundation that policy is the idea of the relationship between means and ends (Danielsson 2010, 121). Policy cannot be both a means of intention, and actual behavior; instead, we should understand policy as theories and the idea that there are underlying problems that require action.

To conclude, on one hand it is fair to express a critique against too broad concepts of policy processes, and that the processes do not necessarily play out in neat stages that follow each other. On the other hand, handling complex processes demands some form of simplification, as long as we are aware of the difficulties and challenges

(Sabatier 2007, 4). In this dissertation, the policy process, or the political process on the formal political agenda, is understood as the actions or inactions we choose in order to solve societal problems, as summarized by Cairney (2012, 4) below:

> The policy process is complex, messy, and often appears to be unpredictable. Further, the idea of a single process is a necessary but misleading simplification. When we scratch beneath the surface we find that there are multiple policy processes: the behaviour of policymakers, the problems they face, the actors they meet, and the results of their decisions often vary remarkably. They often vary by region, political system, over time and from policy issue to issue.

### 3.4.2 How issues rise on the formal political agenda

How are issues defined and redefined on the political agenda? "History tells us that political mobilization is fuelled as much by great events as by great men and great strategy", writes Goss (2001, 3). In this way, focusing events often play an important role when mobilizing stakeholders. However, it is difficult to identify patterns and arrangements following focusing events because their circumstances are often random and impossible to predict. In contrast, this is one of the things that cause people to organize themselves. "Politically, focusing events do not happen so much as they 'play out'" (*ibid.*, 5), hence, we can identify the stages associated with how focusing events are contextualized. The first phase involves increased attention, which pushes the issue into the public agenda. In the second stage, the public perception of the causes and risks associated with the event is redefined, which can lead to a reformulation of the problem. In the third stage, new proposals can be brought forward, which leads to new groups getting involved in the issue. If the focusing event, and the actions decision makers choose to apply, are considered legitimate – there is an opportunity for policy change. This can be understood in terms of the focusing event creating an understanding of a problem, which in turn can result in concrete actions (Goss 2001, 5–6). Moreover, with an increased number of new ideas, a better breeding ground for new policies is created (Birkland 2006, 18).

Politics can be defined as three streams – a problem stream, a policy stream and a political stream (Kingdon 2003, 197). Inside the problem stream, events and problems related to them are identified. In the policy stream, solutions are presented by experts, interest groups and actors. However, there is not always a clear pathway between the problems perceived in the problem stream and the solutions presented in the policy stream (Rushefsky 1994, 98). Policy making is a complex concern, since the different actors must specialize and coordinate to achieve influence in the policy process (Sabatier & Weible 2007, 192). Furthermore, the different actors' positions on policy issues are often very stable, making it relatively difficult to accomplish policy change. Still, the core of policy processes in democratic states is the occasional disturbance by "policy punctuations", allowing change to happen (Baumgarner & Jones 1993). Politics consists of static and incremental periods with little or no change, followed by more dynamic periods where ideas are revised, allowing changes (Danielsson 2010, 63). It is possible for states with a long history of stability, to experience rapid and destabilizing changes (Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen & Jones 2006, 63). Actors within a system often share an understanding of the problem formulation concerning a certain policy. The driving force behind major policy change is the mobilization of new actors, allowing problems to be reformulated. A disturbed balance in the political system can start from policy images – how issues are defined, or from the institutional context – where an instability on the political arena allows actors do advocate change (Parson 1995, 204). Political actors use attention to try to influence the formal political agenda, thus, the media plays an important role by drawing attention to various events (Danielsson 2010, 63; Parson 1995, 204). During static periods, the political elite dominate the policy process, but when for instance focusing events challenge existing notions and point out imperfections – policy change is possible (Walgrave & Varone 2008, 367).

When a society is aware of a problem, citizens can participate to demand changes, political groups can support or work against an issue, and academics can be involved in policy formulation. During normal political processes, the three streams work separately, however, during certain circumstances "a window of opportunity" (Kingdon 2003, 165) arises and the three streams are combined and new policies can come to light. Long periods of maturation and development precede policy change in

the process where new ideas are born and old ideas disappear on the political agenda (Kingdon 2003, 226). Even though the process is usually quite slow, there are examples of rapid change, when policy change does not happen gradually, but through great strides. Although legislative activities are usually a time consuming process, Wolfe (2012) finds that questions that are prominent on the political agenda are often followed by a faster policy-making process; if we are dealing with large-scale focusing events, the legislative process is up to two and a half times faster than usual. An explanation for this may be the positive feedback received from the media, when the coverage is extensive (*ibid.*). Hence, real and revolutionizing changes are possible. Nevertheless, there is still a need to have an existing understanding of the problem, since policy solutions are formed under longer periods of time, even though a change can happen quite quickly (*ibid.*, 227).

Furthermore, decision makers are expected to learn from disasters and crises. The learning process can be defined as "the process by which participants use information and knowledge to develop, test, and refine their beliefs" (Birkland 2006, 8). Learning in crisis and disaster situations can be about experience, if there is a lack of previous knowledge about rare events. Furthermore, learning can be based on explanations, to find rational and scientific causes and effects. Thirdly, learning in crisis situations can be about competencies and skills to adopt in similar situations (Boin et al. 2005, 118). A prevailing notion is that people and organizations act rationally; trying to make logical decisions based on information and analysis capabilities. So, when something goes wrong, we try to learn from our experiences and improve the system to avoid similar situations in the future (*ibid.*, 9). Hence, we can connect a specific event to policy learning, since participants in the policy process must try to solve the problems arising from the event; no legitimate politician wants school shootings or floods (*ibid.*, 18). Few events ever receive massive attention on the parliamentary arena. But once a particular event does come into the limelight, it will start to receive serious attention and consideration by policy makers, creating a better breeding ground for learning and policy change. There are two different approaches to the concept of learning in emergency situations. Firstly, learning aims to answer questions such as; what went wrong, why is this happening and how can we make sure this does not happen again? Moreover, learning can also refer to changes in policy (Boin et al. 2005, 116).

When formulating a problem, issues can be brought forward by groups. On one hand, the issues might be fabricated by the groups, according to their own political agendas. On the other hand, sometimes issues are brought forward for the good of the society, with no vested interest, for instance, the civil right movement in the US. Secondly, circumstantial reactors, or unpredictable events, might initiate an issue onto the formal political agenda, as an example, the murder of J. F. Kennedy made the issue of gun legislation an important political issue (Cobb & Elder 1972, 81–83).

The triggering mechanisms of unpredictable events might be both external or internal, corresponding to domestic and foreign policy responsibilities (Cobb & Elder 1972, 84):

Internal triggering events:

1. Natural catastrophe
2. Unanticipated human event
3. Technological change
4. Imbalance in the distribution of resources leading to strikes or riots
5. Ecological challenges

External triggering events:

1. Act of war or military violence
2. Innovations in technology, for instance arms control
3. International conflicts
4. Changing world alignment patterns

The internal triggering events are focusing events; natural disasters, and man-made disasters in the form of human accidents or technological change. Disasters and catastrophes provide an opportunity for change by being the triggering mechanism that changes our perception of a problem, or as Birkland (1997, 6) puts it:

> That trigger can be a change in our understanding of the problem, a change in the political stream that is favourable to policy change, a change in our understanding of the tractability of the problem given current solutions, or a focusing event that draws attention to a problem and helps open a window of opportunity.

However, to reach the political agenda the event needs attention; that is the surrounding society needs to be aware of this accident taking place. Secondly, a concerned public that approves of political action is needed in combination with the issue being considered a part of the government's operating range. Hence, "action must be considered not only possible, but also necessary for the resolution of the issue" (*ibid.*, 86). Reaching the system agenda is not always a given ticket to the institutional agenda.

What makes an issue interesting once it has reached the formal political agenda? It is not the characteristics of the event per se, but the way "political actors deliberately portray them [problems] in ways calculated to gain support for their side" (Stone 1989, 282). Political actors give us stories, telling us how to solve problems. As seen on the media arena and in the framing literature – our reality is a struggle over which ideas to use in the definition of the world. Although Stone calls this manipulation, one could ask whether there is another way to explain a complex world? Some kind of simplification and contextualization is always needed. The stories we tell can be about decisions or consequences which are accidental or deliberate in both dimensions (*ibid.*, 284). An accidental cause, for example a natural disaster, is an event that is not the direct consequence of human actions. This makes it difficult to discuss on a political level. Since decision makers cannot control such events, it is more fruitful to discuss human actions in terms of responsibility or blame (*ibid.*, 295–297). There are different ways to frame a crisis situation, depending both on the characteristics of the event and on the strategies by the leaders (Boin, t' Hart & McConnell 2009). The first type of crisis covers events explained as an unfortunate happening, which therefore do not require any form of political action. The second type covers events portrayed as a critical threat to society, although no blame or accountability are placed on the political actors. Thirdly, there are crisis situations that are employed by bringing up criticism of current policies or the political parties in power (*ibid.*, 85). Previously, the

first and second options were often discussed as "God's work", something you cannot influence through political actions. However, in today's risk society there is a greater critical emphasis or framing of disasters in such a way as to affect the social and political arena (*ibid.*).

### 3.4.3 Focusing events on the parliamentary arena – Opening a window of opportunity?

Having discussed and defined political processes in the parliamentary arena, starting from the important question regarding which issues succeed in reaching the formal political agenda and staying there, I will conclude with some remarks about what this says about the influence of focusing events on the political agenda. The question is important, since the issues brought up for discussion affect which solutions are considered. An initial notion is that focusing events are not always a trigger for policy change, since other aspects such as the prevailing political ideology and the willingness to make changes might be important. Nevertheless, focusing events immediately bring attention to problems (Birkland 1997, 1). Furthermore, the political processes following focusing events are usually faster than during normal politics (e.g. Wolfe 2012).

Sudden and rare events have a greater chance of reaching the political agenda, since these types of events are more efficient in terms of agenda building (e.g. Cobb & Elder 1972). Furthermore, events that contain threats of violence, such as man-made focusing events like school shootings or terrorist attacks, reach the political agenda since they threaten core values (e.g. Mitchell 1962). Likewise, natural disasters as well as technological accidents can be seen as triggering devices (Cobb & Elder 1972). The political reality is a battle of competing ideas; why did this happen, how can we prevent similar things from happening in the future, and who is guilty? (e.g. Stone 1989). The vitality of an issue is strongly influenced by the media coverage (e.g. Birkland 1997; 2006; Cobb & Elder 1972), "the larger public to which an issue has been expanded, the greater the likelihood of the conflict being placed on the docket" (Cobb & Elder 1972, 151).

## 3.5 Who'll stop the rain? – Summarizing the context

Is the notion that politics is chaotic, messy, and unpredictable true? Or can politics be put into neat process steps, where rational choice and objective facts rise above the self-interest and shortsightedness? As anywhere in life, Aristotle's thoughts of the golden mean – or the combination of elements from both domains, is probably closer to the truth than either side alone. The same is true regarding the impact of focusing events on society; events raise emotions, thereby drawing attention – sometimes disproportionately so in comparison to other social problems. This is done by pushing issues onto social agendas, or getting them to serve as triggers and symbols for other issues bubbling under the surface. However, in a political context, the main question is that the event is labelled as a crisis or disaster, a problem that needs a solution. This conclusion lies close to Deborah Stone's (2002, 378) thoughts on the political process:

> Reasoned analysis is necessarily political. It always involves choice to include some things and exclude others and to view the world in a particular way when other visions are possible. Policy analysis is political argument, and vice versa.

In bringing the chapter to an end, I will try to shed some light onto how we can combine the context of three societal arenas with the general research questions of the dissertation. Looking at how focusing events with a varying degree of strength and origin affect political processes, we must start by including all three societal arenas. Hence, this chapter has tried to identify the arenas and the political processes connected to them, but also highlight the possible emotional and cognitive reactions that focusing events cause. The theoretical context has showed why focusing events are important in a society and that a political system must handle stress and disturbances for the legitimization of the system. Moreover, citizens must have trust in the political leaders in crisis and disaster situations. Physical destruction and negative consequences for large numbers of people force political leaders to "do something". Focusing events have a high news values, which is a stepping stone to the media agenda and the political agenda. The processes following a focusing event are often faster than during routine politics, making a redefinition of a problem possible, as well as the mobilization of new actors.

The theoretical discussion set off with the notion that we are biologically biased to pay more attention to negative and fearful events. When looking back to the time when humans spent their days on savannas, fighting other animals for daily survival, the evolutionary discussion suggests that individuals who paid attention to negative stimuli had better chances of surviving. Hence, the negativity bias comes from a natural selection (e.g. Öhman & Dimberg 1984; Hunt & Campbell 1997). This bias is furthermore present also amongst other species, like rats, monkeys and chimpanzees (Brosnan et al. 2007; Miller 1961; Mahl 1952; Soroka 2014, 9). From a survival aspect, paying attention to negative stimuli is important – meaning that most people will, without even knowing it, pay more attention to focusing events. So what happens when we encounter negative events? How do we react? Often with a higher pulse rate, increased sweating, more brain activity and increased attention to the event. The definition of emotion as "specific sets of physiological and mental dispositions triggered by the brain in response to the perceived significance of a situation or object for an individual are goals (up to and including survival)" (Brader 2006, 51) means that focusing events by nature raise emotions and allocate our attention. Emotions are important in our information processing and political behavior (Huddy et al. 2005; Valentino et al. 2008), enthusiasm through uplifting stimuli motivate citizens, while fear and anxiety make voters more likely to change their beliefs and search for more information (Brader 2006, 182). Interestingly, emotional appeal also significantly affects highly educated and intelligent people (Brader 2006, 183), perhaps since emotions are triggered unconsciously. Contrary to the popular belief that the uses of emotion depreciate rational behavior, Brader (2006) found that emotion does not contradict logic. When studying political campaigns, the results show that fear ads were more likely to be based on facts and issues rather than personal characteristics (*ibid.*, 184). To conclude, an emotional response is present when focusing events occur – and this is in our best interest and does not result in a deprived understanding and handling of the situation. The emotional response is a driver for information processing, behavior and policy formulation, which means that the emotional response can influence the attribution of responsibility, evaluation of leaders and which solutions are considered legitimate. Likewise, negative events and stories receive attention and are important when mobilizing actors. In conclusion, the emotional reactions are an important variable to study on all three arenas.

Secondly, citizens, the media, and politicians define the categories of an event through cognition, which in turn affect the political outcome. The mental construction of a problem, highlighting certain aspects while downplaying others, is necessary due to intellectual boundaries (Stone 2002, 378). However, this should not be understood as the existence of a true reality. Rather, in order for citizens and politicians to understand, know and live in a society, they must categorize events and objects and give them meaning (Berger & Luckmann 1966). We can probably agree over a few objective facts; such as chemical composition or the weight of an object, but "these kinds of facts are simply not the ones that matter in politics" (Stone 2002, 379). Instead, the important aspect of politics is defining events and problems with no given categories. The starting point for a problem can be for instance an accident or the intentional use of violence, which might result in a different kind of responsibility given to individuals or institutions. Nevertheless, politics is a struggle to define how we see the world, what problems exist and how to solve them. The meaning-making process of politics on the citizen, the media, and the formal political arena is an important point of departure for this thesis. Focusing events are agenda setters; extensive discussions on all three arenas make the problems salient – bringing together the problem stream, the political stream and the policy stream (Kingdon 2003). The emotional and cognitive reactions on all three arenas are part of the politicization process: What happened? Who is responsible? What will we do now?

## 3.6 Specific research questions

The general aim of this thesis is to analyze how focusing events with a varying degree of strength and origin affect societal processes. The interaction on three societal arenas; the civic arena, the media arena and the parliamentary arena, are defined as the context for this dissertation. Following the theoretical discussion in this chapter, the important steps when a focusing event occurs are:

1) *emotional arousal* → attention → the event reaches societal agendas
2) *defining the problem* → framing, blame attribution →
3) *solutions* presented

Thus, there are four main themes regarding how to study the effects of focusing events on political processes. Initially I defined the effects as consisting of both emotional and cognitive reactions. The specific research questions are therefore:

1. Which emotional reactions are visible?

2. How are the events framed?

3. How is blame attributed?

4. Which solutions are presented?

However, not all themes may be of importance on all arenas. For instance, the citizens' perception of how an event is framed is mostly affected by the media coverage or by political statements. Thus, the framing of the event will not be emphasized in the study of the citizen arena. Moreover, the externalization of emotions may vary across the different arenas. One example is how the emotional reactions in the media often consist of pictures and graphical elements, while the emotions on the parliamentary arena are transmitted through verbal attributes. Hence, the measurements of emotional reactions on the three societal arenas may vary to capture the unique attributes of the arenas.

# III.
# RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS

# 4. Research design

In this chapter I will discuss how to best investigate my research questions empirically. That means defining the context of the three societal arenas, and selecting cases for the studies, as well as discussing methodological considerations. In addition, the chapter encompasses the three studies. Each study will contain a short introduction and specific research questions. Furthermore, each study encompasses a more detailed theoretical discussion to operationalize the variables in the studies.

As discussed in the introduction, this dissertation adopts a view of political processes as being closely intervened and combined on different arenas in the society (Easton 1965; Lundquist 1971). To understand the political decisions made, we must study the contextualization of the problem on different societal arenas. Are there demands from the citizens, do the public trust their leaders and view actions as necessary? And how did the media cover the event – what kind of framing was used and how was blame or responsibility attributed? These questions are important when looking at the discussion on the formal political arena. Moreover, this dissertation takes a somewhat new approach to studying disasters in politics – looking not at policy changes, but at the discourse surrounding the events, the debate preceding possible change. The politicization that is present when we answer questions such as: Why did this happen? and Who is to blame?, is an important determination for which solutions are seen as probable in the end.

The context for such studies have to represent an open community where citizens are free to express their opinions, the media arena is not controlled by any specific actor and the parliamentary arena consists of different political options. Thus, there are many countries that fit this description. However, as will be discussed in the pilot analysis and case selection, it is necessary that the researcher has a substantial knowledge of the context in the questions, when making the index of strength.
Likewise, the researcher has to comprehend the language spoken in the country. Notwithstanding, the cause that primarily affected the chosen context was the

method. Using an experimental laboratory approach sets some geographical restrictions. As a result, the context in these studies is placed in Finland.

## 4.1 Case selection and pilot analysis

The second chapter discussed focusing events theoretically, and ended with a proposal on how to define the magnitude of focusing events. To summarize, when discussing the magnitude of an event, I suggested that the event in question is discussed according to five characteristics: three necessary conditions and two further intensifying conditions. In the following discussion, I grade the necessary conditions on a two-point scale as either stronger or weaker, and the intensifying conditions as present or not (Figure 4.). The main point is to separate events with a weaker magnitude from events with a stronger magnitude, and thus, improve the definition of focusing events to four different parts; origin (man/nature) and magnitude (strong/weak).

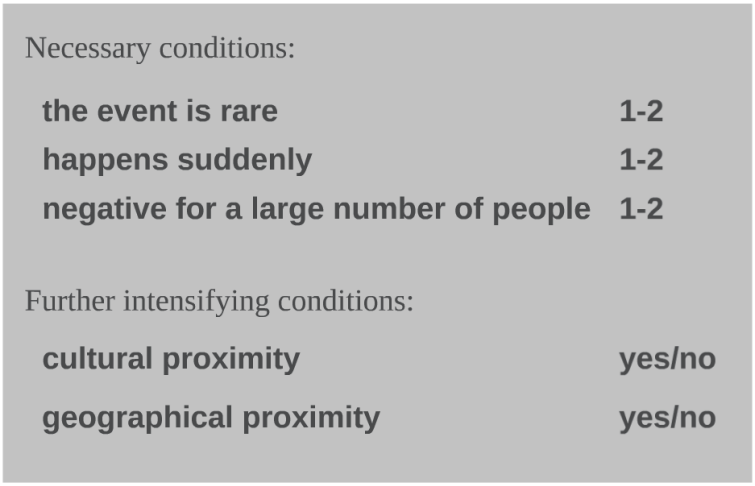


**Figure 4.** The magnitude of focusing events.

The grading of events is not always as black and white as a two-point scale might suggest, in the real world we could also include a third middle category of somewhat focusing event. Hence, I considered using a three-point scale, but found that the grading of strong/middle/weak was even more difficult since events differ on many aspects. This is why I suggest we apply a basic division of man-made versus natural disasters – and events with a stronger versus weaker magnitude.

The combination of three necessary conditions; rarity, surprise and negative consequences for a large number of people, and two further intensifying conditions; cultural and geographical proximity, affect the magnitude of an event. In this section, I choose to test the empirical tool as part of the case selection for the studies in the dissertation. The main point is to identify events with a stronger versus weaker degree of focus. The research questions of the dissertation aim at identifying differences between focusing events concerning origin and magnitude. Hence, the case selection must start from a basic selection of man-made events and natural disasters. It should be emphasized that it is somewhat difficult to provide clear guidelines for how the necessary points are to be assigned, since the magnitude of events differs greatly between contexts. One example is how a country like the US has over 300 million inhabitants in comparison with Finland's 5.5 million. Hence, the perception of the number of injured as a measure for severity can vary. Moreover, in some parts of the world, it is more common that various natural disasters with a strong degree of focus occur every year; one example is the occurrence of earthquakes, which take place where continental plates meet. In some concluding first remarks, I want to emphasize that the key to taking a first step in dissolving these issues is that the researcher presents a detailed and clear reasoning behind the scores. For this purpose, it is important that the researcher has a deep understanding of the culture and the society where the events take place. This makes it easier to provide scores and discuss the empirical tool. Another remark is that the tool is easier to use when adapted to one specific context. In this study, all events are analyzed in a Finnish context; moreover, all events took place in a Finnish context as well. The comparison between events is therefore not an issue. However, the generalization of the results is slightly more difficult. However, if we once again revisit the aim of the thesis, the main starting point

is to add to the theoretical discussion of focusing events by comparing different events and their political impact.

The necessary conditions when determining the magnitude of a focusing event are bisectional; this means that an event meeting these three criteria can be defined as a focusing event. Regarding the first criteria, suddenness and surprise – the points awarded are either a 1 or a 2. A score of 1 implies that the event is expected to occur at regular intervals. Often one knows in advance when various natural phenomena such as storms and hurricanes are about to occur. Nevertheless, there is a difficulty in convincing citizens of a possible dangerous situation; people as well as governments tend to ignore disaster warnings (Merchant 1986, 1249). This means that a natural disaster can also be surprising to the people affected. It is also possible that the event can change character and become more extreme in such a short time that people do not have time to prepare for the change. To receive 2 points in this category, the event needs to strike like a bolt from the blue, such as the massacre of Utøya in Norway. This was an event that no-one saw coming, at least not in the preceding discussion.

The second necessary condition is rarity. Focusing events are always a breakup from the day-to-day routine politics. However, some events are rarer than other. Traffic accidents and natural disasters are two types of focusing events that are relatively common. If we can expect an area to get flooded at some point every year, the rarity of the event would score a 1 on the empirical tool. Other types of events occur more seldom, such as oil spills or extreme weather, and would score a 2 on the empirical tool.

The last necessary criterion is that the event has negative consequences for a large number of people. A score of 2 should be given to an event that has national implications. Many extensive focusing events affecting whole countries also have a global influence, such as the Fukushima nuclear incident or 9/11. An event that scores a 1 is limited to a small area, such as a town or a municipality or a region. At this stage it is worth reiterating on the importance of taking the context into consideration. Using only the numbers of people affected by an event would not be a good measurement when comparing different countries. Hence, in a Finnish context, negative consequences for a large number of people can mean something else than in

an Indian context. A good example of this is the number of deceased in Finnish, or Nordic, accidents and natural disasters. The highest number of deceased in a Nordic accident during the 21st century was 24, in a traffic accident in Finland. For natural disasters such as storms and floods, the highest number of deceased is between four and seven in a Nordic comparison[3].

The characteristics of cultural and geographical proximity are awarded 1 point each, since a closer proximity results in a greater political impact (Nohrstedt & Weible 2010, 20). Since all the events in this study take place in a Finnish context, and unfold on Finnish soil – the intensifying conditions are the same for all events. However, it is important to pay attention to these criteria when studying events occurring in other geographical locations. A focusing event taking place in another Nordic country would receive a point both for geographical proximity and for cultural proximity. As such, proximity, especially in the form of geographic proximity, results in forms of cooperation in disaster preparedness (Brooks 1986). Moreover, events not taking place in the immediate geographical environment might also call for attention, even though the cultural proximity is further away. One example of this is Haiti and the Dominican Republic, two small countries in the Caribbean. Their culture and history, however, rely on different foundations, French versus Spanish heritage (Kelman 2012, 84). Likewise, stronger focusing events happening in western societies, such as other European countries, also have a possible cultural influence over the Finnish political context. Nohrstedt & Weible (2010) have developed a typology that shows the relationship between geographic and policy (defined in this dissertation as "cultural") proximity. A fourfold division between close and distant proximity levels yields the following dimensions of crisis; an *immediate crisis* has both a close policy and geographic proximity, for example the impact of Hurricane Katrina for the citizens of Louisiana. A *policy-proximate crisis* has close policy dependence, but a more distant geographic location, such as the impact of the 9/11terrorist attacks for European politics. The third dimension is a *geographic-proximate crisis*, such as the impact of Southern California wildfires on the public health subsystem in California. The fourth

[3] The international disaster database http://www.emdat.be/

is a *vicarious crisis* which has neither geographical or policy proximity, such as the impact of the swine-flu crisis on the counterterrorism subsystem.

After this first discussion of the scoring system, I now turn to the empirical analysis of four Finnish events. A first remark is that strong focusing events are quite rare in Finland. According to the international disaster database (www.emdata.be), only two disasters occurred in Finland during the 21st century, one flood and one technological disaster. In comparison, Germany experienced 43 natural disasters and 17 technological disasters during the same time period. However, the database looks only at natural disasters and technological accidents, excluding, for example, school shootings and terrorist attacks. This means that when a focusing event does occur in Finland, the focal power is strong, since these events are very rare. It is also important to keep the cases close in time, to avoid a potentially different political climate during different time spans. Hence, a first limitation in this dissertation was to only include the last few years[4], giving me a time span of about 2007 to 2012. During this time period, only one natural disaster with a stronger degree of focus appeared, hence this event will be included. Likewise, the first school shooting in Jokela is without a doubt one of the most focusing events occurring in Finland during the 21st century. The events with a weaker degree of focus were chosen since they are regional crises that still made it into the formal political arena.

### Focusing event created by man-made actions: The school shooting in Jokela 2007

An 18-year-old student killed nine people, including himself, when he started shooting at Jokela High School. The school shooting in Jokela sparked a debate on gun legislation and the mental health service for the youth in Finland. Since this was the first ever large-scale school shooting in Finland the event can be characterized as very rare and sudden. The number of deceased was high in a Finnish context, and the event affected and spread concern throughout the Finnish educational system. Starting from the previous discussion on magnitude (see Figure 4), I will now grade each of the three

[4] The first study was conducted in 2012.

necessary conditions (1–2 points) as well as the two further intensifying conditions (1 point each if present). The points given will be explained further.

Suddenness/surprise: 2 (the first large-scale school shooting in Finland came as a big surprise to the Finnish society)
Rare: 2 (the first school shooting in nearly twenty years in Finland, the first school shooting took place in Rauma in 1989 and two people were killed)
Negative for a large number of people: 2 (9 deaths, which is very high in a Finnish context, however, the school shooting threatened core values and affected the entire Finnish school system)
Cultural proximity: 1 (occurred in Finland)
Geographical proximity: 1 (occurred in Finland)
*Total: 8 = stronger degree of focus*

**Focusing event created by man-made actions:**
**Water crisis in Nokia 2007**

The drinking water in Nokia was contaminated in November 2007 when sewage water became mixed with drinking water due to human error. The water crisis affected 12 000 inhabitants and caused diarrhea and stomach upsets for thousands of people, resulting in three deaths. The crisis highlighted the poorly-designed water treatment facility. The same design at that point in time was used in almost half of Finland's water treatment plants. The event was quite rare and sudden. However, the numbers of people affected were limited to the inhabitants of Nokia. Hence, as this event does fulfil the suddenness and rarity criteria but is limited concerning the criterion of negativity for a large number of people, we deemed its degree of focus as being "weaker". The three necessary conditions will be given 1–2 points each and the two further intensifying conditions one point each if present. The points given will be explained further below.

Suddenness/surprise: 1 (the event was created due to human error, however it took three days before the residents in Nokia were informed of what had happened)

Rare: 1 (the event was quite rare, however, between four and ten water crises occur every year in Finland)

Negative for a large number of people: 1 (the crisis involved the citizens of Nokia, about 32 000 inhabitants)

Cultural proximity: 1 (occurred in Finland)

Geographical proximity: 1 (occurred in Finland)

*Total: 5 = weaker degree of focus*

**Focusing event created by a natural phenomenon:**
**Boxing Day Storm 2011**

The storm that hit Finland as well as other Nordic countries (named Dagmar) during the Boxing Day of 2011 was one of the hardest storms in Finland during the twenty-first century. The electricity supply for hundreds of thousands of people was cut off for up to two weeks. The damage to forests was later estimated to be approximately 50–70 million Euros. One person was killed by a falling tree. The event was rare and affected large parts of Finland. Natural disasters are seldom very sudden in Finland and the authorities had issued warnings. The three necessary conditions will be given 1–2 points each and the two further intensifying conditions 1 point each if present. The points given will be explained in detail below.

Suddenness/surprise: 1 (the meteorological institute had come out with an official warning about storm winds)

Rare: 2 (the storm was the strongest in Finland during the last ten years)

Negative for a large number of people: 2 (large parts of Finland were left without electricity – 300 000 households)

Cultural proximity: 1 (occurred in Finland)

Geographical proximity: 1 (occurred in Finland)

*Total: 7 = stronger degree of focus*

**Focusing event created by a natural phenomenon:**
**Floods in Ostrobothnia 2012**

During the late summer of 2012, many villages in the Finnish region of Ostrobothnia were flooded due to heavy rains. Roads were cut off and many homes and other properties were damaged. Many farmers had flooded fields and the harvest losses were estimated at 20 million Euros. Floods are not as rare as the Boxing Day storm, and flooding is expected to occur every year. However, the event was unusually severe and affected the region of Ostrobothnia. Hence, similarly to the Nokia water crisis, this event does fulfil the suddenness and rarity criteria but is limited concerning the criterion of negativity for a large number of people. The three necessary conditions will be given 1–2 points each and the two further intensifying conditions 1 point each if present. The points given will be explained further below.

Suddenness/surprise: 1 (the meteorological institute sent out warnings about abundant rainfall)
Rare: 1 (equal amount of rainfall during a short time period happen roughly every ten years, however, the same areas in Ostrobothnia get flooded almost every year)
Negative for a large number of people: 1 (limited to the inhabitants of Southern Ostrobothnia)
Cultural proximity: 1 (occurred in Finland)
Geographical proximity: 1 (occurred in Finland)
*Total: 5 = weaker degree of focus*

This provides me with the following four cases, placed here in a fourfold showing origin and strength (Figure 5):

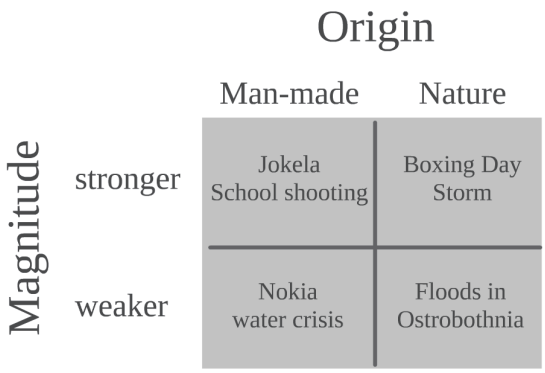


**Figure 5.** Case selection according to origin and magnitude.

## 4.2 Methods and material

The aim of the thesis is to study how focusing events affect society as a whole. Three separate studies are used in the research. Firstly, the effects of focusing events on the citizen arena will be analyzed. Revisiting the specific research questions, it is the emotional reactions and the attribution of blame that are most visible on the citizen arena. An emotional response is vital in mobilizing people, in information processing and when evaluating the leaders. The framing of the event is mostly done through the media coverage or by political statements. Likewise, citizens do not have a prominent role in solution formulation, as discussed in the theory. One exception of this is letters to the editor, where citizens can suggest remedies or demand actions. However, these kinds of writings are present within the media arena and will be studied in the second study. When studying the civic arena an experimental approach will be used. Experimental methodology is often used to answer causal empirical questions (Morton & Williams 2012, 12). Thus, using experiments makes it possible to study the effects of explanatory factors on the dependent variable, while keeping other factors constant (Esaiasson et al. 2007, 371). One reason for using laboratory experiments is that some situations of interest do not arise naturally (Morton & Williams 2012, 505), one example is the study of citizen's immediate reactions to crises and disasters. Thus, if the focus is on affection and psychophysiological reactions, the only way to study these kinds of research questions is through controlled laboratory experiments.

This methodology provides researchers with a unique opportunity to study the unconscious psychophysiological reactions of citizens. A laboratory experiment provides interesting insights to the emotional reactions of humans; skin conductance, for instance, is an established method of evaluating a subject's stress response (Stern et al. 2001). Furthermore, using a laboratory setting makes it easier for the researcher to measure behavioral differences between subjects who are randomly assigned different treatments in the same environment (Morton & Williams 2010, 305). The performance of the experiment is explained in detail in Chapter 5: Citizens' emotional and cognitive reactions to focusing events.

The media arena study will focus on the four main themes in the specific research questions; emotions, framing, blame attribution and solutions presented to the problem. The emotional appeal will be studied through the visual framing in the news coverage. Disaster coverage is often very visual, and emotions are expressed well through pictures (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen 2011, 118). Although this is rather logical, what is more surprising is the previous lack of research on visual framing. Needless to say, disaster coverage also consists of news texts in different forms. The framing, blame attribution and solutions will be studied through the media texts. To be able to make replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use, a quantitative content analysis will be performed (Krippendorff 2004, 18). A quantitative approach is used since the amount of texts are quite large, and using a content analysis answers questions, such as how frequently a category occurs, and how much space it is given (Esaiasson et al. 2007, 223). Using enough analysis units of equableness makes it possible to compare variables expressed in numbers. Hence, the research themes framing, blame attribution and solutions will be studied using a quantitative approach. When analyzing the coverage, there are two different approaches; an inductive and a deductive approach (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, 94). An inductive approach means that although there are no clearly defined categories initially, the various news reports are analyzed to identify any patterns and frameworks (e.g. Gamson, 1992). As such, an inductive approach highlights many different frameworks used in the media coverage of focusing events. However, a problem that can occur is that the process becomes very time consuming. Moreover,

it can be difficult to repeat and generalize the results (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, 94–95).

A deductive approach, on the other hand, uses a structure that previous research has identified to observe whether the same frameworks are present in the media reporting. However, the use of a priori identified frameworks poses a danger that a certain framework will be overlooked. Nevertheless, the advantage is that it is easier to discover differences between different types of reporting, such as between television and newspaper journalism, or, as in this case, between various crises and disasters. Another limitation when using already established framework categories is the fact that researchers may fail to identify newly emerging frames (Matthes & Kohring 2008, 262–263).

In Finland, there is one dominating newspaper: Helsingin Sanomat. The newspaper is an important effective channel used by power-holders to address peer groups and follow the elite debate in society (Kunelius, Noppari & Reunanen 2009, 265–269); this newspaper also works as an agenda-setter for other Finnish newspapers (Lounasmeri 2013, 385). A detailed version of the coding scheme as well as the design of the study is presented in Chapter 6: Media framing and blame attribution of focusing events.

The third study will analyze the formal political agenda by looking at the plenary debates in the Parliament. Appeal to emotions in the debates, as well as blame attribution, framing, and suggested solutions will be studied. When studying political communication, quantitative content analysis is a well-documented method (Esaiasson et al. 2007, 225). Similar to the second study, the discourse on the parliamentary arena will be investigated using quantitative content analysis. The coding scheme used for the framing and blame attribution variables is the same as in the previous study – making comparisons possible. The third study is presented in Chapter 7.

# IV. STUDIES

The overall aim of this thesis is to reach a deeper understanding of how focusing events influence societal processes. In the previous section, four focusing events with a varying degree of magnitude and origin have been selected. This fourth section contains three studies of how the cases were portrayed on three societal arenas. Each study will be presented in detail concerning theory, methods, research questions, results and conclusions. The following chapters are:

Chapter 5 – *Citizens' emotional and cognitive responses to focusing events – An experimental study*[5]

Chapter 6 – *Media framing and blame attribution of focusing events*

Chapter 7 – *Threat or opportunity? The politicization of focusing events in the parliamentary arena*

[5] This chapter is based on a previously published article: Lindholm et al. 2015. "Citizens' Emotional and Cognitive Responses to Focusing Events", *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disaster 33*(3), 407–427.

# 5. Citizens' emotional and cognitive responses to focusing events – An experimental study

## 5.1 Introduction

We live in a world that is constantly exposed to disasters and catastrophes, in a political context often considered as so-called focusing events (Birkland 1997; 2006; Kingdon 2003). The concept of focusing events provides an understanding of the political processes that follow a crisis or catastrophe. The twenty-first century has brought us new threats such as international terrorism, fears of a collapse of information and communication systems, and extreme weather events (OECD 2003). These new phenomena, as well as familiar problems in the form of crises and disasters created by humans and natural occurrences, show the vulnerability of societies (Boin et al. 2005, 1). Hence, disasters and catastrophes in the form of man-made and natural events, with both extensive, global degree of focus and more regional extent, provide an opportunity for political change, learning and evaluation of governmental performance, and are often studied in political science (Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Birkland 1997; 2006; Boin et al. 2008; Kingdon 2003).

Previous research has mainly emphasized the "window of opportunity" (Kingdon 2003) focusing events create on the political agenda by examining at reforms and policy change (Boin et al. 2005; Fleming 2012) or the framing of these events on the formal agenda (Boin et al. 2009; Goss 2001). Researchers have also accentuated the importance of media reporting, blame attribution and learning (Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Birkland & Lawrence 2009; Boin et al. 2008). However, disasters and catastrophes are also important on the civic arena. Whenever a crisis or a disaster occurs, it is essential that citizens trust that their society can provide credence towards managing the situation. Society's leaders are expected to avert threats – or at least to minimize the damage and devastation of a disaster. Likewise, an explanation is

expected as to what went wrong and a declaration that it will not happen again (Boin et al. 2005, 1). Citizens' reactions to focusing events are important because the more attention an event gets, the more likely it is to rise on the political arena. Previous research on citizens' responses to crises and catastrophes are often case studies (e.g. Arceneaux & Stein 2006; Chamlee-Wright & Storr 2010). Citizens' reactions to sudden crises or disasters, such as flooding, have been addressed in experiments (e.g. Kievik & Gutteling 2011; Terpstra, Zaalberg, de Boer and Botzen 2014; Zaalberg & Midden 2013). However, this field of research often focuses on citizens' responses to natural disasters, and the overall reactions to different kinds of disasters, including man-made disasters, are a relatively unexplored part of a larger whole, namely the political implications generated from focusing events.

This study addresses this area of research by examining how citizens respond to focusing events. This study emphasizes the following research question*: in what manner do the origin and strength of focusing events affect the emotional and cognitive reactions of citizens,* through devising an experiment of how citizens react to various crises and disasters. Hence, the study examines both the reactions as such and their potential political implications. The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, I discuss affective intelligence and our understanding of the relationship between emotional responses and political demands. Secondly, I elaborate the concept of focusing events using a typology that emphasizes the strength of the event and the origin, concluding with our hypotheses. Thereafter, the method and design of the experiment is presented, followed by the results. I end with a concluding discussion as well as limitations of the study and directions for further research.

## 5.2 Affective intelligence

Since focusing events are rare phenomena containing some form of negative element(s), they can be expected to cause reactions among citizens. A situation that is perceived as threatening and fearful often produces negative emotions, such as anxiety, which can cause citizens to pay more attention to the event. The concept of emotion can be defined as "underlying responses to the perceived relevance of external stimuli" (Brader 2005, 390). The brain identifies different objects and their

significance, which triggers different emotions, often in such a way that the person is not even aware of this happening. Marcus et al. (2000) refer to this as affective intelligence (AI). The theory of AI develops from two emotional systems, the dispositional and the surveillance system, which people use to manage all tasks and information they are constantly confronted with. While the dispositional system handles everyday behavior, the surveillance system makes people pay attention to threats and novelties and is connected to feelings of anxiety and fear. Hence, Damasio (2003) maintains that threatening and dramatic situations produce an emotional arousal as a biological necessity, forcing individuals to become aware of dangerous situations. These reactions happen very fast and are often unconscious to the individual. Such mechanisms may also explain political behavior (Marcus et al. 2000, 126–127; Renshon et al. 2015). According to Graber (2007, 265), different emotions may, for instance, influence citizens to learn more about a particular issue, demand policy change or perhaps distance themselves from the problem (e.g. Atkeson & Maestas 2012). Thus, emotional reactions, conscious as well as unconscious, in combination with cognitive responses, give rise to expectations and demands regarding policy changes. AI can thus be described as a theory about how "emotion and reason interact" according to Marcus et al. (2000, 1). We evaluate and think about political issues when our emotions are triggered by novel and threatening events.

The framing of disasters is another factor that is linked to the cognitive and affective processes of citizens, especially the effects of risk information on information need (Terpstra et al. 2014). An interesting aspect is how both positive framing – in the form of a safety aspect – and negative framing – an increased risk of floods, resulted in a higher level of information need, correlated inversely with trust in the risk management by leaders. One explanation for this might be that the first message of a present disaster aroused a high level of fear that could not be reduced by positive frames (Terpstra et al. 2014, 1516). When studying citizens' reactions to earthquake and tornado risks the perceived protection responsibility played an important role in the adaptive behavior. Trust and perceived protections responsibility have potentially political impact (Muilis & Duval 1997). Hence, it is important to understand how citizens perceive focusing events.

Hence, in this study the causal chain of reaction depicted in the theory of affective intelligence is adopted as follows (Figure 6):

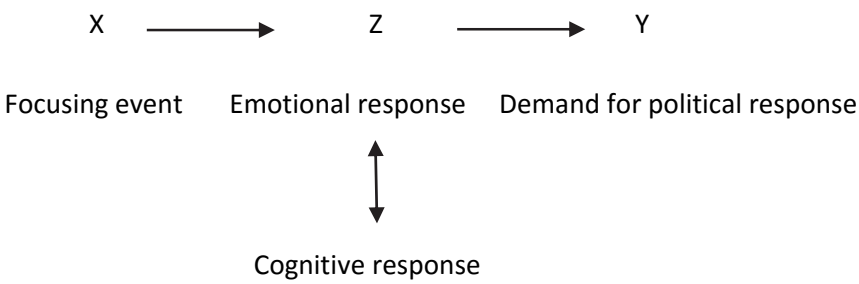


**Figure 6.** Affective intelligence theory.

## 5.3 Focusing events

The term focusing event suggests that the event increases attention to a specific problem. As have been discussed in chapter two, focusing events vary on two aspects. Firstly, the degree of focus, the more powerful the event is, the more attention it will receive on different societal arenas, for example, in the media (Birkland 2006). This also applies for citizen attention. For instance, in a study by Graber (2007), an interesting finding is that the television news feature that produced the highest emotional reactions from the audience depended on the magnitude of danger in the story. Moreover, involvement in violence abroad, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and man-made disasters received more attention than elections and general issues such as childcare (Graber 2007, 267). In a study of specific news reports that people claimed to follow more closely, scholars found that what attracted the most attention from the audience was how widespread and dangerous the incident was perceived to be, and not for example, the audiovisual aspects of the stimuli (Graber 2007). This allows me to assume that focusing events generally evokes reactions and emotions from citizens on the basis of the characteristics that these events possess. This is primarily because the situation is rare, occurs without warning and affects a large number of people in a negative sense. This also results in the assumption that a higher degree of focus is associated with stronger reactions from citizens and the possibility of them taking measures to understand the problem and advance demands for policy

change. In chapter two, the strength of a focusing event was defined as consisting of different characteristics, which are either necessary or intensifying. Firstly, the three circumstances required for an event to be focusing are defined as: the suddenness, the rarity, and the negativity for a large number of people. Subsequently, two characteristics which further intensify the focus: geographic proximity and cultural proximity (see Birkland 1997; 2006; Worrall 1999). This is in line with Atkeson and Maesta's (2012, 191) recommendation that the emotional intensity and breadth of personal relevance should be considered when evaluating the impact of events. The use of these criteria, regarding the treatment stimuli, will be further specified in the Methods section.

## 5.4 Hypotheses

The starting points for the hypotheses concern how focusing events of varying degrees of strength and different origins will influence citizens' emotional and cognitive reactions. Taking earlier research into account (Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Birkland 1997; 2006; Eriksson & Noreen 2004; Graber 2007), the expectations are that an event with a stronger degree of focus produces more emotional and cognitive reactions than an event with a weaker degree of focus. Concerning origin, although the scholarly evidence is somewhat inconclusive, I expect events originating from man to produce stronger reactions than events originating from nature if the degree of focus is similar. Due to limits of testing a low *N*, the hypotheses are split into two steps (H1a and H1b, H2a and H2b) instead of using two main hypotheses. When conducting multiple pair wise tests on four cases, the low *N* makes statistical significance hard to reach. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: Among events originating from man, events with a stronger degree of focus will result in stronger emotional and cognitive reactions among citizens than events with a weaker degree of focus.

H1b: Among events originating from nature, events with a stronger degree of focus will result in stronger emotional and cognitive reactions among citizens than events with a weaker degree of focus.

H2a: Among events with a strong degree of focus, events originating from man cause stronger emotional and cognitive reactions among citizens than events originating from nature.

H2b: Among events with a weak degree of focus, events originating from man cause stronger emotional and cognitive reactions among citizens than events originating from nature.

Thus, the two hypotheses concern the causal connection from an event occurring to emotional and cognitive responses as depicted in the theoretical model of affective intelligence. Besides these hypotheses, an interesting open question raises; does the strength or the origin of events produce stronger reactions? According to Fishman (1999) and Birkland (1997), focusing events deriving from natural disasters occur more often in society and the impact from "new" focusing events that are neither routine nor pre-planned are sometimes stronger. Thus, previous findings suggest that more rare events possibly create stronger reactions, which is something we shall tentatively explore here too. For instance, does a strongly focusing event originating from nature produce stronger reactions among citizens than a weakly focusing event originating from man, or vice versa? Additionally, I find it relevant to explore the interrelationship contained within the theory of affective intelligence – i.e. how emotional and cognitive responses interact – receives support in light of the findings of our study. According to the AI theory, these reactions produce thoughtful and attentive citizenry manifested in for example a demand for political change. In the empirical exploration the following hypothesis is used:
H3: Stronger emotional reactions are positively correlated to a higher extent of cognitive reactions.

## 5.5 Method

In this study, the aim is to compare citizens' affective and cognitive reactions to focusing events varying in degree of focus and origin (see typology in Figure 1). To this aim, four news broadcasts depicting four different real-life focusing events from Finland were used as treatment stimuli in a lab experiment (Morton & Williams 2010); two concerning events that are natural disasters – with strong and weaker degrees of focus respectively – and two regarding events that are created by human action – also with variation in the strength of the degree of focus. The participants (*N=30*) were randomly assigned to one of these four different treatment groups[6]. While viewing the stimulus material, participants' pulse and skin conductance level were observed in order to measure their objective, socially uncontrolled, affective reactions to the events (Gruszczynski et al. 2013; Renshon et al. 2015). Immediately after viewing the stimuli, participants filled out a questionnaire containing self-reported measures of affective reactions (SAM and Likert scales), potentially adjusted according to social control, as well as scales measuring cognitive reactions to the event. Psychophysiological reactions can be related to arousal and emotions and are incidental to the decisions process, for example fear and anxiety have been linked to a negative selective retrieval bias (Renshon et al. 2015, 20). Thus, the study applies a post-test only experimental design (Campbell & Stanley 1963). Due to the small number of respondents, each treatment group had either *N=7* or *N=8*, nonparametric tests are applied in analyzing differences between treatment groups. Additionally, since a low-N requires very high effect sizes in order to be statistically significant while maintaining sufficient statistical power (see Kraemer &Thiemann 1987; VanVoorhis & Morgan 2007), we apply a significance level of .10 in our statistical tests. This yields an approximate a priori effect size, Cohen's *d*, of 0.6 with a statistical power of roughly 0.81[7] (see Kraemer & Thiemann 1987).

[6] Chi-square tests and Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric H-tests, which were carried out after the random allocation to groups, showed no differences between the groups for background variables such as; gender, age, education, occupation, media consumption, and trust in societal institutions and actors.

[7] Calculated on-line at http://stat.ubc.ca/~rollin/stats/ssize/b2.html

### 5.5.1 Design

The design of the study is a 2 (strength of focus) x 2 (origin of event) basic factorial design. Each factor has two levels; strong degree of focus or weaker degree (strength of focus factor); originating from man or originating from nature (origin of event factor). The experiment uses a between-subjects analytical design. However, regarding the objective psychophysiological measures of each participant's reactions, within-subject measures are firstly used in order to standardize each individual's psychophysiological values against their individual level. These values are thereafter, in the analytical stage, compared between subjects.

### 5.5.2 Participants

Thirty adults participated in the study. Participants were recruited from a local adult learning center. The participants were aged between 17 and 74 (mean 42 years), 53 % were women and 47 % men. Prior to the actual experiment, a pilot study was conducted to test the stimuli, the questionnaire and the interview questions. A group of graduate students (*N=8*) participated in this successful pilot study.

### 5.5.3 Stimulus materials

The four Finnish crises and disasters which we used as stimuli in the treatment groups were the School shooting in Jokela (man-made/stronger), the water crisis in Nokia (man-made/weaker), the Boxing Day storm (nature/stronger) and the floods in Ostrobothnia (nature/weaker).

Obviously, since all of these events have actually occurred, the time lapse since they had taken place varied when the experiment was conducted in 2013. Thus, it is plausible that the test subjects might remember one event more vividly than the other which could blur the results of the experiment. However, we maintain that all of these events are all well-known to Finnish citizens and that such a memory-effect ought not to have been a de facto problem[8]. Additionally, it should be pointed out that the

[8] This assessment also appeared valid in light of what the test subjects indicated in the debriefing interviews at the end of the experiment.

variation in time lapse is only present in comparisons across origins, not within the same origin.

The stimuli used consisted of television news broadcast of approximately three minutes length. Each focusing event had its own stimulus, so, there were four different broadcasts. The members of each treatment group saw only one stimulus. The video news broadcasts originated from the newscast belonging to the Finnish public broadcasting service, Yleisradio (YLE). In order to ensure that the format itself would not affect the test subject's reactions, the four different stimuli broadcasts were edited to resemble each other as far as possible. This allowed us to compare the reactions between the four different groups. Each stimulus started with the newsreader briefly introducing the audience to what had happened. Subsequently, there were different reports ranging from eyewitnesses accounts of the event to stories of people who were on the scene describing what they saw. Thereafter, a clip was shown of either a government official or an expert discussing the incident and attempting to explain what had happened. Finally, a clip was shown about the impact the event had had on society and various proposals for action were discussed.

### 5.5.4 Emotional reactions

#### *Self-reported measurements*

Emotional reactions were measured after exposure to the stimuli using the Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM) form (Bradley & Lang 1994). The SAM consists of graphic symbols on a nine-point scale to represent three different dimensions of emotion: pleasure/happiness, arousal, and dominance. In this study, two of the dimensions were used; whether the stimulus gave rise to positive and pleasant feelings or negative emotions, and whether the test subject felt excited or calm during the exposure to stimulus. Previous research shows that the two dimensions of pleasure/happiness and arousal together account for a large part of the emotion variance which a person experiences (Bradley & Lang 1994, 55). SAM is an established measuring instrument and an effective method that has been widely used in previous research, including studies on the emotions associated with pictures, sounds, or advertising (for a review see e.g. Bradley & Lang 1994, 51). Many studies involving

television or film clips in combination with SAM have already been implemented, such as Lombard et al. (2000), Palomba et al. (2000) and Zhou (2005).

Emotional reactions were also measured in a questionnaire that the subject completed immediately after seeing the stimulus material. In the questionnaire, the subject filled out an evaluation of six basic emotions (anger, fear, anxiety, sadness, happiness and hope) on a seven-point scale. The emotions chosen were such which are often used in research on media, news and political consequences (e.g. Brader and Valentino 2007; Huddy et al. 2007; Neuman et al. 2007). The self-reported negative emotions of anger, fear, anxiety and sadness together with the two SAM measurements were combined to one variable measuring the test subjects' combined extent of negative emotions (Cronbach's alpha 0.78). The SAM measurements were standardized to a seven-point scale to be comparable to the other negative emotions; all measurements were then summarized and divided by six, representing the test subject's self-reported emotional reactions.

### *Psychophysiological measurements*

Since there are arguably elements of social control involved in completing self-report questionnaires describing emotions – i.e. the test subject can alter their response as he or she feels is expected and socially acceptable – we opted for also using psychophysiological measures of emotional reaction. This provides us with objective measures of the citizens' emotional reactions of the kind described in the theory of affective intelligence. The psychophysiological measurements used in this study were pulse and skin conductance (SCL). In order to achieve comparability between subjects, SCL was standardized using each test subject's own maximum and minimum values. Sensors were attached to the test subject's hand to measure heart rate and skin conductance. Skin conductance reflects both the subject's emotional and cognitive activity and electro-dermal activity may be seen as "the state of the organism's interaction with its environment" (Stern et al. 2001, p. 206). Moreover, skin conductance can be described as either skin conductance level or skin conductance response (SCR). The difference, however, is that SCL refers to basal activity (tonic), while SCR refers to the response to a stimulus. In this study we use SCL since it provides a tonic, slowly habituating measure of arousal (Alexander et al. 2005, p. 116). Skin conductance data was collected ten times per second with a

collection range of 0.01 to 40.95 μMho. Skin conductance and heart rate were collected using two Ag-AgCl standard electrodes attached to the participant's non-dominant hand, and data was collected using an UFI MSDCS system. Heart rate or pulse plethysmograph (PPG) measures blood flow changes in the skin with values from 30 to 240 beats per minute and is used as a measure of attention (Stern et al. 2001; Grabe et al. 2003).

### 5.5.5 Cognitive reactions

Citizens' cognitive reactions were all measured in the post-test questionnaire using seven-point Likert scales. These covered two aspects: what institutions have social responsibility and what societal institutions should do more when similar events occur?

#### *Social responsibility*

The respondents answered a 9-item question, each item being on a seven-point Likert scale where 1=no responsibility and 7=full responsibility, concerning which societal institutions have responsibility in similar events contained in the stimulus material. In line with Rothstein's (2003) three dimensions of institutional trust – the representative, the implementing and the reviewing – the societal institution included in the items were the government, the parliament, political parties, the police, the military, rescue services, newspapers, radio and television, as well as citizens. The nine items were combined into a summarized scale ranging between values 1 and 7 (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80).

#### *Do more*

Respondents were asked how these institutions or actors should act in a similar situation, if they should do more. On the Likert scale, 7 represented that they should do more while 1 represented that they do enough as it is today. The measures for each institution were summarized into one scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91).

### 5.5.6 Procedure

Data collection took place in a user experience laboratory at Åbo Akademi University in Finland during two weeks in April 2013. Each test session was scheduled to take approximately one hour. Initially, each subject received information about the test session's procedure and a reminder that data is treated confidentially. Next, the subject filled out a short questionnaire with demographic variables and information about media consumption and confidence in government agencies and social institutions. Also questions about the subject's trauma history were included. The trauma questions used in the study were from the Traumatic Life Events Questionnaire (TLEQ) (Kubany et al. 2000). Test subjects were asked to answer questions about different types of traumatic events such as experience of a traffic accident or a natural disaster, since such trauma history might have affected the person's emotions when watching the stimuli material (Weathers et al. 2009). Thankfully, no test subject had any relevant trauma history.

Thereafter, each subject sat down in an armchair and the collection of psychophysiological measurements started. As an introduction a quiet and restful image was shown on the television screen, while the test subject was instructed to relax. The picture was taken from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS), with a valence of 6.36 and arousal of 2.51 on a nine-point scale. The measurements are based on SAM and indicate that the picture is seen as neutral and not very arousing by most people. A baseline consisting of the individual's normal values was obtained during this phase. Thereafter, the test subject saw a short and neutral video material in order make the person feel more comfortable in the laboratory setting. Also, we deemed it likely that the first stimulus would receive higher responses because of the test situation itself. Moreover, it is also necessary to have a comparison of how test subjects normally react to a television report, as psychophysiological reactions can vary greatly between individuals.

## 5.6 Results

We present the findings by firstly, in Table 1, showing the descriptive findings (group median values) for each dependent measure according to stimuli groups. Thereafter, we demonstrate in Tables 2, how the findings relate to hypothesis H1a, H1b and hypothesis H2a and H2b respectively.

**Table 1.** Findings of study 1.

| | Emotional reactions | | | Cognitive reactions | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Self-reported emotions | Pulse | SCL | Social responsibility | Do more |
| Man-made/strong (N=8) | 5.07 | 83.5 | 41.2 | 5.33 | 3.89 |
| Man-made/weak (N=7) | 3.19 | 74.9 | 41.2 | 4.44 | 3.11 |
| Nature/strong (N=8) | 3.31 | 74.4 | 31.5 | 5.61 | 2.78 |
| Nature/weak(N=7) | 3.30 | 65.0 | 37.7 | 5.33 | 4.00 |

**Note:** Figures for self-reported emotions, social responsibility and do more are median values on scales ranging between 1 and 7. Figures for pulse and SCL are the median values per group. Man-made/strong = Jokela School Shooting, Man-made/weak = Nokia water crisis, Nature/strong = The Boxing Day Storm, Nature/weak = The floods.

Observing the findings in Table 1, the median values for the Jokela stimuli group (classified as a strongly focusing event originating from man) generally are among the highest among all dependent variables. The findings are much more mixed for the remaining three stimuli groups making it hard to discern any clear patterns.

I now proceed by judging our hypotheses in light of the descriptive findings presented thus far. This is done in Table 2, where we present the findings for each hypothesis and according to each dependent variable. Since non-parametric tests are applied, all tests of between-group differences are carried out on mean ranks using Mann-Whitney independent sample test.

**Table 2.** Findings in light of the hypotheses 1 and 2.

| | **Emotional reactions** | | | **Cognitive reactions** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Self-reported emotions | Pulse | SCL | Social responsibility | Do more |
| H1a (Jokela vs. Nokia) | 11.38 > 4.14** | 10.38>5.29* | n.s. | 10.00 > 5.71† | n.s. |
| H1b (Storm vs. Floods) | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| H2a (Jokela vs. Storm) | 12.38 > 4.63*** | 10.63>6.38† | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |
| H2b (Nokia vs. Floods) | n.s. | 10.43>4.57** | n.s. | ~~5.36 < 9.64~~ | n.s. |

† = Mann-Whitney significant at p<.010; *=p<.05 ** = p<.01; *** = p<.001
**Note:** Figures in strikethrough font are in the opposite direction of what is predicted in the corresponding hypothesis.

Concerning H1a, the findings for the relevant pair wise comparison, between the Jokela and Nokia stimuli groups, show that there were three significant differences, among the five possible, which all supported the hypothesis. These were concerning self-reported emotions with a non-parametric effect size Cliff's delta of 0.95 (see Macbeth et al. 2009), pulse (Cliff's d=0.70) and social responsibility (Cliff's d=0.54). Thus, the null-hypothesis can, on balance, be rejected for H1a. Concerning hypothesis H1b, no significant between-group differences were found in the relevant pair wise comparison of the Storm and Floods stimuli groups. Concerning this hypothesis, consequently, the null-hypothesis is not rejected. For hypothesis H2a, two significant between-group differences (Jokela stimuli compared to Storm stimuli), which both supported the

hypothesis, where found. These were regarding self-reported emotions (Cliff's d=0.95) and pulse (Cliff's d=0.52). Tentatively, in light of these two significant findings at least, the null-hypothesis can be rejected. Finally, regarding hypothesis H2b, the null-hypothesis is not rejected. Although there were two statistically significant between-group differences (Nokia compared to Floods) – concerning pulse (Cliff's d=0.84) and social responsibility (Cliff's d=-0.37) – these were in contradicting directions. Thus, the findings concerning pulse supported H2b whilst the findings for social responsibility did not support H2b. In summary, it is noteworthy that the non-parametric effect sizes were generally medium or large as was also to be expected in light of the a priori approximation of statistical power of the experiment.

Finally, I turn to the research questions concerning the relative importance of strength and/or origin in affecting citizens' reactions, and to the exploration of the degree to which our findings shed light on the relationships between emotional and cognitive reactions contained within the theory of affective intelligence, respectively. Regarding the former of these, the findings of the experiment (see Table 1) show that in light of statistically significant between-group differences when comparing reactions crosswise in the analytical typology (origin/strength), strength of a focusing event seems to cause somewhat stronger reaction regardless of origin. First and foremost, though, it is noteworthy that most between-group comparisons did not find any statistically significant differences. Nonetheless, three statistically significant differences were found: firstly, a strongly focusing event originating from nature (Storm) causes significantly stronger reactions than a weakly focusing event originating from man (Nokia) for social responsibility (Cliff's delta = 0.57). Likewise, in the other relevant crosswise comparison – between a strongly focusing event originating from man (Jokela) and a weakly focusing event originating from nature (Floods) – the former causes statistically stronger reactions concerning self-reported emotions (non-parametric effect size, Cliff's delta = 0.77) and pulse (non-parametric effect size, Cliff's delta = 0.84).

Secondly, I examine the findings concerning the third hypothesis, i.e. the correlation between emotional and cognitive reactions, suggested in the theory of affective intelligence. Thus far, the findings show that events did cause some emotional and cognitive reactions among the test subjects. Nonetheless, we have not yet addressed the potential connection between emotional reactions and cognitive

reactions. Did emotional reactions among our test subjects also correlate to cognitive reactions? Thus far, the analyses have not provided any clear indications of any particular event producing strong correlations between both types of reactions. Often, either one type of reaction occurred but not so much the other. Initially, in the empirical tests of this correlation, I also tested the same correlations for each stimuli group separately but found no significant correlations on the group level. Therefore, I additionally test this with two Spearman's rank-correlations; one in which self-reported affective reactions *for all individual subjects* (*N=30*) are compared to a summarized scale of all cognitive reactions[9], and one in which the combined psychophysiological measures – e.g. the value of pulse and SCL added together and divided by two – for all subjects (*N=30*) of affective reactions are compared to the same sum of cognitive reactions[10]. Regarding the former of these tests, the findings support the assumptions of the AI theory; stronger emotional reactions were significantly positively correlated to stronger cognitive reactions (Spearman's Rho=.42 sig.=.02). However, when using the *psychophysiological* measures of emotional reactions, there is no significant correlation between emotional and cognitive reactions (Spearman's Rho=.21 sig.=.27). This raises some interesting questions since it challenges the AI theory's assumption. According to the theory, to reiterate, an event triggers emotional arousal unconsciously as a biological necessity (e.g. Damasio 2003) which, according to Graber for instance (2007, 265), could interact with cognitive reactions. However, as indicated above, when measuring such "unconscious" reactions with the appropriate measures of biological psychophysiological emotional reactions, there was no correlation between emotional reactions and cognitive reactions. Thus, interestingly, the theory fits focusing events better when emotional reactions are subject to social control in answering a post-test questionnaire than when they are approximated with measures of objective, unconscious, reactions during the exposure to the stimuli. I will discuss the implications and limitations of this further in the conclusions.

[9] The scale was constructed by summarizing the values for the variables "social responsibility" and "do more" and dividing that figure by two.

[10] Additionally, I tested the correlations between pulse and cognitive reactions, and between SCL and cognitive reactions separately. Neither of these resulted in any statistically significant findings.

## 5.7 Discussion and conclusions

As McDermott (2007, 393) desiderates, more work needs to be done beyond the American context to achieve a wider acceptance and information concerning the ability to generalize from the AI theory. The political implications of emotions might vary within the context of divergent social, political and cultural structures. Thus, even if citizens in different societies share an emotional experience, the cultural and cognitive expressions may differ (*ibid.).* Consequently, the current study contributes to existing knowledge of AI in its' focus on a European context where citizens' emotional and cognitive reactions to crises and catastrophes beyond the U.S. context are examined. To summarize, in this section, the main findings emanating from this examination are discussed and directions for future research are explained.

The findings of this study might be deemed as both unsurprising on the one hand, and surprising on the other. Thus, as was to be expected in light of previous research (e.g. Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Birkland 1997; 2006; Eriksson & Noreen 2004; Graber 2007), the findings showed that an event with a stronger degree of focus brings about more emotional and cognitive reactions than an event with a weaker degree of focus, albeit only among events originating from man. This was evident in the quite strong support for hypothesis 1a, which tested the impact of strength for events originating from man. Likewise, the crosswise comparison of events of varying degree of focusing strength and origin, i.e. the first open research question, tentatively indicated that a stronger degree of focus was predominant in producing more reactions among our test subjects.

Turning to the more surprising findings, two aspects of the experiment merit further attention. Firstly, as this study is to my knowledge the first studies testing an event's strength of focus and its origin in the same experiment, the findings shed some further light on how these might relate to each other and how they cause reactions among citizens. In hypotheses H2a and H2b, I tested the effects of origin when focusing strength was kept constant in turn. The findings showed that an event originating from man tended to cause stronger emotional and cognitive reactions among our test subjects, *but* only if the event had a strong degree of focus. For events with a weaker degree of focus, the origin of the event made no difference for the reactions. Hence, if an event has a strong enough degree of focus, the findings lend

some support to Eriksson's and Noreen's suggestion (2004) that threats and crises where we are able to identify the actor responsible – i.e. those originating from man – clearly becomes easier to combat and discuss. More novel are the findings concerning the relative impact of focusing strength and origin on citizens' reactions where we saw that in the two significant between-group differences, strength "triumphed" over origin. So mainly, albeit my findings are only tentative here due to many between-group differences not being significant, this is in line with Graber's findings (2007, 267) that both emotional and cognitive reactions seem to mostly be contingent on the magnitude of danger in the event and not on who or what caused it. Bearing in mind how focusing events occur in reality – usually, if not always, one at a time – these findings are rather logical.

The second aspect which can be deemed surprising in the experiment concerns the findings regarding the relationship between emotional and cognitive reactions illustrated in the theory of affective intelligence. Even though this was not one of the main points of interest a priori, it emanates as perhaps one of the most important findings of the study. Especially intriguing is the finding that emotional reactions measured by psychophysiological measures did not correlate with cognitive reaction whereas emotional reactions gauged in the self-completion questionnaire did correlate significantly to cognitive reactions. Of course, one could argue that the self-reported and psychophysiological measures used here gauge different types of emotions which would explain the discrepancy in their connections to cognitive reactions. As McDermott (2007, 378) points out, one of the differences between self-reported emotions and skin conductance and heart rate is the difference in timing. Psychophysiological reactions during a stimulus might measure different psychological processes than self-reported emotions, which include elements of memory processing and semantics. Hence, there seems to be more work to be done in integrating psychophysiological measurements with self-reported scales of emotions. Also, one should bear in mind that the AI theory seeks to explain actual reactions – i.e. how people react to sudden and *real* danger and how that spills over to cognitive reactions which may have *real* policy implications – whereas an experiment always suffers in terms of external validity. Thus, even though we preempted this by using real life events as the basis for our stimuli, the connection from the unconscious emotional reactions to the self-reported cognitive reactions might have been broken

due to the fact that these events nonetheless had already occurred and the test subjects did not consciously perceive any real current danger in them. Arguably, in hindsight, manipulation checks of the stimuli would have been helpful. However, although this method has its restrains and could be further refined, I still think that experimental research has an important contribution to the discussion concerning political processes following focusing events. It should also be stressed that using stimuli depicting fabricated disasters and catastrophes have obvious problems with external validity too. Nonetheless, even though there are clear limitations regarding our findings concerning the AI theory, these initial and tentative findings suggest that future studies ought to further explore the mechanisms contained within the theory. Furthermore, it is also feasible that other factors besides strength and origin influence the emotional and cognitive reactions of citizens, for example the level of external efficacy of the test subjects. Nevertheless, I deem it highly unlikely that this factor would influence the results due to the randomization of the test subjects. Finally, on the note of limitations, the ability to generalize from the findings is limited by the low N in this study. Nevertheless, many laboratory studies have a limited number of participants because of the time and recourse consuming methods used. In specific, measuring and analyzing psychophysiological reactions is extremely time-consuming.

The context of focusing events may condition their effects (McDermott 2007, 393). Hence, possibly the Finnish cultural and cognitive expressions may manifest themselves quite reservedly and cautiously due to certain intangible aspects of Finnish political culture. Examples of these aspects were seen in the aftermath of the Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004 and how it caused societal reaction in the Nordic countries. In Finland, the criticism from citizens concerning the governmental response was short-lived and the event had no political implication, in contrast to a deafening disapproval in Sweden resulting in a prolonged political crisis (Kivikuru and Nord 2009, 11). Hence, the political culture in Finland has traditionally given the state a strong position and policy making operates more hierarchically, making cognitive demands from citizens more infrequent. Therefore, the topic concerning the context of divergent social, political and cultural structures – and their influence on cultural and cognitive expressions – need further investigation and elaboration.

# 6. Media framing and blame attribution of focusing events

## 6.1 Introduction

Occasionally, in every society, ordinary life is interrupted by extraordinary events that are considered to be threatening enough to arouse feelings of sudden uncertainty (Boin et al. 2008, 3). One Monday morning, in December 2004, an earthquake occurred west of Sumatra. This resulted in two giant tidal waves, or tsunamis, smashing over towns and villages all along the Indian Ocean coastline, in what can be described as one of the worst natural disasters of our time. Although the event occurred thousands of kilometers from the Nordic countries, the incident nonetheless generated political implications in Finland and Sweden, since many northerners were affected by the event. When unexpected and dramatic events occur, the communication between policy makers, the media and citizens influences the democratic foundations of trust, accountability and legitimacy (Kivikuru & Nord 2009, 9). During times of crisis, citizens rely on the media for information – thus providing the media with great potential influence over the framing and blame attribution of an event. This is illustrated in the fact that disaster news affects public perceptions and concerns in times of crisis. However, another aspect is the competition between actors to frame the media coverage according to their individual self-interests (Salwen 1995, 827).

Media coverage of crises and disasters creates a framework for the comprehension of focusing events – what has happened, who is responsible, and how the problem should be solved (Atkeson & Maestas 2012, 30). Initially, the media act as a channel for information to the public, by supplying reports from eyewitnesses and victims. As the event develops, other sources, such as organizations, experts, officials and decision-makers are included in the coverage. Concerning the sources used in disaster

reporting, actors tend to accentuate themselves and blame others (Salwén 1995, 835). Moreover, the same study showed that state officials were cautious in their accusations and chose to present themselves as defenders of the public and the victims. Yet, as soon as the first articles and the first pictures are published, the coverage contributes to the explanation, understanding and framing of an event (Entman 2003). Framing can be explained in terms of the media highlighting certain aspects of an event – through pictures, quotes and comments – while downplaying others. However, the framing of focusing events changes and develops over time (Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Li 2007; Muschert 2009). Different frameworks are used to describe and explain the incident, e.g. an initial focus on how humans are affected by the incident might over time emphasize economic consequences. Thus, focusing events become politicized rather quickly. As such, political, economic or societal actors do not want to concede their interests simply because a crisis happened, rather "they engage in a struggle to produce a dominant interpretation of the implications of the crisis" (Boin et al. 2008, 9).

The tsunami catastrophe received extensive coverage, e.g. it was the event that received the most media attention in Sweden during a two-week time span since the 1990s (Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2009, 189). Moreover, the news media are often the only source of information about what has happened and how the authorities managed the situation, resulting in citizens having to rely on the news in order to understand and evaluate the incident (Jääsaari 2009, 59). Natural disasters are interesting because there is no clear enemy or responsible actor to blame and the framing of the event is therefore open to debate. This was visible in the media coverage of the tsunami in Finland and Sweden (Jääsaari 2009). The blame game that occurred in the Finnish media emanated from a temporary confusion and distrust of the decision-makers, while the Swedish responsibility attribution developed into a prolonged political crisis, resulting in a weak election result for the Social Democrats in 2006 (Henderson & Sitter 2007, 207; Jääsaari 2009, 57). The tsunami catastrophe had an impact on the Finnish political arena too. However, this was more in terms of learning rather than causing changes in the political situation, e.g. Jääsaari (2009) mentions improvements in crisis communications following natural disasters. In light of the above, it can be seen that crises and catastrophes tend to cast long shadows on society, resulting in blame attribution and discussions on how to anticipate similar

events in the future. Moreover, crises and catastrophes can also shatter or damage political careers.

The purpose of this study is to compare the media coverage following four different focusing events of varying degrees of strength (weaker versus stronger) and origin (man-made versus natural disasters). Since the media message helps shape broader political outcomes, Atkeson and Maestas (2012, 191) call for studies that compare different types of disasters. The framing and blame attribution of these events are important because the media is likely to be an agenda setter and shape the outcome of the incidents. Moreover, as Boin et al. (2009) demonstrate, crisis outcome is affected by historical, cultural and political variables. Therefore, it is fruitful to study events in the same context. The main research question in this study concerns whether different types of disasters result in different types of media coverage. It has already been proved that media reports about focusing events play a particularly important role in society, since a comprehensive coverage is often linked to increased attention both in the parliamentary arena and among citizens (e.g. Smith 1996).

## 6.2 Theoretical background

Theories of agenda setting and framing show that the media has a key role to play in how a focusing event is perceived. As such, the media arena is not only a stage where various actors perform, but an important arena where those in power and opposition have to work hard for an event to be understood based on certain explanations (Boin, t' Hart & McConnell 2009). In some situations, the political actors in power manage to emphasize their explanation of the incident well, while in other situations, those in power are pinpointed as the culprits. There are several explanations for this variation, such as how skilled the different actors are in their crisis communications (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeker 2007), or that everything is dependent on the media climate and the willingness of the media to blame actors (Brändström & Kuipers 2003). However, it is less likely that those in power will suffer negative political consequences when the coverage highlights exogenous explanations (Boin et al., 2009). As such, there is a difference in the responsibilities highlighted in the coverage, i.e. whether a causal

responsibility or treatment responsibility is used. A causal responsibility indicates that there is a causal link to the source of the problem, while a treatment responsibility looks into the possibility of mitigating circumstances (Iyengar 1991, 8). When discussing the framing of crises, three different types can be detected (Boin et al. 2008, 19). *Incomprehensible crises* provide considerable room for a framing contest, illustrated by strong focusing events, such as 9/11 or the Asian tsunami. A great deal of confusion and incomprehension leaves room for actors to put forward many different explanations. *Mismanaged crises* represent a failure within governmental institutions and offer an opportunity to emphasize weakness in the legitimacy of decision makers and politicians. The third type of crises are *agenda-setting crises* that demonstrate social vulnerabilities and fears, e.g. nuclear accidents or riots. Such events may affect entire policy domains and open up a wider debate on societal issues (Boin et al. 2008, 19).

The media coverage of focusing events can be divided into three distinct phases (Graber 2009). The initial phase follows immediately after a focusing event has occurred or when the event is developing. During this phase, it is crucial to spread the information about what occurred, especially during perilous situations where the public needs to take action and get to safety (Graber 2009). Moreover, the coverage is often extensive and largely based on reports by eyewitnesses. The characteristic of the first phase is speed and volume, where television, radio, the internet and social media focus society's attention to an extraordinary event. As such, other issues might get disregarded for the moment. The media's role during the first phase is significant because the media coverage is often the only source of information about what happened, both for the average citizen, as well as for politicians. The first phase is followed by an active phase, where the reporting is mainly a matter of sorting out causes and correcting any factual inaccuracies in the initial speculations. Hence, the second phase can be partially represented by the stage in which policy-makers and other actors are trying to influence how the event is perceived and portrayed on the political arena (Graber 2009). When journalists try to place the event in a broader societal and political perspective, the coverage transcends into a third phase that overlaps the previous two phases (*ibid.*). One characteristic of the third phase is that the media evaluate various governmental interventions, often by attributions of blame

and responsibility (Atkeson & Maestas 2012). As Boin et al. (2008, 21) demonstrate, it is clear that the media is an important part of a crisis' aftermath, since without the media arena there would be no venue for exploitation and blame gaming. However, the media coverage of crises and catastrophes is often extensive and can amplify or cast doubt on the political response to an event. A widespread coverage focuses the public's attention and sometimes works as a catalyst, affecting the politicization of the crisis (Boin et al. 2008).

Previous research has emphasized that natural disasters receive attention for shorter periods of time when compared to other issues (Houston et al. 2012). Another characteristic feature of natural disaster coverage is an emphasis on the current event itself, e.g. writing about how many people were injured, physical destruction, or economic aspects. As such, the discussion about the present situation and what is happening at that particular moment is often conducted on a regional level. From an information perspective, the media are successful in conveying information about what happened to the public. Nevertheless, one thing lacking in this type of disaster coverage is a more comprehensive picture of natural disasters, e.g. a discussion about how society has responded to previous disasters, and how these incidents might affect society in the future (Houston et al. 2012, 619).

During the time that a focusing event is featured in the news reports, the frameworks used to describe and explain the incident might change. Frame-changing is used both unconsciously and consciously, e.g. to keep the reporting interesting for the audience (Chyi & McCombs 2004). Usually, two different dimensions vary in the coverage; temporal and spatial aspects. The temporal dimension can either focus on what is happening at the moment, by giving historical explanations to the event, or by evaluating the possible future effects of the event. The second dimension is based on whether the event is presented at a micro or a macro level. This spatial dimension has five levels: an individual level, a community level, a regional level, a societal level, or a level showing the event from an international perspective (*ibid*., 25). Previous research shows that the use of frames discussing the incident at an individual or a group level decreased significantly after the first three weeks, in favor of a more general perspective (Chyi & McCombs 2004, 29). Moreover, the use of different frames in the media coverage can be understood based on Downs' (1972) issue-attention cycle. This theory discussed how awareness about a particular issue evolves through five stages,

from 1) a pre-problem stage, 2) alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm, 3) realizing the cost of significant progress, 4) gradual decline of intense public interest to 5) a post-problem stage.

## 6.3 Framing

Theories of political communication and agenda setting have been used to explain how the media inform audiences about which issues are important (McCombs et al. 1997; Wanta 1997). The theory of framing emphasizes how the media construct different societal problems in the communication process, since the media chooses to highlight particular aspects of reality. Hence, framing includes a definition of the problem, diagnosis of the causes, making moral judgments, and lastly, some form of suggested remedies (Birkland & Lawrence 2009; Entman 1993; Gamson 1992; Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Pan & Kosicki 1993; Reese 2007). In the past decades, the theory of framing has gained popularity in many different academic disciplines, resulting in a slight confusion of the concept. Nevertheless, instead of recognizing the lack of a clear definition as a problem, Reese (2007, 148) emphasizes that therein lies the strength of the theory. Namely, that framing can be seen as "a provocative model that bridges parts of the field that need to be in touch with each other", such as quantitative and qualitative methodology. However, one problem occurs when researchers choose to highlight only the descriptions of the various frameworks that the media uses, without putting them in relation to a larger whole or discussing how these frameworks can change over time (Entman 1993, 52; Reese 2007, 149).

In the description of reality, certain information is left out, while other information is highlighted. This kind of construction is needed if we are to understand a complex world. Likewise, framing is about "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully construct the social world" (Reese 2001, 11). Hence, framing involves something beyond the text, the creation of wider social explanations and patterns. As such, framing within policy-making is used to highlight a particular issue. Furthermore, the construction is often more visible if it concerns a controversial issue (Birkland & Lawrence 2009, 1406).

However, the media can distort the public's perception of an event and prevent a deeper understanding of various societal problems (Muschert 2007, 65). One problem, in this respect, is that news reports focus largely on dramatic events, which undermines a more long-term and holistic analysis of various phenomena. During emergencies and disasters, the media use exceptional pictures, which act as a social construction of an event (Birkland 1997, 11). By comparison, many societal crises and disasters are complex problems that are difficult to comprehend. Hence, the social construction of a problem affects the extent to which an issue is expanded, and influences which starting points are used to find solutions to a problem. For example, a school shooting can be described as a massacre, an execution or a school shooting (Norris et al. 2003, 7). In addition to the framing of the issue, other factors also affect how the issue is perceived by the general public, such as real world indicators, personal experiences and discussion amongst citizens. However, there are strong implications that the current media context plays a major role in shaping public opinion, especially if decision-makers and leaders are united on an issue (Hewitt 1992).

Previous research has identified different types of frameworks found in media coverage (e.g. Neuman, Just & Crigler 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg 2000). Furthermore, some of this research has had a specific focus on crisis and disaster communications (An & Gower 2009; Iyengar 1991; Houston et al. 2012; Li, 2007). Based on the above, the following five recurring frameworks are identified; attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic, human interest, and morality; these will be discussed in turn below. The attribution of responsibility framework describes a problem in such a way that responsibility can be attributed to decision makers, groups or individuals. The responsibility can be portrayed as the occurrence of a problem, or as responsibility for resolving the issue (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, 96). In Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) study of how European politics was framed by national newspapers, attribution of responsibility was the most common framework. The description of responsibility may occur either through an episodic framework, where the focus lies on a specific event or an individual, or as a thematic responsibility (Iyengar 1991, 14). Using a thematic framework places the event in a broader societal perspective by providing background explanations or discussing the issue more generally. One problem with the use of episodic explanations is that citizens could

perceive social problems based on an individual perspective, rather than as a political issue (*ibid.*).

When applying a conflict framework, the media coverage underscores a conflict between individuals, groups or institutions. Describing a problem as a conflict can be understood according to media logic, such as an attempt to capture the audience's attention (Johansson 2004; Nord & Strömbäck 2002). Neuman et al. (1992) studied the media coverage in the US regarding different issues and problems and found that the use of conflict frames were one of the most common approaches. Through a human interest framework, the news is presented through an emotional angle or a personal story (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000). Similar to the conflict frame, a human interest frame aims at catching the audience by enabling identification and dramatizing the news (Nord & Strömbäck, 2002). The use of a human interest frame increases emotional reactions, which correlates with responsibility attribution (Cho & Gower 2006, 422). The fourth framework is an economic angle, which presents an issue, an event or a problem based on the economic consequences for individuals, groups, institutions or countries (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, 96). When reporting on natural disasters, the second most common framework is addressing the disaster costs or business issues (Houston et al. 2012, 614). The fifth framework, i.e. morality framework, places an issue or an event in a moral context by referring to religious principles or moral rules (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, 96). However, since journalists are expected to remain objective, a moral framework is often used by allowing other sources to raise such issues (Neuman et al. 1992).

Focusing events are embedded with emotion, both by those affected by an event and by a collective sorrow in a society (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen 2011, 108). Hence, the visual framing of focusing events is of great importance, since pictures transmit emotions. However, the visual framing is often unexamined in disaster coverage (Rodriquez et al. 2011, 49). Nevertheless, emotions are significant in political life, e.g. as motivators to incite participation in political processes. As such, the mediated picture of focusing events provides an expression of emotions through images, editorials and letters to the editors (Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen 2011, 118).

## 6.4 Blame attribution

During times of extraordinary events, such as crises and catastrophes, the media and the public often attribute blame as a way to understand the event or infer responsibility (Atkeson & Maestas 2012, 160; Mutz 1994). Focusing events motivate a need for journalists and the media to make sense of the situation. At the same time, attributions affect particular avenues for policy-making. As such, discussions about causal responsibility or assignment of blame are a natural part of how the media coverage evolves during times of crisis (Graber 2009). Moreover, criticism of governmental officials occurs more often during a crisis or a catastrophe than under normal circumstances (Salwen 1995). However, the blame attributions following focusing events differ from the normal flow because of the intensity, as well as the extensive attention given to the issue. Hence, journalists rather than elites may influence the framing of such events (Atkeson & Maestas 2012, 9). The politicization of crises and catastrophes tend to evolve around the processes of accountability and learning (Boin et al. 2008, 9). Accountability refers to actors rendering account, often in public forums, of their and other's actions prior to, and following a focusing event. Learning can be defined as the evaluation and redesign of policies and practices (*ibid*.). It has never been easy for political leaders or decision makers to avoid the blame game following a crisis; however, the transformation of the media industry has made things even more difficult (Boin et al. 2008). Aggravating aspects include the growing number of media representatives, the speed of reporting, and increased competition between different media actors, which have resulted in a more aggressive approach toward politicians (Sabato et al. 2000; Nylund 2003). A difference in the attribution of blame may also derive from the characteristics of the event in question. Exogenous factors sometimes play an essential part in this respect. For example, when dealing with natural disasters like floods or tsunamis, it is easier for governmental actors to present an underlying cause for the event, and thus avoid blame. However, when endogenous factors, such as mistakes or negligence, are part of a crisis, it is more difficult to alleviate doubt.

There are different strategies for decision-makers to adopt in times of crisis (e.g. Brändström et al. 2008). Should actors choose to *construct severity,* they can frame the event as a violation of specific core values in society. The more severe an issue is

perceived to be, the more likely actors are to get involved (Rochefort & Cobb 1994). Another strategy is to *construct agency,* and describe an event as an incident or a common problem. A third strategy is to *construct responsibility* and depict the crisis as being caused by an actor (Brändström et al. 2008, 116). In the aftermath of the tsunami catastrophe, governments in the Nordic countries tried to frame the event as "an act of god", to avoid blame; nevertheless, this attempt failed. In Finland and in Norway the public apologies by the governments seemed to relieve the blame when constructing severity. The Swedish government continued to deny responsibility, turning the event into high politics (Brändström et al. 2008, 142–143). In summary, when events are severe enough, and receive an extensive coverage in the media, they arouse a collective stress where "some sort of catharsis is required" (Brändström & Kuipers 2003, 279).

As a summary, the coverage of focusing events can be discussed in terms of temporal and spatial aspects, Phase I, II and III, and on a micro or macro level, since coverage varies over time (Figure 7). It is difficult to separate Phase I and II, especially in today's media environment where the internet speeds up the information flow and descriptions concerning what has occurred are immediately followed by possible explanations. Hence, Phase I and II are merged in the figure, representing the first two weeks of the media coverage. The blame game and attribution of responsibility, visible in Phase III, are most likely to overlap during the initial two weeks.

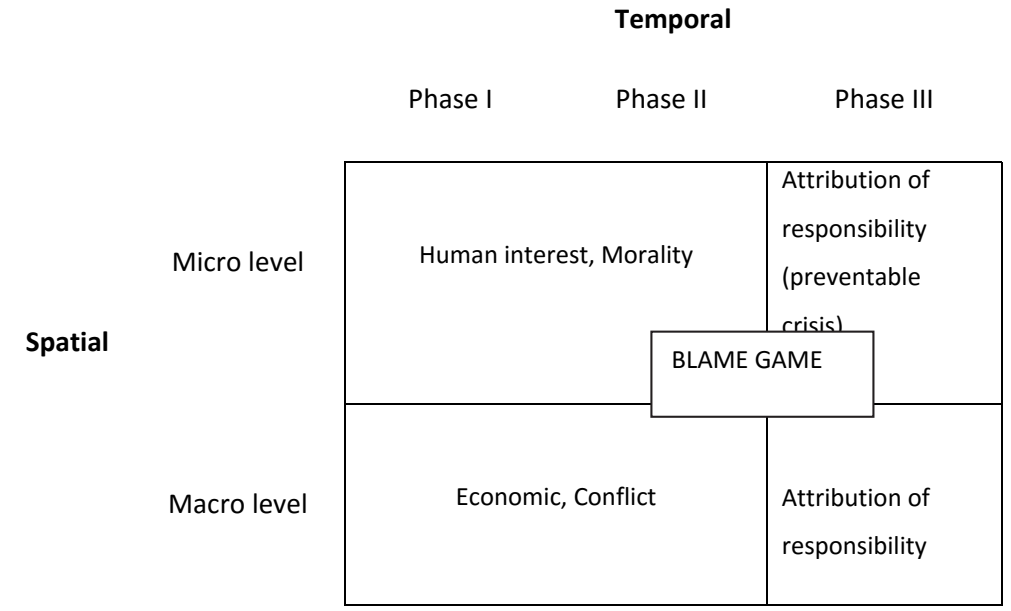


**Figure 7.** Media coverage of focusing events over time.

The use of frames on a micro level will probably decrease after the first weeks (Chyi & McCombs 2004). Moreover, the use of frames varies depending, for example, on the characteristics of the event – some frames are more relevant in the case of a natural disaster and others when discussing a school shooting. Previous research shows that human interest frames and morality frames are used when discussing preventable crises, and when attributing blame on an individual level, while a macro perspective focuses on economic and conflict frames (An & Gower 2009). The attribution of blame might also be present in the second phase, when looking for explanations (Graber 2009).

The aim of this study is to compare how events with a varying degree of focus and origin are covered in the media, proceeding from four main research questions:

RQ1: How much coverage did the focusing events receive?

RQ2: Which different themes were used in the coverage?

RQ3: How did the media frame the events?

RQ4: How was blame attributed in the coverage?

The first research question is descriptive, looking at the quantity of media texts and pictures. The question also considers the characteristics of the texts and images, such as the type of text and distribution over time. The following three questions analyze different aspects of the coverage on a more detailed level. This study contributes to previous research since it focuses on two previously limited research areas, a comparison of different focusing events and the study of visual framing.

## 6.5 Methods

This study uses quantitative content analysis to examine the media reporting following four focusing events: the school shooting in Jokela 2007, the water crisis in Nokia in 2007, the Boxing Day storm in 2011 and the floods in Ostrobothnia in 2012. Content analysis can be defined as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff 2004, 18). The data consists of 521 items of texts and pictures that appeared in the leading Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS). All media coverage – such as news texts, editorials and letters to the editors, as well as pictures and graphics – that was present during the first two weeks following the events was analyzed ($n$ = 498). Letters to the editor were included in the analysis to provide a comprehensive picture of the media coverage following the focusing events. When citizens and politicians read the news, the journalistic coverage represented by news texts and editorials is not the only news of importance, since the voices of citizens act as an interplay between the media agenda and the public agenda. Letters to the editor and stories where ordinary people are used as sources provide a direct channel for blame attribution and criticism toward power holders. Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen (2011, 118) call this "disaster citizenship", which is a democratized systematic critique of power holders.

Moreover, the number of texts and the spatial distribution during the following six months were charted and a randomized sample of texts published during this time period was analyzed ($n$ = 23), in order to take the temporal aspects into account. However, the small n gives only an indication of the Phase III media coverage and the results will not be used to compare the two time spans, but merely to illustrate what

frames were used later on in the coverage. A six-month limitation corresponds with the findings of Houston et al. (2012) that the average time span of disaster media coverage is 178 days (5.93 months)[11].

The material was compiled from Helsingin Sanomat's printed versions. All HS printed newspapers since 2003 are available online (www.hs.fi/paivanlehti/). HS has a dominant position in Finnish society with 849,000 readers daily (2012–2013)[12], compared to the second largest newspaper *Aamulehti*, which has 281,000 readers daily. HS's influence is noticeable since the newspaper is important to power-holders as an effective channel for addressing peer groups and for following the elite debate in society (Kunelius, Noppari & Reunanen 2009, 265–269). Furthermore, HS is a significant agenda-setter and source of information for other Finnish newspapers, influencing which issues are regarded as important. Given the strong position HS holds on the media arena, HS might be regarded as a watchdog in society (Lounasmeri 2013, 385).

The focus of the analysis is divided into two time periods, because of the different phases of media reporting on crises (see e.g. Graber 2009). As such, the first two weeks are more likely to deal with descriptions of what has happened, along with a discussion of possible explanations (Phase I and II). During the first two weeks following the focusing events, all printed newspapers were analyzed. All articles and paragraphs referring to the event on the first page and inside the paper were coded, as well as letters to the editor, editorials, editorial columns, expert comments (vieräskynä), pictures and graphics concerning the event. During the second period of reporting (Phase III), when the media might try to place the event into a larger societal perspective (Graber 2009), texts concerning the event, present during the following six months period, were analyzed. The texts selected from the second time period were

[11] That is when hurricane Katrina was excluded from the sample. Katrina received a massive, 1,920 days coverage.

[12] Kansallinen Mediatutkimus, KMT. 2013.
http://www.levikintarkastus.fi/mediatutkimus/Kokonaistavoittavuus%20S12-K13.pdf

found through the HS digital search archive using keywords related to the event[13]. A randomized sample of material was selected for analysis. If the texts during the second phase were distributed evenly throughout the time span, a randomized sample was selected. However, if the material was packed together in larger clusters throughout the six months period, articles were selected from all the larger clusters.

### 6.5.1 Coding measurements

The coding scheme used in the quantitative analysis was developed from previous research (Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Birkland 2006; Bytzek 2008; Chyi & McCombs 2004; Houston et al. 2012; Lawrence 2001; Li 2007; Semetko & Valkenburg 2000).

#### *Descriptive data*

Initially, basic data was compiled (see Appendix A for details). Each text was first identified by the focusing event it dealt with. The information collected was the headline, the date, placement in the newspaper and centimeters of column space together with the number of words. The producer of the text and the type of text was also noted. The text's theme was then described in a few words. A text's theme refers to the general meaning of the text or a recurring typical thesis in the text (Altheide 1996, 30). In the second stage of analysis, the themes were recoded into more general variables to enable a comparison between the four events. An illustration of this is the theme "problems that the event created", which was characterized by phrases such as 'troubles with the supply of electricity' (Boxing Day Storm), 'stomach disease epidemic' (Nokia Water Crisis) or 'evacuation of citizens' (The Floods).

The character of the text is connected to the nature of the frame, which is either descriptive, attributive, or affective (Li 2007, 674). Interestingly, this character may vary depending on which phase of the reporting the text occurs in. Moreover, Graber (2009) found that the different stages of media reporting in times of crisis are flexible and overlapping, which illustrates why it is necessary to code the main character of the item correctly. In this way, the descriptive character parallels to the media's role

[13] For example the key words for the Jokela school shooting was "Jokela*", "koulusurma* [school shoot*]" and "Auvinen". A review of the result identified articles referring to the school shooting in question.

as an informant in the first stage of a crisis. In other words, if the text is mainly relating to what has happened, it is coded as descriptive. On the other hand, if the characters of a text correspond to the media's function of explaining and making sense of an event during the second phase, it is coded as attributive. Hence, an example of an attributive text is the discussion about SSRI-medicines prescribed to the Jokela school shooter, and their possible connection to his destructive and aggressive behavior. Media texts that are coded as affective are linked to the third phase, where the news media try to explain the issue in a more long-term perspective (Li 2007, 674). An example of a text coded as affective is the discussion on how emergency messages in a crisis situation will appear on television in the future, and not only on the radio, following the Nokia water crisis.

### *Dominant actors*

The actors and sources used to comment and contextualize the focusing event in texts are key components to how the event is defined and what issues are brought to discussion (Lawrence 2001, 101). Journalists have a central role in choosing which views to amplify, especially in the case of a disagreement of the cause of the problem. One important distinction is the proportion of non-official actors, such as citizens and interest groups, and their participation in the debates. When observing the sources used in the national reporting in the US after the Columbine School shooting, 38 % of the actors were public officials and 33 % experts, compared to representatives from interest groups (8 %) and citizens (24 %) (Lawrence 2001, 104). However, gaining access to the debate does not guarantee success in the struggle over problem definition, since actors such as experts seldom represents a unified opinion (Lawrence 2001, 105). The actors interviewed in the texts were coded according to group type, such as academic, interest group, journalist, public official or victim (e.g. Birkland 2006, 77; Lawrence 2001, 104).

### *Blame attribution*

The texts analyzed were coded for attribution of blame. The measurements used for this analysis were drawn from previous work by Atkeson and Maestas (2012), who analyzed the media message environment following Hurricane Katrina with a focus

on blame attribution. Attributions of blame may be implicit, such as the tone of the report or leading statements, or explicit in the form of direct statements. In this study, explicit attributions of blame, defined as an expression of some kind of responsibility for what has happened, were coded. When an attribution occurred in the text, the coder noted the speaker making the attribution and the target of the attribution. Moreover, the time frame to which the attribution was referring was coded as either a preparation failure or a response failure. Moreover, the reason for the attribution of blame was registered (Atkeson & Maestas 2012, 204–207). An example of this is the statement from the Minister for the Interior, Päivi Räsänen, regarding how the criticism of the power producing companies after the Boxing Day storm is justified, since the companies had serious shortcomings concerning the supply of electricity. This statement was coded as a public official making the attribution, while a corporation was the target and the time frame was a response failure[14].

### *Framing*

Previous research has emphasized that visual framing is less studied than the framing of texts (Matthes 2009). However, when studying focusing events like natural disasters or school shootings, the events are often given extensive visual coverage in the media. In the same way that textual material accentuates some aspects of reality, so does visual material (Kruif 2009). Therefore, both visual and textual framing is analyzed in this study. However, since the aim of the study is to compare the framing of four different events, and not to deduct contingently emerging frames, this study will use a previously developed measurement of media framing.

To analyze which frames were used in the textual reporting, a previous framing measurement developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) was used. The measurement is used by other researchers concerning a wide range of topics (e.g. An

[14] Sähköyhtiöt ovat saaneet myrskyn hoidosta rankkaa kritiikkiä. Moni on arvostellut ennen kaikkea suurimman yhtiön, Fortumin, tiedottamista. Eilen kritiikkiin yhtyi sisäministeri Päivi Räsänen (kd). "Myrskyn hoidossa on ollut todella suuria ongelmia ja pahoja puutteita nimenomaan sähköyhtiöiden kohdalla. Sähkönsaannin keskeytyminen on ollut kaikkien ongelmien keskeinen syy", hän sanoi.

& Gower 2009; de Vreese et al. 2001; Dimitrova et al. 2005; Igartua et al. 2005). The coding scheme included 20 questions to which the coder had to answer yes (1) or no (0). Each question represents one of five frames: attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality and economic dimensions. The questions used were such as "Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?" (attribution of responsibility) and "Is there a mention of the cost/degree of expense involved" (economic). The attribution of responsibility frame presents accountability to either some level of government or an individual/group. The human interest frame illustrates how individuals are affected by the issue, or present an emotional angle to capture the audience's interest. The conflict frame emphasizes a disagreement between actors, often used when a political discussion is reduced to simplistic conflicts (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000). The morality frame discusses the issue in terms of religious tenets or moral prescriptions, while the economic frame is used to cover a problem concerning economic consequences or the degree of expenses involved (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000). Previous research (e.g. d'Haenens & De Lange 2001; Holt & Major 2010; Semetko & Valkenburg 2000) has investigated how the questions cluster together and the five previously discussed frames were distinguishable. To measure the occurrence of frames a yes-no category was used in the analysis[15].

### *Images and graphics*

In the analysis of images and graphics used in the media reporting of focusing events, the measurements of the item's height and length were registered to calculate square centimeters. This was done as a comparison between the proportions of text percentage and image percentage of the coverage. Moreover, actors visible in the images and the framing of the images were coded. The variable "actors" visible in the images were the same as used in the measurement of dominant news source.

Concerning the framing of images, previous studies have analyzed which frames are present in the media environment (e.g. Borah 2009; Fahmy 2004; Messaris &

[15] A principal component analysis with varimax rotation on the 20 framing questions was conducted and the analysis yielded a factor solution in which the framing questions clustered into five frames, explaining 54.7 % of the variance.

Abraham 2001). A specific focus on the images present in crisis and catastrophe media reporting found five categories of visible frames: loss versus gain, pragmatic, human interest, political and other (Ali & Mahmood 2013; Borah 2009, 51). The loss versus gain frame, for example, emphasizes lives saved or lives lost. The coding of "lives lost" included the images of deceased people, compared to "lives saved" images that focus on survivors and the relief and rescue work being done. Not many "lives lost" images were found in this study, but one illustration is a portrait image of the headmaster of the Jokela High School, who was killed in the school shooting. Images coded as "lives saved", for example, represented police officers and fire fighters cleaning up after the Boxing Day storm and the Floods. The pragmatic frame was represented by physical destruction – often illustrated by flooded homes, shattered buildings or general destruction following the events. The human interest frame was divided into three subcategories. The first subcategory was emotional framing, represented by images of grieving and suffering citizens and victims showing strong emotions. The second subcategory was human interest framing, portraying victims and people affected by the event, albeit with the absence of strong emotions in the image. The third subcategory was ordinary citizen framing, showing regular people as spectators and not as victims. The political frame was represented by images of politicians, sometimes they were seen visiting the disaster area but many were portrait images. The framing category "other" was represented by images of weapons or medicines in the school shooting case. A separate category was included concerning images of school shooters - dominated by images of Auvinen, the Jokela school shooter, although images of American school shooters were also included.

Concerning graphical features, the height and length of the graphics was noted, along with a comment of what the graphic represented.

An inter-coder reliability test was conducted on a randomized sample of 30 stories for the variables character, blame attribution and framing using simple agreement (Holsti's formula)[16], with the lowest score of .93 for the framing variables and .80 for character and blame attribution.

[16] Holsti's intercoder reliability (IR) formula was used as follows: IR = 2M/(N1 + N2), where M equals the number of agreements between the coders, N1 is the total number of coding decisions made by Coder 1 and N2 is the total number of coding decisions made by Coder 2.

## 6.6 Findings

Following the coding processes outlined in the preceding section, a total of 350 texts and 171 images and graphics from HS were included in a content analysis to identify differences between different types of disaster coverage. Since a low-N requires very high effect sizes in order to show statistic significances while maintaining sufficient statistical power (see Kraemer & Thiemann, 1987; VanVoorhis & Morgan, 2007), I apply a significance level of .10 in the statistical tests. The agreements between events are measured by Kendall's coefficient of concordance, W. The coefficient illustrates differences in the values of Kendall's W from unity, which represents full agreement. The initial two weeks of media coverage represents a total population, hence, statistical tests are redundant. However, the tests conducted are used to indicate small or large differences between the events. The findings will be reported as four different events in this section, and discussed according to strength and origin in the concluding discussion section.

The first research question asked how much coverage the focusing events received. As Table 3 shows, during the first two weeks of reporting, the Jokela School shooting received the highest number of texts and images.

**Table 3**. Media coverage of focusing events during the first two weeks. (*N* = 498).

| First two weeks | Man-made stronger focus | Man-made weaker focus | Nature stronger focus | Nature weaker focus |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Texts (*n*) | 187 | 34 | 87 | 19 |
| Images (*n*) | 92 | 12 | 42 | 12 |
| Graphics (*n*) | 4 | | 6 | 3 |
| Centimeters of column, mean | 11 | 7 | 10 | 7 |
| Total centimeters of column | 2,090 | 252 | 873 | 126 |
| Average number of words (*n*) | 255 | 160 | 195 | 143 |
| Total number of words (*n*) | 47,363 | 5,423 | 16,930 | 2,574 |
| Percentage of images (%) | 42 | 56 | 48 | 70 |

Moreover, the texts about the school shooting were more extensive with a mean of 11 column cm and 255 words. The Boxing Day storm received the second highest quantity of coverage, with an almost equal column height mean (10 cm) as the school shooting. In comparison, the water crisis and the floods derived an equal number of images (12) and fewer texts than the other two events. The distribution of texts and images (in column cm) were calculated into a percentage of the entire coverage. As shown in the table, the coverage of the water crisis and the floods attained a large percentage of visual coverage – 56 % versus 70 %, while a majority of the school shooting and the storm coverage consisted of texts.

Figure 8 presents the distribution of texts during the first two weeks. The Jokela School shooting coverage peaks at Day 2, with almost 35 texts. The storm and the Floods have their highest number of texts during Day 3 or 4. The Nokia water crisis maintained a more even distribution of texts throughout the two-week time period, since the crisis developed due to new facts emerging over time.

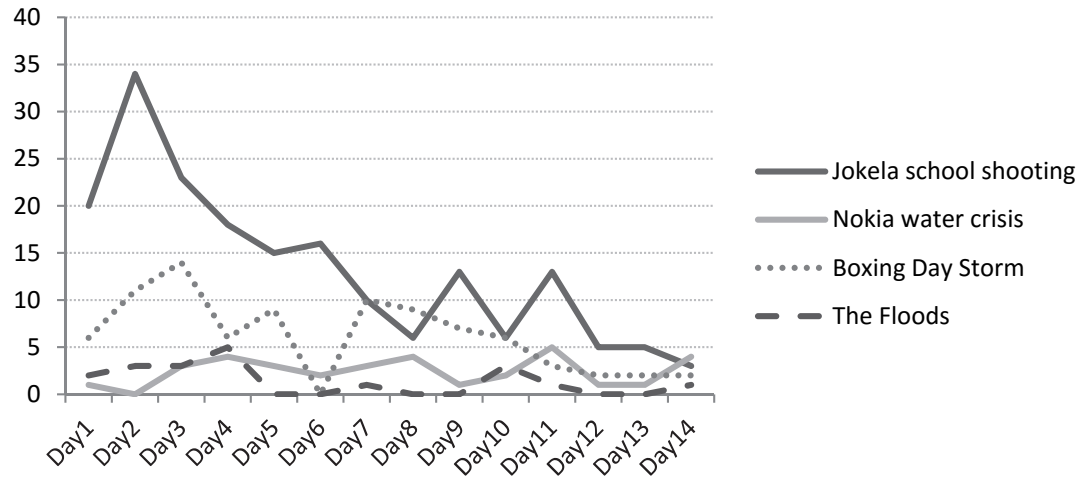


**Figure 8.** Distribution of texts during the first two weeks. Total number of texts,(*N* = 327).

Figure 9 shows the total centimeters of column for the texts during the first phase of reporting. The texts concerning the school shooting were the longest during the second day, with another peak during the last days of the second week. The floods and the water crisis received a similar proportion of centimeters of column during the two

weeks, however, slightly higher concerning the water crisis. The storm showed a similar pattern as Jokela, with the highest quantity of centimeters of column during the second and third days.

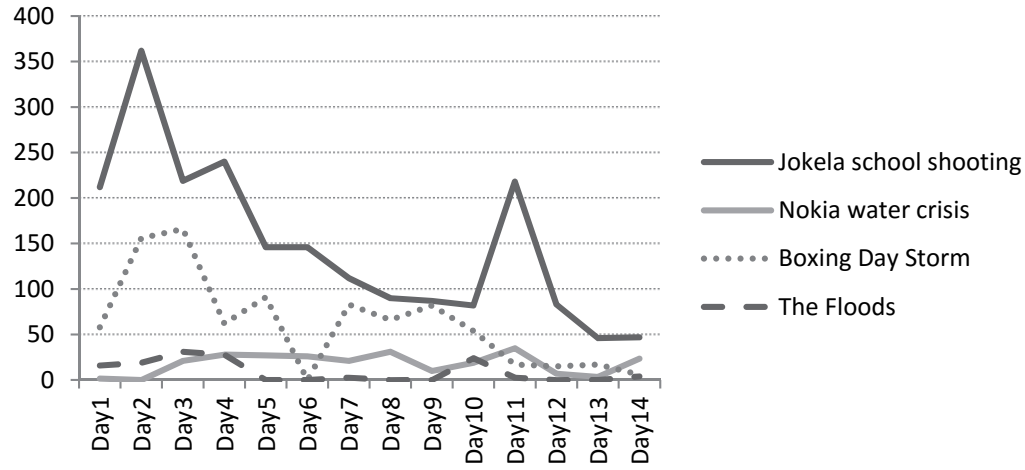


**Figure 9.** Total centimeters of column for texts published during the first two weeks.

The following six months included 191 texts about the four events, distributed as shown in Figure 10. Noticeably, the school shooting in Jokela received extensive coverage during the first month, with an additional peak after five months.

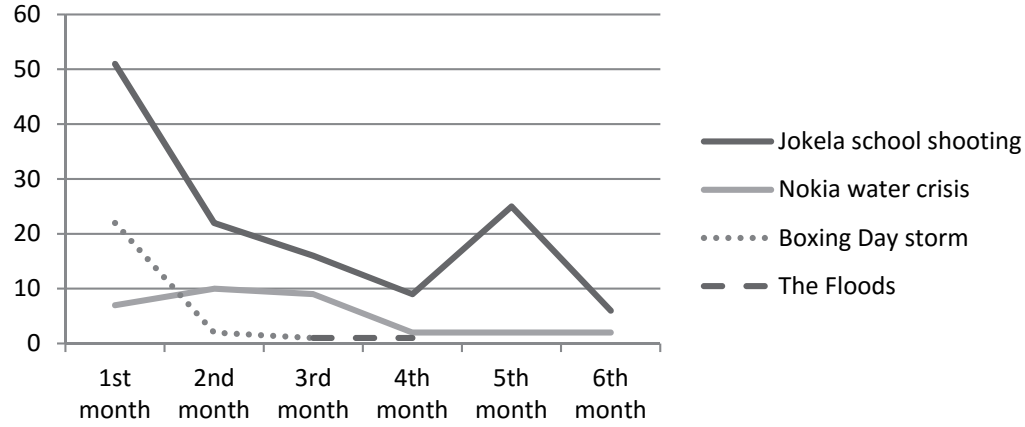


**Figure 10.** News texts during a six month phase. Total number of texts, *N* = 191.

The water crisis was featured in the news with a few texts each month during the following half year. However, both natural disasters disappeared from the media agenda after three or four months. To analyze the third phase, a randomized sample of ten texts from Jokela (N = 129), five from the water crisis (N = 32), five from the Storm (N = 27) and three from the Floods (N = 3) were analyzed to provide a transitory picture of the coverage.

The basic characteristics of the texts during the first two weeks are presented in Table 4. Articles accounted for the most common type of texts concerning three of the events; between 32–38 % of the texts about the school shooting, the water crisis, and the storm. In comparison, the most common textual feature concerning the floods was a paragraph (37 %), followed by articles (31 %). Moreover, the two events receiving a large number of letters to the editor were the school shooting and the storm. Additionally, there are some similarities concerning the producer of the texts. HS is the main contributor to all the events' texts, followed by citizens in the form of letters to the editor. However, one difference between the events is that the flood's second most common producer is a news agency, while the school shooting is discussed through expert comments.

Concerning the character of the texts, the school shooting and the storm show a similar structure, with a high number of affective stories, followed by attributive and descriptive stories. The water crisis and the floods are presented through a high number of attributive texts. Interestingly, citizens are the most dominant actor in texts about the school shooting and the storm, in comparison to the water crisis and the floods, where public officials are cited. Furthermore, when reporting on Nokia and the two natural disasters, victims and eyewitness were a commonly used source (22 and 23 % respectively). However, not many eyewitnesses were interviewed when covering the school shooting; rather, academics and experts were used instead of citizens.

Moving on to the second research question, concerning the different themes used in the reporting, Table 5 illustrates the distribution and as Kendall's W (.244) shows, there are differences between the events. In the reporting of the school shooting, among the topics covered were explanations, such as the one explaining that in Finland it is too easy to acquire a license to own a fire arm, and solutions referring to bullying or how the school should intervene and prevent harassment.

**Table 4.** Basic characteristics of media coverage of focusing events during the first two weeks.

| Type of text[1] | Man-made stronger focus | *n* (%) | Man-made weaker focus | *n* (%) | Nature stronger focus | *n* (%) | Nature weaker focus | *n* (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I | article | 60 (32) | article | 12 (35) | article | 33 (38) | paragraph | 7 (37) |
| II | letter to the editor | 46 (25) | paragraph | 7 (21) | letter to the editor | 30 (35) | article | 6 (31) |
| III | paragraph | 38 (20) | 1st page | 5 (15) | paragraph | 11 (13) | 1st page | 3 (16) |
| **Prod-ucer[2]** | | | | | | | | |
| I | HS | 125 (67) | HS | 29 (85) | HS | 49 (56) | HS | 12 (67) |
| II | citizen | 46 (25) | citizen | 3 (9) | citizen | 30 (35) | news agency | 5 (28) |
| III | expert comment | 7 (4) | news agency | 2 (6) | news agency | 4 (5) | HS + news agency | 1 (6) |
| **Chara-chter[3]** | | | | | | | | |
| I | affective | 108 (58) | attributive | 19 (56) | affective | 41 (47) | attributive | 9 (50) |
| II | attributive | 70 (38) | affective | 13 (38) | attributive | 34 (39) | descriptive | 5 (28) |
| III | descriptive | 8 (4) | descriptive | 2 (6) | descriptive | 12 (14) | affective | 4 (22) |
| **Dominant actor[4]** | | | | | | | | |
| I | citizen | 47 (26) | public official | 9 (30) | citizen | 20 (24) | public official | 7 (54) |
| II | academic/ expert | 31 (17) | victim/eye witness | 7 (23) | victim/eye witness | 19 (22) | victim/eyewitness | 3 (23) |
| III | public official | 25 (14) | journalist & citizens | 4 (13) | public official | 15 (17) | expert & political party & corporation | 1 (8) |

[1] Kendall's *W* = .575
[2] Kendall's *W* = .622
[3] Kendall's *W* = .438
[4] Kendall's *W* = .188

Another common issue concerned stories about the school shooter Auvinen, in the form of interviews with classmates, discussions about philosophers he had read, or references to previous school shootings in the US. The themes most common in the

Nokia water crisis coverage were distributed evenly between five different types of themes.

**Table 5**. Primary themes used in the media coverage during the first two weeks.

| **Man-made, stronger focus** | ***n* (%)** |
|---|---|
| Explanation | 51 (27) |
| Solutions | 47 (25) |
| Auvinen/school shootings | 25 (13) |
| Narrative | 23 (12) |
| Compensation/responsibility | 14 (8) |
| Other | 14 (8) |
| Critique | 13 (7) |

| **Man-made weaker focus** | ***n* (%)** |
|---|---|
| Compensation/responsibility | 8 (23) |
| Critique | 7 (20) |
| Problems | 6 (17) |
| Narrative | 6 (17) |
| Solutions | 5 (14) |
| Other | 2 (6) |

| **Nature, stronger focus** | ***n* (%)** |
|---|---|
| Problems | 31 (36) |
| Solutions | 20 (23) |
| Compensation/responsibility | 12 (14) |
| Narrative | 11 (13) |
| Critique | 11 (13) |
| Other | 2 (2) |

| **Nature, weaker focus** | ***n* (%)** |
|---|---|
| Problems | 9 (47) |
| Compensation/responsibility | 5 (26) |
| Narrative | 4 (21) |
| Other | 1 (5) |

Kendall's $W$ = .244

Compensation and responsibility illustrated questions such as the city being responsible for the accident, while critique dealt with questions of the late and insufficient information following the situation. Problems in connection to the water crisis were e.g. the water supply and businesses affected by the lack of clean water. Moreover, another common theme was descriptions about what had happened, as well as solutions to the problem, e.g. in the form of crisis communication in emergency situations. The two natural disasters were similar in that the most common theme was problems that the events created. The Boxing Day storm resulted in days of interruption in the electricity power supply, and the floods caused evacuations when houses were filled with water. Other frequently appearing discussions following the natural disasters concerned compensation and responsibility, such as whether the

electric companies (concerning storm damage) and the insurance companies (concerning flood damage) have to pay compensation to the customers. Furthermore, the storm was discussed in terms of solutions concerning how to avoid similar problems in the future by burying the power lines underground. Looking at the most prevalent theme during the six-month period following the initial reporting, the storm was discussed in terms of compensation and responsibility, e.g. how the damage following the event affected many forest owners. In comparison, the coverage in the second phase following the floods dealt with questions of solutions, how information and warnings may be used to prevent similar situations. In the aftermath of the water crisis, the media reported on how the economic costs of the crisis were over 1.5 million Euros, as well as the investigation of several deaths and their possible connection to the contaminated water. The school shooting coverage focused on solutions and explanations, dealing with questions on how aggression is linked to violence, and the media's power when reporting about similar events.

The third research question concerns the variation of frames used in the reporting of the four focusing events. Table 6 presents the percentage distribution for the five frameworks of attribution of responsibility, human interest, morality, conflict and economic.

**Table 6.** Use of frames in the reporting of focusing events during the first two weeks (%).

| | Attribution of resp. | Human interest | Conflict | Morality | Economic | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Man/strong** | 54 | 61 | 22 | 34 | 9 | 186 |
| **Man/weak** | 82 | 39 | 21 | 12 | 24 | 33 |
| **Nature/strong** | 71 | 43 | 37 | 11 | 37 | 84 |
| **Nature/weak** | 61 | 29 | 6 | | 29 | 17 |

**Note**: Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistencies for the five dimensions. Alpha values for the frames were: .701 for the attribution of responsibility, .850 for human interest, .709 for the conflict frame, .818 for the morality frame and .734 for the economic frame.

When reporting on the Jokela School shooting, the most dominant frame was human interest, followed by attribution of responsibility and morality frames. The school shooting is indeed the event that differs most from the other events, e.g. concerning the morality frame, with a more frequent use, and the economic frame, with a low appearance. However, this is somewhat understandable since the school shooting dealt with questions of ethics and morals, a debate not employed in the reporting on natural disasters.

The dominant frame used in the coverage of the water crisis and the two natural disasters was attribution of responsibility. Another similarity was the use of the human interest frame, the second most common frame for these three events. Moreover, the economic and conflict frames were used quite often when reporting on the water crisis and the storm. Using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with type of frame (attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality and economic) as a within-story factor and the event (Jokela, Nokia, the Storm and the Floods) as a between-story factor, the MANOVA generated differences between the use of type of frame, $F\,(15, 862) = 5.86$, $p < .000$, Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.765$, partial $\eta^2 = .086$.

The discussions of frames used during the six-month period following the events are only indicative, because of the small number of texts. Hence, the discussion will focus on the frame-changing of the same event in comparison to the first two weeks of coverage (see e.g. Chyi & McCombs, 2004). The framing of the school shooting was quite similar throughout the two phases. The six months period ($n$ = 10) was dominated by stories with a human interest framing (80 %), followed by attribution of responsibility (50 %), morality (30 %) and conflict (20 %). However, the frame-changing of the other three events is more visible. The water crisis ($n$ = 5) was later on in the reporting framed in terms of attribution of responsibility (80 %), together with economic (40 %) and human interest (20 %) aspects. Regarding the two natural disasters (the Storm, $n$ = 5 and the Floods, $n$ = 3) the most common frame during the six-month period was an economic frame, 80 % and 67 % respectively. Furthermore, both events were portrayed in terms of attribution of responsibility and human interest frames, approximately 30 % of the texts.

When analyzing the images in the reporting, Table 7 illustrates that the most common visual framing was the human interest frame concerning all four events. The images from the school shooting differed from the other events with a high quantity of images coded as "other", showing e.g. weapons and medicines.

**Table 7.** Most dominant framing in images during the first two weeks (*N* = 158).

| | **Man-made stronger focus (*n*)** | **Man-made weaker focus (*n*)** | **Nature stronger focus (*n*)** | **Nature weaker focus (*n*)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Human interest (17) | Human interest (7) | Human interest (15) | Lives saved (4) |
| 2 | Other (17) | Lives saved (3) | Physical destruction (10) | Human interest (4) |
| 3 | Emotional (13) | Other (2) | Lives saved (7) | Phys.destruct. (3) |

Kendall's *W* = .406

**Most dominant actors in images.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Victim/eyewitness (23) | Victim/eyewitness (9) | Victim/eyewitness (16) | Victim/eyewitness (4) |
| 2 | Citizen (11) | Police/rescue services (2) | Police/rescue services (6) | Police/rescue services (2) |
| 3 | Police/rescue service (9) | Citizen (1) | Citizen (5) | Citizen (2) |
| | Accountable person (9) | Corporation (1) | | |

Kendall's *W* = .853

Furthermore, the third most common frame was an emotional frame showing people in grief. The two natural disasters' images showed physical destruction and lives saved, images of lives saved were also used in the coverage of the water crisis, illustrated by the military service handing out clean water.

The actors displayed in the images show a high conformity for all four events (Kendall's W = .853). Furthermore, the images of all the events were dominated by victims and eyewitnesses, and three of the events were also portrayed with images of

police officers or rescue services. However, in the case of the school shooting, the police/rescue service group was the third most common. Moreover, citizens were a common actor in the visual catastrophe coverage.

All the graphics (*N*=13) consisted of maps, e.g. geographical maps of where the storm and the floods had hit, and maps of the Jokela High School showing how the school shooter moved inside the building.

The fourth and final research question concerns how blame was attributed in the media coverage following the events (Table 8). In the coverage of the water crisis, blame attribution was present in 50 % of the texts ($n$ = 17). In comparison, following the storm, blame was attributed in 34.5 % of the texts ($n$ = 30), in 18.5 % ($n$ = 34) of the texts concerning the school shooting, and in 5 % ($n$ = 1) following the floods. The low number of blame attributions concerning the floods may originate from the fact that most texts were short paragraphs.

When attributing blame for the school shooting and the water crisis, the speaker making the attribution was usually a citizen, while the storm received the highest amount of blame from victims and eyewitnesses. However, blame attributions in response to the school shooting were also made by academics and experts, journalists, and public officials. The blame game following the water crisis consisted of journalistic initiatives, and the speakers making the attributions following the storm were public officials or citizens.

The target of the attribution was often a public official in all the four events. However, in the aftermath of the school shooting, society was attributed responsibility, illustrated by problems in the Finnish culture, such as alienation and violence. Concerning the storm, corporations were the target of the attribution in 50 percent of the texts, as the electricity power supply companies were blamed for their slow response.

**Table 8.** Blame attribution in the media coverage.

| | Man-made/strong | | Man-made/weak | | Nature/strong | | Nature/weak | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| **Blame attribution** | 34 | 18.5 | 17 | 50 | 30 | 34.5 | 1 | 5 |
| **Speaker making the attribution**[1] | | | | | | | | |
| Academic/expert | 7 | 6.1 | | | | | | |
| Interest group/union | 2 | 1.2 | | | 3 | 2.7 | | |
| Journalist | 6 | 4.4 | 5 | 22.7 | 3 | 5.0 | | |
| Public official | 5 | 3.0 | | | 7 | 13.4 | | |
| Police/rescue service | | | 1 | 5.7 | 2 | 3.6 | | |
| Victim/eyewitness | 3 | 1.3 | 1 | 1.4 | 9 | 9.9 | | |
| Citizen | 13 | 7.1 | 6 | 21.1 | 5 | 5.7 | | |
| Political party | | | | | | | 1 | 3.6 |
| Corporation | | | 2 | 8.3 | | | | |
| Other | 1 | 0.8 | 1 | 1.59 | | | | |
| **Target of the attribution**[2] | | | | | | | | |
| Public official | 13 | 8.7 | 15 | 57 | 11 | 19.1 | 1 | 3.6 |
| Police/rescue service | 2 | 1.2 | | | 1 | 2.1 | | |
| Citizen | 1 | 0.8 | | | 1 | 0.8 | | |
| Political party | | | | | 1 | 1.0 | | |
| Corporation | | | | | 16 | 20.0 | | |
| Other | 3 | 1.7 | | | 1 | 0.3 | | |
| Society | 12 | 9.8 | | | | | | |
| Media and show business | 7 | 2.9 | | | | | | |
| **Time frame** | | | | | | | | |
| Preparation failure | 26 | 17.8 | 3 | 9.3 | 10 | 12.5 | | |
| Response failure | 7 | 3.4 | 14 | 53.2 | 20 | 25 | 1 | 3.6 |

**Note***:* Percentage in relation to an event's total coverage in column cm.

[1] Kendall's $W = .284$, [2] Kendall's $W = .478$

Concerning the time frame, the school shooting stands out as the event that received the most preparation failure blames, e.g. that it is too easy to acquire a weapon license, or that neoliberal values and downsizing in the 1990s have resulted in social problems. The blame attribution for the other three events proceeded from a response failure, such as little and slow information about what happened in Nokia, or difficulties to get in contact with the electricity companies after the storm.

When looking at the six-month period following the initial response, blame attribution was only present in three of the items analyzed: two attributions concerning the water crisis, and one concerning the school shooting. In Nokia, the head of the waterworks was fired, presenting a concrete solution to the blame attribution, while the blame for the school shooting was attributed to the shooter.

## 6.7 Discussion and conclusions

Media attention to focusing events explain the event, propose solutions, and promote learning (Birkland 2006) in the form of framing – when highlighting certain aspects of the incident, or attributing blame. Intense media coverage of an event may make certain issues salient, which provides important clues to the public and to policymakers. Attention from the media can produce political change, as the pressure to "do something" rises (Birkland 2006; Smith 1996). The aim of this study was to compare the media coverage regarding four focusing events with a varying degree of strength and origin, using content analysis of texts and images. The differences between the events will be discussed starting from the distinction between natural disasters and man-made disasters, as well as a weaker versus stronger degree of focus. The media coverage in terms of framing, theme, blame attribution and descriptive characteristics were empirically assessed through a quantitative content analysis of *Helsingin Sanomat's* coverage. The coverage was studied during a two-week period immediately after the incident (total sample) and a six-month period (randomized sample). The analysis showed differences between the four events and will be discussed in more general terms here.

Concerning the initial two-week coverage of the events, the events with a stronger degree of focus (namely the school shooting and the storm) cluster together in contrast to the events with a weaker degree of focus. The quantity of texts, the number of images, the mean column height, and the number of words are higher for the events with a stronger degree of focus – not surprisingly since the stronger the focus, the more newsworthy the event. However, the school shooting clearly stands out as the event that receives the most attention since it was such an exceptional event in a Finnish context. When looking at the visual coverage, one aspect clearly emerges, a difference in the percentage of images. As such, 70 % of the flood coverage during the first two weeks consisted of images, compared to 42 % of the school shooting reporting. Moreover, when examining the six-month period, the second phase, the man-made catastrophes continue to receive attention, while the discussion about natural disasters has faded away. The Boxing Day storm did acquire around 30 texts during the second phase, but 89 % of these were published during the first six weeks following the crisis. The pattern for the school shooting ($N = 129$) and the water crisis ($N = 32$) is much more evenly distributed throughout the six-month period, with texts published five to six months after the event. The patterns for the natural disaster coverage are similar to Bytzek's (2008, 95) findings from a flooding in Germany, where the core of the reporting represented a three-week intense peak, followed by only a few texts later on. Therefore, the two natural disasters are more of a "fast-burning crisis" type ('t Hart & Boin 2001; Boin et al. 2008) – i.e. critical events followed by intense media coverage. However, as soon as the operational action is over, the significance on the political agenda fades away. On the other hand, the two man-made disasters can be discussed in terms of being "long-shadow crises" (Boin et al. 2005; Boin et al. 2008), since there was no immediate closure of political actions, and the intensity lasted longer.

The basic characteristics of the four events have similarities concerning the type of text and the producer of the text (Kendall's W .575 and .622, Table 3). The two events with the stronger degree of focus received more coverage as noted, illustrated by a higher number of articles and letters to the editor. However, the water crisis and the floods had a higher quantity of paragraphs and front page stories. When looking at the character, the two events with a higher degree of focus cluster together with a similar structure. Firstly, an affective character, trying to explain the issue in a more

long-term context, followed by attributive texts corresponding to making sense of the present situation. The use of affective texts in the coverage of Jokela and the storm may relate to a more comprehensive reporting. A higher number of texts provide more room for analysis. The coverage of the floods and the water crisis focused on a micro level analysis at an individual level, in comparison to the events with a stronger degree of focus where an affective reporting on a macro level with more focus on regional and societal levels (cf. Chyi & McCombs 2004). Natural disasters are often covered in terms of physical destruction and economic aspects, and a more comprehensive picture is missing in the reporting (Houston et al. 2012).

The actors and sources used to comment and contextualize the focusing events in texts are key components to how the event is defined, and what issues are brought to discussion. The use of sources in the reporting varied between the events, and no clear resemblance was found between either events with a similar degree of focus or origin. The school shooting was discussed by citizens, experts and public officials when trying to make sense of an incomprehensible event. The coverage of the storm leaned on a high number of citizens and eyewitnesses together with public officials. Some similarities are distinguishable between the Nokia reporting and the floods, where public officials were the most common source, followed by victims and eyewitnesses. The proportion of non-official sources in the reporting is similar to Lawrence's (2001) study, around 25 %, the exception being the storm where the combination of citizens and victims account for 46 % of the sources used in the reporting.

The school shooting can be classified as an "incomprehensible crisis", since it was extremely unexpected and caused a collective disruption in society (Boin et al 2008, 289), whereas the water crisis and the storm developed into "mismanaged crises" (Boin et al. 2008, 290) due to official response failures. The themes used in the reporting are connected to the characteristics of the event. An incomprehensible event generates questions of explanations and solutions, and a focus on the person behind the incident – in the case of the school shooting, the shooter Auvinen. The two natural disasters dealt with themes such as problems, solutions, compensation and responsibility to clear up the situation. In Nokia, the mismanaged water crisis resulted in texts about the compensation and responsibility alongside a critique of the management of the situation.

The framing of the events differ mostly between Jokela and the three other events. The school shooting was mainly framed in terms of human interest stories, together with attribution of responsibility and morality. When a focusing event involves human casualties, it is likely that human interest is a central issue in the framing (Li 2007, 684). In comparison, the framing of the other three events emphasized attribution of responsibility in 60–80 percent of the cases, together with a human interest frame and an economic frame. The absence of the economic discussion in the debate following the school shooting is, on the one hand, understandable, since the visible economic consequences concerned only the school of Jokela, while the other three events affected society economically in a more direct manner. The result is in line with Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) findings that attribution of responsibility is the most frequently occurring frame. The explanation for this might be found in the potential influence of political culture and context, where a strong welfare state is connected to citizen's expectations that the government should provide answers to societal problems (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, 106). The frame-changing of the events, although only implied due to a small sample of texts, reveals that the school shooting coverage remained quite similar throughout the whole period, while the natural disasters transcended into a more economic centered reporting. The water crisis moved towards an attribution of responsibility framing.

The fourth research question in this study compared the blame attributions following the four focusing events. During times of extraordinary events, such as crises and catastrophes, the media and the public often attribute blame as a way to understand the event or infer responsibility. Blame attributed in the media coverage was most dominant in the water crisis reporting, probably because the incident occurred because of a mistake, presenting clear scapegoats in combination with inadequate response management from the public officials. The storm coverage had the second highest percentage of blame attribution, 34.5 %, and about a fifth of the texts covering the school shooting contained blame attribution. The coverage of the floods only contained one blame attribution, making it difficult to discuss the differences according to origin and degree of focus. Thus, a more general discussion concerning the blame game following the school shooting, the water crisis and the storm will be carried out. There are situations where the political actors in power manage to market

their explanation of the incident well, and other situations where people in power are pinpointed as culprits. The framing of the school shooting as an incomprehensible event made it easier for policy-makers to avoid blame. This can be seen as a sharp contrast to the blame game that followed after the second school shooting in Kauhajoki, less than a year later (Raittila et al. 2009). The analysis of blame attribution made by Atkeson and Maestas (2012) following hurricane Katrina showed that almost half of the segments contained blame attribution, such as a slow response of government and the devastation to property and livelihoods – similar to the natural disaster coverage in Finland. It is common that governments receive blame in times of crisis (Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Salwen 1995), and the most common target of the attribution is public officials. The debate after the storm placed blame on the companies responsible for electricity supply, and the discussion about possible explanations to the school shooting emphasized society as one factor to blame. Exogenous factors sometimes play an essential part, e.g. it is easier for governmental actors to present an underlying cause for the event and thus avoid blame when dealing with natural disasters. However, when endogenous factors such as mistakes or negligence are part of the crisis, it is more difficult to alleviate doubt – as seen in the aftermath of the water crisis.

The distribution of speakers making the attribution is extensive and concerns different actors. As Atkeson and Maestas (2012, 68) demonstrate, journalists, victims and local politicians expressed blame following hurricane Katrina. In the Jokela case, the combination of citizens, victims and journalists represent about 60 % of the speakers making the attribution, compared to 70 % in the case of Nokia and 56 % in the aftermath of the storm. This illustrates the fact that journalists and ordinary people attribute blame and, to some extent, influence the framing of the media coverage in crisis situations (Atkeson & Maestas 2012). Since the second phase of reporting – the six-month period – was only briefly studied, it is difficult to say as to whether blame attribution is more common in the second phase of the reporting, as stated by Graber (2009). However, blame attribution in the more long-term phase was only present concerning man-made disasters.

Visual framing is an important part of disaster coverage, although it is less studied than textual framing. This study analyzed the images and graphics present during the first two weeks. The human interest framing was used in the visualization of all four

events. The two natural disasters have a similar image framing with images framed as lives saved or images showing physical destruction. The absence of lives lost frames might be explained by the more serious image of HS, since displaying dead bodies is more often a feature of sensationalism employed by the tabloid newspapers (Ali & Mahmood 2013). The dominant actors in the images were very similar between the four crises, mostly victims and eyewitnesses, although policemen and rescue services were also portrayed.

A summary of the most dominant frames used in textual and visual coverage of the focusing events, along with blame attribution for the events, is presented in Table 9.

**Table 9**. Summary of the media coverage following four focusing events.

| | **First two weeks**<br>Most dominant text frame (%)<br>Most dominant image frame (%)<br>Blame attribution (%),Who is blaming who? | **Six months**<br>Most dominant text frame (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **Man-made, stronger** | Human interest (61 %)<br>Human interest/other (18 %)<br>18.5 %, citizens blaming public officials and society | Human interest (80 %) |
| **Man-made, weaker** | Attribution of responsibility (82 %)<br>Human interest (58 %)<br>50 %, citizens and journalists blaming public officials | Attribution of responsibility (80%) |
| **Nature, stronger** | Attribution of responsibility (71 %)<br>Human interest (36 %)<br>34.5 %, victims and public officials blaming corporations and public officials | Economic (80 %) |
| **Nature, weaker** | Attribution of responsibility (61 %)<br>Lives saved/human interest (33 %)<br>5 %, political party blaming public officials | Economic (67 %) |

As discussed by Boin et al. (2008, 9), focusing events become politicized rather quickly when political, economic or societal actors engage in a struggle to produce a dominant interpretation of the implications of a crisis. Thus, we can anticipate a difference in the framing, as well as frame-changing over time, of focusing events. Therefore, the current study contributes to disaster research by comparing different types of disasters and the apprehension of how these events and the media message helps shape broader political outcomes. Overall, the findings of the study show that some characteristics of the reporting are affected by the event, while other features might be explained by origin and strength. The volume of initial coverage given to an event regarding space and time is connected to the strength of the focus. As expected, the more focusing an event is, the more texts are written about the event, since focusing events are interesting according to media logic (Birkland 2006; Downs 1972; Nord & Strömbäck 2002). However, the percentage of images used in the reporting seems to be higher when the strength of an event is weaker. Furthermore, man-made disasters tend to receive a more extensive coverage during the third phase; this might provide a better understanding of the event and possible effects, while natural disasters are discussed in terms of the immediate actions (Houston et al. 2012).

Looking back at the initial theoretical figure we can conclude that the school shooting had the highest percentage of human interest and morality frames, while the other three events were dominate by attribution of responsibility. Especially the water crisis, which indeed was a preventable crisis, had a high amount of blame gaming. The natural disaster with a stronger degree of focus did show a high usage of economic and conflict frames in combination with the attribution of responsibility and human interest. Hence, natural disasters are discussed more frequently on a macro level, while man-made disasters are explained on a micro level concerning how ordinary people are affected by the events (Figure 11).

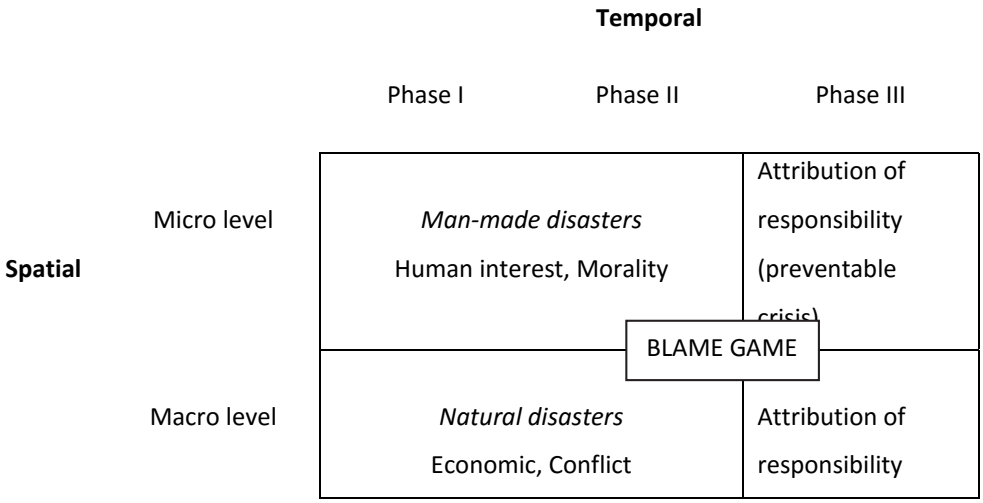


**Figure 11.** Media coverage of focusing events over time according to origin.

Moreover, discussing how the visual frames correspond with the textual frames, the physical destruction frame resembles the economic frame, while the human interest is used in both framing measurements. The emotional image frame often displays cemetery candles or grieving and suffering people – related to both the human interest frame and the morality frame. The lives saved image frame could be linked to the attribution of responsibility, together with the politician frame – showing actors who are handling the situation. The combination of visual and textual framing of the school shooting shows a clear focus on the human interest angle. The water crisis uses both textual and visual frames of attribution of responsibility and human interest, while the two natural disasters combine an economic angle with human interest and attribution of responsibility. To conclude, the visual and textual framing of focusing events reinforce each other, making the coverage a powerful contributor to the understanding of focusing events.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate the combination of visual and textual framing more closely. In previous research, the textual and visual elements are often studied separately. Another fruitful research strategy would be to analyze the visual and textual elements using the same coding scheme for a better comparison of how the two elements support each other.

# 7. Threat or opportunity? The politicization of focusing events in the parliamentary arena

## 7.1 Introduction

In today's world, there is a constant punctuation of everyday life by crises and disasters, followed by a sense of threat and uncertainty. Focusing events cast doubt on institutions and policies, raise salient issues, shape agendas and might even alter power distribution (Baumgartner & Jones 2009; Boin et al. 2009, 3). "In the wake of devastation and sorrow, we expect more from government than restoring a sense of order. We expect government to study the causes and initiate actions that ensure this crisis will never happen again" (Boin et al. 2008, 309). Focusing events receive a lot of attention, both on the formal political agenda and on the media agenda (Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Henderson & Sitter 2007; Jääsaari et al. 2009; Odén, Ghersetti & Wallin 2009). In both these arenas, actors define which problems need our attention, and how we should understand them (Roggeband & Vliegenthart 2007). Nevertheless, when discussing political actions, the debate in the parliamentary arena has a legislative role, in comparison to the media arena where ideas can be brought forward without a clear connection to actual policy making (Birkland & Lawrence 2004). Hence, the interesting aspect in this study is the process regarding how an event is perceived in the formal political arena, e.g. through the discussion of problems and solutions in the wake of an event (Birkland 2006, 1). A causal mechanism between a focusing event and specific policy change is sometimes hard to establish (Birkland 2006). Hence, the debate of the event in the parliamentary arena is a more direct technique to distinguish how the event is perceived by those in power, which is influenced by values, interests of the actors, as well as the framing of the debate. Furthermore, disasters are influenced by political factors; the prevention, preparedness and response to a disaster are parts of a political game, where the reconstruction of the event in the media or in

the parliament is a political event with political outcomes in terms of framing the problem, agenda-setting or governmental interventions (de Waal 2006; Fuentes 2009; Hannigan 2012).

Atkeson and Maestas (2012, 1) argue that crises and disasters create a different surrounding than routine political conflicts – a space where political change is permitted, because of the emotional impact of these events and the high motivation for attributions of blame. Moreover, focusing events highlight existing problems, thus providing an opportunity for change. Hence, the debate following a focusing event may contain new ideas concerning what the problem is and what should be done, bringing about a competition amongst political actors regarding the framing and definition of the event (Birkland, Camileeri & Warnement 2014, 2). Nevertheless, what is lacking in previous research is a careful textual analysis of the discourse surrounding focusing events (e.g. Birkland & Warnement 2013, 21). This study examines the following research question: are there different kinds of meaning-making processes following different types of focusing events in the formal political arena? The aim of this study is to compare different types of disasters through a quantitative content analysis of the debate in the parliamentary arena. The main focus is to compare natural disasters to man-made disasters, as well as events with a weaker degree of focus to events with a stronger degree of focus. The outline of the chapter is as follows. Firstly, I present a theoretical discussion about the politicization process following a focusing event, i.e. how crises are portrayed as either a threat or as an opportunity, and potential political implications concerning framing and blame attribution. Hereafter, the method, design and data of the study is presented followed by the empirical findings and a concluding discussion.

## 7.2 Theoretical background – The politics of crises

"Crises have a way of becoming politicized rather quickly", state Boin et al. (2008, 9). The concept of politicization can be defined as an "increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation" (de Wilde 2011, 560). While some actors

might fear a critique of existing policies and a threat to the legitimacy of the dominating way of work, others enjoy a window of opportunity for a possible political change. We cannot expect actors with a political, economic or other interest to give up their self-interest when a disaster or catastrophe occurs – instead different actors participate in a struggle to define the event and the political outcome. Two important aspects of a crisis aftermath are therefore accountability and learning; policy makers discuss actions prior to the event and evaluate and redesign practices (Boin et al. 2008).

When a focusing event occurs, the media coverage of the event is essential because an extensive media reporting can be linked to an increase in institutional attention (Smith 1996). Furthermore, a more profound discussion mobilizes groups and actors who may otherwise find it difficult to be heard in the political arena (Birkland 2006). There are various ways for policy makers to deal with emergencies, as different events can be framed in very different ways (Boin et al. 2009, 84). This notion derives from the supposition that it is not the event per se, but the public perception and interpretation that affects whether a focusing event has a political impact and leads to policy change. The first type of crises are events that are explained as unfortunate incidents and therefore do not require any kind of political actions. The second type constitutes crisis situations portrayed as the existence of a critical threat to society. However, the situation nonetheless defends prevailing norms and values and does not put blame on the political actors. The third type of emergencies are events that raise criticism of current policies or the political parties in power, defined here as a critical opportunity. Earlier, the first two types of crises were often seen as 'An act of God', something you could not influence at a political level (Rosenthal 1998), and a similar argumentation is often applied following natural disasters – the weather is something we cannot influence. These situations are seen as incomprehensible events, and feelings of confusion and sorrow produce a necessity to move on and restore order. However, in today's risk society, there is a greater chance of crises and disasters affecting the societal agenda, as well as the political agenda. If a disaster situation repeats itself, critical voices may be raised asking how this could happen again. Have there been warning signals showing the vulnerabilities of a society – and why have no actions been taken? The third type of emergency, crises as opportunities, are therefore

becoming more common today, when a more critical interpretation of the questions are emphasized (Boin et al. 2009, 85–86).

## 7.3 Blame games and meaning-making

Politicians and decision makers undergo five critical tasks in the wake of a crisis; sense making, decision making, meaning-making, terminating, and learning (Boin et al. 2005, 10). Political leaders have a special responsibility to safeguard societies from crises, and handle the consequences of these situations. This study focuses on the meaning-making aspect of a crisis situation, where a society demands to know what is happening and how citizens can feel safe and protected. In a situation where the government does not succeed in dominating the meaning-making of a crisis, the ability to take action and manoeuver the situation is constrained. In this situation, leaders are, as stated by Boin et al. (2005, 13) "challenged to present a compelling story that describes what the crisis is about: what is at stake, what are its causes, what can be done". Framing is part of the meaning-making following a focusing event, and an interesting aspect of framing is how it is not just about following existing plans or implementing pre-crisis decisions. Instead, framing brings about an intuitive and sometimes improvised communication by leaders "to influence public perceptions and emotions" (Boin et al. 2005, 82). The meaning-making of an event is important to the legitimacy of societal institutions and core values. Hence, did those in power present a clear interpretation of the focusing events and explain how the society is supposed to get through the crisis (Boin, Kuipers & Overdijk 2013, 85)? To successfully attribute meaning to a focusing event through defining the problems and diagnosing causes also gives the power to suggest remedies.

In the description of reality, some information is withheld, while other material is highlighted. This construction is needed if we are to understand a complex world. Framing is about "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully construct the social world" (Reese 2001, 11). Hence, framing involves something beyond the text, the creation of wider social explanations and patterns. Within policy-making, framing is used to highlight a

particular issue, as such, the construction is often more visible if it concerns a controversial issue (Birkland & Lawrence 2009, 1406). In the parliamentary arena, actors may use a juridical language to de-politicize a crisis (Boin et al. 2005, 83). Moreover, another effective strategy is to downplay a crisis by using a scientific discourse (Snider 2004). Framing in times of crisis is a balancing act between dramatizing the seriousness of the event including, for example, emphasizing villains and threats, followed by the opportunity to propose bold actions that under normal political processes would not stand a chance (Birkland 2006; Boin et al. 2005). Previous research has identified different types of framework that are found in media coverage (e.g. Neuman, Just & Crigler 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg 2000), and furthermore with a specific focus on crisis and disaster communications (An & Gower 2009; Iyengar 1991; Houston et al. 2012; Li 2007). In a broad sense, the concept of framing includes the use of emotions and blame gaming. However, in this study the concept of framing is first operationalized through previous research to represent five frameworks dominating political discussion; attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic, human interest, and morality. Then I apply an additional more specific focus to post-disaster framing in the form of blaming, emotional appeal, and solutions presented.

The values, interests and positions of political actors can be seen as the "why" aspect of the politicization of crises. Explanations as to why an event becomes a crisis can be found in temporal aspects, such as in the media environment or in the political context with leaders versus opposition. However, the aim of this study is to discuss the "how" process, where frames, blame and emotions are used in the meaning-making process to either portray the event as an opportunity or as a threat, affecting which solutions are discussed as feasible.

Temporary factors affect how actors participate in the politicization process in the parliamentary arena, such as the proximity in time when a crisis occurs in relation to elections (Boin et al., 2009). One example is how the bombings in Madrid in 2004, which occurred only a few days before the national elections, became a major election issue. The opposition leader, José Luis Zapatero, beat the incumbent Prime Minister, José María Aznar, despite the fact that the former was in the lead in the polls before the bombings occurred (*ibid.*). Thus, the timing may result in different motivations for actors to pursue questions regarding responsibility and liability. The closer in time

to an election a focusing event occurs, the more likely it is that the crisis is exploited to achieve policy changes or creates negative repercussions toward the actors in power (Boin et al. 2009). Furthermore, the length of the political career can affect how hard political leaders are punished. Leaders who have been in power for a long time are more likely to have to defend themselves, while newly elected leaders can come off more easily (ibid.).

Furthermore, another temporary factor is whether the media coverage about the incident emphasizes exogenous explanations. As such, policy makers can more easily avoid blame attribution, and instead, negative political consequences are linked to endogenous explanations. However, the media's influence on the political agenda is often tied to political contingency, which means that opposition parties, for example, react to media coverage only if an issue is important in the politicization process (Green-Pedersen & Stubager 2010). However, there are differences in the framing of political issues in the parliament and in the media (Roggeband & Vliegenthart 2007). Institutional structures might explain these differences, whereby the media have stronger incentives to define a problem in a new way, while the parliament favors preexisting solutions. This derives from the fact that the parliamentary debate is concerned with policy making – discourse and action, while the media handles ideas that are not necessarily convertible into legislation (Birkland & Lawrence 2004; Elder & Cobb 1983). Moreover, situational factors may influence the crisis outcome. Some events are so compelling that the meaning-making process is limited, as for example when there is a clear actor to blame for an event. At other times, the magnitude of the event can impose a national solidarity rather than blame gaming (Boin et al. 2008, 98).

A study of post-crisis political processes involves an accountability or responsibility discussion. In times of crisis, there are different strategies for decision-makers to adopt (e.g. Brändström et al. 2008). When actors choose to *construct severity* they can frame the event as a violation of specific core values in society. The more severe an issue is perceived to be, the more actors are likely to get involved (Rochefort & Cobb 1994). Another strategy is to *construct agency* and describe an event as an incident or a common problem. A third strategy is to *construct responsibility* and depict the crisis as caused by an actor (Brändström et al. 2008, 116). In the aftermath of the tsunami catastrophe, governments in the Nordic countries tried to frame the event as "an act of God" to avoid blame. Nevertheless, this attempt failed. Subsequent public apologies

by the governments in Finland and Norway did, however, appear to mitigate the crisis somewhat in those countries, although the Swedish government, by comparison, continued to deny responsibility, thus turning the event into high politics (Brändström et al. 2008, 142–143).

The media and the public often use catastrophes to attribute responsibility to leaders and not to parties (Bucy 2003; Merolla & Zeichmeister 2009). As such, disaster leadership is connected to legislation and the executive branch. The question of accountability in the event of crises and disasters can be about a political, legal, moral or financial responsibility. Therefore, a focusing event raises a collective stress in society, often requiring some form of catharsis for mitigating circumstances (Brändström & Kuipers 2003). Accountability and guilt will affect the political arena if the incident has been explained and contextualized as a result of policy failures (ibid., 280–281); and when different actors choose to view the incident as a failure and pinpoint scapegoats we can speak of a "politicization process" (*ibid.*). Although this process is neither automatic nor the predominant way of addressing focusing events, such events can become politicized if influential actors "succeed in framing them as blameworthy violations of crucial public values" (*ibid.*, 280).

It is important to study attributions of blame and responsibility because they are the basis for how we evaluate political leaders and policy-making (Iyengar 1989). An especially central role can be recognized concerning attributions formed in crisis and disaster situations, as these events attract massive attention and often create a common way of perceiving the events. This means that focusing events have "the potential to become long-standing political symbols that are used in framing a range of policy debates" (Maestas et al. 2008, 610). The description of attribution of responsibility may occur either through an episodic frame, where the focus lies on a specific event or an individual, or as a thematic responsibility (Iyengar 1991, 14). A thematic framework puts the event in a broader societal perspective by providing background explanations or discussing the issue more generally. Episodic explanations may result in citizens perceiving social problems based on an individual perspective rather than as a political issue (*ibid.*). Therefore, the attribution of responsibility may be individual or organizational, e.g. in the case of a crisis originating from a mistake or an accident, organizational responsibility attribution is often used (An & Gower 2009, 110).

The meaning-making process eventually boils down to presenting a solution to the problem. Is the event in question treated as a possibility for new policies or is the status quo maintained? As such, the solution discussion is closely related to defining the problem. By presenting what is wrong, the politicians are automatically assigning a set of solutions to the problem (Birkland & Warnement 2013).

## 7.4 Political discourse and emotional rhetoric

Emotions are a central part of how citizens and societies make sense of focusing events. On the one hand, emotions can foster solidarity and arouse a collective shared meaning (Hutchison 2010, 81), while on the other hand, disasters arouse feelings of anger and fear (Bleiker & Hutchison 2008). Emotional responses are important since "the raising of emotions in politics is essential to the prioritization of problems, because emotion governs the allocation of attention" (Jones & Baumgartner 2005, 16). Crisis and disaster situations are, by definition, rhetorical situations since they call for a discursive action (Mral, Hansson Nylund & Vigsø 2010, 53). Hence, the meaning-making process of framing, blame attribution and emotional arguments in the parliament is undertaken through rhetoric, "achieved through an unprejudiced and systematic inventory of every possible angle on a question (invention), and through dialogic debate" (Mral et al. 2010, 54). When a disaster strikes, the rhetorical reactions should be quick and distinct, as well as prepared – political leaders should be prepared for unexpected events, handle the situation and learn for the future.

One challenge when studying political discourse is how speeches are both theoretically and empirically relevant in relation to political structures and processes on a macro level. However, the study of discourse often takes place at a micro level, where we find individual political actors with various sets of beliefs, discourse and interactions. At an intermediate level, we can discuss political groups and institutions, followed by the top level represented by political systems and socio-political and cultural processes (van Dijk 2002, 204). Nevertheless, an MP giving a speech in the parliament speaks both as an individual, with personal beliefs, and as a member of a party, with a specific position, e.g. as part of the opposition. At the same time, the

person is participating in a system of parliamentary democracy, using a discourse order of democracy with presupposed cultural norms and knowledge. The context of political discourse is indeed crucial, since many forms of political discourses, like parliamentary debates or laws, are defined more by contextual rather than by textual terms – "who speaks to whom, as what, on what occasion and with what goals" (van Dijk 2002, 225). As a consequence, political discourse is politicized because of its role in the political process.

Communication in times of crisis is about deciding on rational arguments based on facts (logos). However, pathos, which are the emotions aroused, are an important factor in determining the outcome (Mral 2013). The brain is not a machine, objectively calculating and searching for facts and figures in order to make rational decisions. Instead, "the political brain is an emotional brain" (Westen 2008, xv), insofar as both politicians and citizens are guided by emotions. This view opposes the view of emotions as contradictory to rationality; instead emotions are understood as an important part of political processes (Hutchison 2010, 82). A demand for change may not merely be a result of new information, but of new emotions, such as anger or fear, advocating a new way of looking at issues. However, there are problems with using emotional appeal in discussion. Emotional appeals are sometimes viewed as weak arguments on a logical basis, since they are based on presumptions and not evidence. Despite its shortcomings, an emotional appeal may play an important role in the wake of a crisis, especially when collective values are threatened or societal norms are questioned. A ceremonial rhetoric might be needed when the identity of a group or a nation is disturbed, an example being the rhetoric used after 9/11 (Mral 2013, 50). Moreover, strong rhetoric is full of examples, metaphors and emotive concepts to either reduce or increase collective anxieties. "The very act of labelling a particular set of societal conditions a 'crisis' is itself a major communicative act with potentially far-reaching political consequences" (Boin et al. 2005, 83). Whether an event is labelled as a "disaster" or an "accident" is important, especially when it comes to the allocation of responsibility (Millar & Heath 2004).

Political reasoning is different from other forms of reasoning since it is part of a struggle over the dominant interpretation of the world, e.g. problems, solutions and decisions made. This means that a political discourse is strategic in the sense that it is intended to build alliances, to spur action or to maintain the status quo. Hence,

political discourse "seeks to evoke values and emotions by presenting something as good or evil, innocent or guilty, responsible or not, possible or impossible, strong or weak, right or wrong" (Stone 2002, 382). As such, attributions of responsibility are linked to emotions and trust in government. The aftermath of a disaster is highly emotional, as well as a fertile environment for blame gaming, often connected to feelings of anger or anxiety. While anger, on the one hand, is linked to a desire to punish those responsible or those in powers, anxiety, on the other hand, might reduce the likeliness to blame others, and instead favor information-seeking policies (Atkeson & Maestas 2010, 181–182; 188; Kühne & Schemer 2015, 401). When feelings of sadness are elicited, the participants are more willing to help victims and emphasize remedial measures (Kühne & Schemer 2015, 402).

As a summary, I draw together the main theoretical points concerning the discussion of the politicization of focusing events in the parliamentary arena in Figure 12. The research questions of the study analyze framing, blame attributions and emotional appeal when discussing different focusing events and possible solutions to the problems. Boin et al.'s (2009) distinction between whether a crisis is portrayed as a threat or an opportunity can be seen as the outcome of a discursive environment. Hence, the first dimension in the politicization process is that the event is portrayed as a crisis, threatening the core values in society. In addition, whenever such a crisis situation is identified, some political actors may decide to use the event as an opportunity for change. Others, however, may simply prefer to maintain the status quo and existing policies. Therefore, the politicization of the event in the parliamentary arena is generally a struggle over the meaning-making process. Furthermore, the meaning-making of an event is important for the legitimacy of societal institutions and core values. In this light, the framing offers an interpretation of the focusing event and explains how a society is supposed to get through a crisis. The expectations concerning the five reoccurring frameworks are that the *attribution of responsibility* framing variable involves recognizing the problem as a threat to core values, as well as emphasizing a responsibility for dealing with the situation. However, the *attribution* variable can be discussed in terms of blame or merely as recognition. A conflict frame is likely to portray an event as an opportunity by attributing some

form of blame, or attacking the status quo. In this study, an exploratory analysis is also made of the three other frames; economic, human interest and morality.

| | **THREAT** | undecided | **OPPORTUNITY** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Framing | Attribution of resp. | Economy, Morality | Conflict, Human interest |
| Blame game | Only diffuse blame | | Blame attribution |
| Emotions | Anxiety | Positive feelings, Sadness, Compassion | Anger |
| | **solutions discussed** | | **solutions discussed** |

**Figure 12.** The politicization of focusing events in the parliamentary arena.

An important question to consider here concerns how these frames are used in promoting a threat or an opportunity discourse. Regarding the blame game, blame attribution is present when a focusing event is seen as an opportunity for change and actors want to pinpoint the disarray on governmental actions. However, only modest or diffused blame is visible when the event is portrayed as a threat to core values and the collective good in society, ensuring the defense of existing policies and incumbent office-holders. Concerning the emotions used in the argumentation, anger and anxiety have been linked to blame attribution. However, whereas anger promotes a desire to punish those in power, anxiety stimulates a more reductive attitude. Furthermore, positive feelings of joy, hope and pride, together with sadness and compassion are researched using an exploratory analysis in this study. For example, consideration is given as to whether feelings of sadness make MPs more willing to want to help the victims and emphasize a threat discourse. In conclusion, the

perception of an event as more of a threat or more of an opportunity affects the solutions that are deemed necessary.

## 7.5 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to analyze the Finnish parliamentary debate following four focusing events, and distinguish variances in the discourse. This is done by analyzing the discussions that took place in the plenary sessions in the wake of each event. The overall research question examines whether any differences can be found in the discussions following these four events in terms of their strength (stronger versus weaker) and origin (man-made versus natural disasters). The debates are studied using four main themes (e.g. Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Birkland 1996; 2006,) and the notion is that there is a lack of research available on the discourse surrounding the political debate on focusing events. Hence, the two main research questions, as well as the four themes, are as follows:

R1: Does the origin of a focusing event (natural versus man-made) affect the political discourse?
R2: Does the strength of a focusing event (weaker versus stronger) affect the political discourse?

The questions pertaining to the four political discourse themes are as follows:

a) Which different frames were used in the debate?
b) How was blame attributed in the debate?
c) Which emotions were used in the debate?
d) Which solutions were presented to the problem(s)?

## 7.6 Method and material

A quantitative content analysis is used in this study to examine the debates that took place during the plenary sessions following four focusing events in Finland; the school shooting in Jokela 2007, the water crisis in Nokia in 2007, the Boxing Day Storm in 2011, and the floods in Ostrobothnia in 2012. The use of a content analysis is a research strategy defined as "the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules" (Riff et al. 2014, 3), often involving statistical methods to analyze relationships. To obtain as similar coding objects as possible, only the plenary debates are analyzed. The data includes all debates mentioning the events during a nine-month period following each crisis. A nine-month period represents the initial phase of the discussion. Moreover, another school shooting happened less than a year after Jokela, and that debate needed to be excluded from the present analysis. Depending on the success of the political actions, and feedback from other societal arenas, the framing of the debate might emphasize other aspects during the third phase. The plenary sessions in written form were found through the search engine www.riksdagen.fi, which provides access to all documents discussed in the Finnish parliament and the government. Through the use of key words, the following numbers of plenary sessions dealing with each of the four focusing events were identified; the Jokela School shooting (16); the Boxing Day storm (11); the Nokia water crisis (9); the floods in Ostrobothnia (9). The combined numbers of debate contributions during these sessions are 132 and each contribution is seen as a coding unit. The search was limited to a nine-month period following the events.

### 7.6.1 The Finnish political context

A great deal of seminal disaster research has been carried out in an American setting (Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Birkland 1996; 2006, Baumgartner & Jones 2005). However, Jensen (2011) argues that a major difference between the US and the European context is the European parliamentary systems, where political parties have a central role as executives. Deriving from this notion, it is essential to discuss the veto power of pivotal parties. As Boin et al. (2009) demonstrate, the political context and an event's occurrence in relation to ongoing elections matter greatly. All the four Finnish cases

appear at a similar point in the political process, during the first or second year of a political term. Hence, the events did not influence the election campaigns or the formation of government. Previous research shows that the closer in time to a forthcoming election a focusing event occurs, the higher the likelihood of policy reform or elite damage (Boin et al. 2009, 99). The expectations of the debates in the Finnish parliaments are therefore more balanced. During 2007, the Centre Party (KESK) and the Conservatives (KOK) formed a coalition with the Swedish People's Party (RKP) and the Greens (VIHR). Four years later, the Left Alliance (VAS) and the Christian Democrats (KD) formed a coalition with KOK, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Greens and the RKP, forming a so-called rainbow coalition.

### 7.6.2 Coding measurements

To analyze the blame attribution, framing, emotional appeal and discussion about problems and solutions, I draw upon previous research (e.g. Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Birkland 2006; Birkland & Warnement 2013; Birkland et al. 2014; Bytzek 2008; Chyi & McCombs 2004; Houston et al. 2012; Lawrence 2001; Li 2007; Semetko & Valkenburg 2000). The coding scheme is included as Appendix B.

Initially, basic data were collected. Each text was identified by the focusing event it dealt with and the information collected was from the plenary discussion where the comment was placed and who placed it; i.e. the speakers' role in the parliament, party membership, as well as opposition or governmental position. The proportion of a comment discussing the focusing event in questions was noted as ranging from complete to very small on a four-point scale, followed by a brief description of the theme of the text.

#### *Blame attribution*

The comments analyzed were coded for attribution of blame. The measurements draw upon previous work by Atkeson and Maestas (2012) who have analyzed the blame attribution environment following Hurricane Katrina. Attributions of blame may be implicit, such as in the tone of the report or leading statements, or explicit in the form of direct statements. In this study, explicit attributions of blame – defined as an expression of some kind of responsibility for what has happened – were coded. When an attribution occurred in the comment, the coder noted the speaker making the

attribution, and the target of the attribution. Additionally, the time frame to which the attribution was referring was coded as either a preparation failure or a response failure. Moreover, the reason for the attribution of blame was registered (Atkeson & Maestas 2012, 204–207). An example is the statement from Eero Lehti (KOK)[17] pointing out how Jokela was an unexpected event, while Nokia to some extent was a product of gross negligence. Hence, the two events should be treated differently.

### *Framing*

To analyze which frames were used in the parliamentary debate, a previous framing measurement developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) was used. This measurement is used by other researchers concerning a wide range of topics (e.g. An & Gower 2009; de Vreese et al. 2001; Dimitrova et al. 2005; Igartua et al. 2005). The coding scheme included 20 questions to which the coder had to answer yes (1) or no (0). Each question represented one of five frames; attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality and economic dimensions. Examples of the questions used were "Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?" (attribution of responsibility) and "Is there a mention of the cost/degree of expense involved?" (economic). The attribution of responsibility frame describes a problem in a way that responsibility can be attributed to decision makers, groups or individuals, either as a responsibility for the occurrence of a problem or as responsibility for resolving the issue (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, 96). When applying a conflict frame, the debate underscores a conflict between individuals, groups or institutions. Through a human interest frame, the news presents an emotional angle or a personal story (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000). Furthermore, the use of the human interest frames can increase emotional reactions, which correlate with responsibility attribution (Cho & Gower 2006, 422). The economic frame presents an issue, an event or a problem based on the economic consequences for individuals, groups, institutions or countries (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, 96). Fifthly, the morality frame places an issue or an event in a moral context by referring to religious principles or moral rules (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000, 96). Previous

[17] "Nokia ja Jokela ovat erilaisia luonteeltaan. Jokelassa on täysin ennalta arvaamaton tapaus. Nokian kohdalla voidaan sanoa, että on törkeästä huolimattomuudesta ainakin osittain kyse, jolloin siinä mielessä näitä kohteita pitäisi myös käsitellä omavastuuosuudeltaan erilaisina." PTK 58/2008 vp

research (e.g. d'Haenens & De Lange 2001; Holt & Major 2010; Semetko & Valkenburg 2000) has investigated how the questions cluster together and the five previously discussed frames were distinguishable.

### *Emotional argumentation*

The argumentation was coded for use of emotions. A division of six basic emotions (anger, anxiety, enthusiasm, pride, compassion, sadness and hope) are often used in political communication research (e.g. Brader & Valentino, 2007; Huddy et al., 2007; Neuman et al., 2007). This is in line with Brader's (2006) study of emotional appeal in political ads. During the coding process in this study, some of the original categories were merged into a broader division of emotions – negative versus positive. An example of enthusiasm, hope and joy appeal is the statement made by Markku Eestilä (KOK) [18]; "Finnish electricity companies did an outstanding job during last year's storms, a formal thank you to them."

### *Problems and solutions*

In the parliamentary arena, different representations of the problems are presented. These representations can be analyzed by looking at a diagnosis – what is presented as the problem, how is it presented and who caused the problem, followed by a prognosis of how the problem should be solved (Birkland & Warnement 2014; Roggeband & Vliegenthart 2007, 529). The questions included in the coding scheme are "What is represented as the problem?" and "Which action is deemed necessary and why?" After the initial coding, the problems and solutions variables were recoded into new, more general categories, in order to enable a comparison between the four events. An illustration of this is the economy category that contained different statements, for example the quest for more resources to pay compensation to farmers, or a demand for more money to be allocated to school health services.

An inter-coder reliability test was conducted on a randomized sample of 15 contributions for the blame attribution, framing and emotional appeal variables, using

[18] "Suomalaiset sähköyhtiöt selvisivät erinomaisesti viime vuoden myrskyistä, siitä heille julkinen kiitos." PTK 23/2012 vp.

simple agreement (Holsti's formula)[19], with the lowest score of .85 for the framing variables and .90 for emotional appeal. The blame attribution showed total agreement between the two coding occasions.

## 7.7 Results

The findings of the study show some differences between the four focusing events concerning the parliamentary debate. A quantitative content analysis, following the coding scheme presented in the previous section, was conducted on 132 plenary session contributions. The nine months of parliamentary debate represent a total population, hence, statistical tests are redundant. However, the tests conducted are used to indicate small or large differences between the events.

The findings will be reported as four different events in this section, and discussed more profoundly according to strength and origin in the concluding section. The debate will be exemplified through translated plenary session contributions and the original texts in Finnish and Swedish are included in Appendix C. Initially, I present the basic characteristics of the parliamentary debate (Table 10). The three most dominant parties in the debate are different during the two time periods (the 2007 parliament and the 2011/2012 parliament). Throughout the school shooting and the water crisis, the two governmental parties, i.e. the Centre Party (KESK) and the Conservatives (KOK), as well as the third largest party in opposition, the Social Democrats (SDP), dominated the debate.

[19] Holsti's intercoder reliability (IR) formula was used as follows: IR = 2M/(N1 + N2), where M equals the number of agreements between the two coding opportunities, N1 is the total number of coding decisions made during the first coding and N2 is the total number of coding decisions made during the second session.

**Table 10.** Basic characteristics of the parliamentary debate.

= Christian Democrats, PS = True Finns, VAS = Left-Wing

| | **Man-made, stronger focus** | *n* (%) | **Man-made, weaker focus** | *n* (%) | **Natural, stronger focus** | *n* (%) | **Natural, weaker focus** | *n* (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Party** | | 55 | | 35 | | 14 | | 28 |
| I | KESK | 16 (29.6) | KOK | 13 (37) | KOK | 7 (50.0) | KESK | 10 (35.7) |
| II | KOK | 13 (24.1) | SDP | 8 (23) | PS | 4 (28.6) | KOK | 7 (25) |
| III | SDP | 10 (18.5) | KESK | 7 (20) | KESK | 2 (14.3) | PS | 7 (25) |
| IV | KD | 4 (7.4) | VIHR | 4 (11.4) | KD | 1 (7.1) | RKP | 2 (7.1) |
| V | PS | 3 (5.6) | KD | 1 (2.9) | | | VIHR | 2 (7.1) |
| VI | VAS | 3 (5.6) | PS | 1 (2.9) | | | | |
| VII | VIHR | 3 (5.6) | VAS | 1 (2.9) | | | | |
| VIII | RKP | 2 (3.7) | | | | | | |
| **Who speaks?** | | | | | | | | |
| I | MP | 44 (80) | MP | 27 (77) | MP | 12 (86) | MP | 22 (79) |
| II | Minister | 10 (18) | Minister | 8 (23) | Minister | 2 (14) | Minister | 6 (21) |
| III | Speaker of Parl. | 1 (2) | | | | | | |
| **Gov/opp** | | | | | | | | |
| I | Government | 34 (62) | Government | 24 (69) | Government | 8 (57) | Opposition | 17 (61) |
| II | Opposition | 21 (38) | Opposition | 11 (31) | Opposition | 6 (43) | Government | 11 (39) |
| **Proportion of comment** | | | | | | | | |
| I | Extensive | 26 (47) | Extensive | 17 (49) | Extensive | 9 (64) | Extensive | 16 (57) |
| II | Very small | 16 (29) | Very small | 12 (34) | Very small | 3 (21) | Very small | 8 (29) |
| III | Small | 13 (24) | Small | 6 (17) | Small | 2 (14) | Small | 4 (14) |

Alliance, VIHR = Green League, RKP = Swedish People's Party.

Concerning the debates following the natural disasters, although the governing KOK prevailed, the two other most vocal parties in the debate were opposition parties; KESK and the True Finns Party (PS).Thus, the majority of the flood debate contributions were made by the opposition parties.

As described above, the debates following the two man-made disasters often emphasized other aspects than the focusing event in question, while the majority of the comments discussing the natural disasters focused completely on the subject of the crisis. Moreover, the number of debate contributions varies between the events; both the man-made disasters receive far more entries than the natural disasters, 55 for the school shooting and 35 for the water crisis – versus 14 for the storm and 28 for the floods. One explanation for the low number of entries for the storm is explained by the timing. The storm occurred during the Christmas holiday period, which is followed by a month-long break in the plenary sessions. As such, an extensive debate had already taken place in the media arena during the days immediately following the focusing event. Nevertheless, the floods also receive less space on the political agenda than the two man-made disasters.

### Framing

The use of frames provides meaning to a crisis context that can otherwise be very complex. The results (Table 11) concerning the first research question show that the school shooting in Jokela stands out as the event that differs the most from the three other events, with a lower proportion of economy and attributions of responsibility frames.

**Table 11.** Use of frames in the parliamentary debate (%).

| | **Man-made stronger** *n* = 55 | **Man-made weaker** *n* = 35 | **Natural dis. stronger** *n* = 14 | **Natural dis. weaker** *n* = 28 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attribution of resp. | 66 | 89 | 89 | 89 |
| Human interest | 42 | 9 | 43 | 21 |
| Conflict | 13 | 3 | 29 | 11 |
| Morality | 15 | | | |
| Economic | 29 | 57 | 64 | 82 |

*Note:* a debate contribution may contain several different frameworks.

Instead, the school shooting is the only event discussed in terms of morality. The other man-made event, the water crisis, had a very high number of responsibility comments, as well as economic references, whereas the human interest and the conflict angles were less prominent, as seen in MP Katainen's statement:

> As a part of the budget discussion that is handled right now we suggest that the city of Nokia, following the accident with the water pipe, and the municipality of Tuusula, following the tragic events in the Jokela School, both are granted a maximum amount of 1 million Euros each. […] Both events are disasters, and the handling of these events definitely belongs to state activity. (Elsi Katainen, KESK, ptk 58/2008 vp)

The two natural disasters are framed alike, with a domination of responsibility and economic frames. It is noticeable that the frames are more evenly distributed when comparing natural disasters to man-made events.

### Blame attribution

The blame attribution in the parliamentary debate regarding explicit attributions of blame was, in general, quite low. Only one blame attribution was present in the discussion of the school shooting, placing responsibility on the internet by saying that playing computer games may worsen problems of marginalization and loneliness. As seen in Heinäluoma's statement, the debate following the school shooting explicitly pointed out that no one was to blame.

> Why does this happen? Can we learn something from this? At the same time it is clear that we do not want to blame anyone. We know the high standard of our schools, we are aware of the good work that the teachers do. But one always stops to wonder – is there anything we can learn? (Eero Heinäluoma, SDP, ptk 75/2007 vp)

Concerning the water crisis, three attributions placed blame on the city of Nokia, pointing out that it was a mistake or a self-inflicted problem caused by the civil servants in Nokia. The two natural disasters, however, were portrayed as preparation failures, collecting five blame attributions in total. In these disasters, the blame was

placed on the large electricity companies for their poor preparation and focus on executive bonuses instead of developing the technology – as well as on insufficient dredging:

> It should not be unclear to anyone that the flooding in Ostrobothnia is not caused by the people who live there. The flooding is caused by the upstream flow of water. (Lars-Erik Gästgivars, RKP, ptk 45/2013 vp)

However, attributions of blame may be implicit, such as the tone of the text or leading statements (Atkeson & Maestas, 2012: 204–207). In this study, even if no explicit blame was present, the blame attribution is connected to the fourth research question of solutions presented to the problem. Even though no explicit attribution is stated, an underlying connection between blame and the problems and solutions presented may be present.

### Emotional appeals

Although the use of emotions is considered to be important when evaluating a situation, interestingly, as shown in Table 12, only a small number of debate contributions focused on conveying fear and only about a fifth of the natural disaster discussions appealed to anger.

**Table 12.** Use of emotions in the parliamentary debate (%).

| | Fear | Positive feelings | Anger | Compassion Sadness | *n* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Man/strong** | 7 | 13 | 2 | 31 | 55 |
| **Man/weak** | 3 | 14 | | 9 | 35 |
| **Nature/strong** | 14 | 21 | 21 | 21 | 14 |
| **Nature/weak** | 7 | 4 | 18 | 29 | 28 |

**Note***:* Positive feelings consist of the categories hope/joy + enthusiasm. Subsequently, compassion and sadness are combined to one category.

Instead, positive feelings of being proud of what has been done, or an optimistic outlook for the future, are present in all the discussions.

> Minister Häkämies has acted exceptionally well in dealing with this storm. (Timo Heinonen, KOK, ptk 23/2012 vp)

However, the feelings appealed to the most in the parliamentary debate are compassion and sadness.

> The situation in Nokia is still truly challenging. There are people who have contracted stomach illness for the second or third time and people who suffer from secondary disease such as articulation inflammation. The local businesses have also suffered disproportionate losses of income. The question of whether the government will come to assist has been raised. (Erkki Pulliainen, VIHR, ptk 97/2007 vp)

An interesting aspect worth consideration here is the association between the frames to the emotions used in the debate (Table 13).

**Table 13.** Cross tabulations between frames and emotional arguments (%).

| | Fear | Positive feelings | Anger | Compassion Sadness |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Att. of resp. | 6.7 | 11.5 | 8.7 | 24 |
| Human int. | 10.5 | **23.7*** | 13.2 | **68.4***** |
| Conflict | | 13.3 | **40.0***** | 26.7 |
| Morality | | 25 | | **75**** |
| Economic | **2.9*** | 10.3 | **11.8**** | 23.5 |

**Note**: Fisher's Exact Test, significant at *** *p*<.001, **$p$<.05, *$p$<.10

The use of positive feelings and compassion and sadness, here in terms of human interest, is probably an explanation for the low amount of blame attributions. The decision makers focused more on sending out a positive image or expressing sympathy than impeaching each other. However, the use of anger was present when portraying the issue as a conflict, which could point to implicit blame. Subsequently, I tested the differences between governmental and opposition parties regarding their use of emotional appeal and found that the only statistically significant difference was

the use of compassion and sadness (Table 14.). What is noteworthy here is a higher use of anger by opposition parties; the parties belonging to the government were more inclined to express positive feelings of hope and pride.

**Table 14.** Emotions used by governmental and opposition parties (%).

| | Governmental party | Opposition party |
|---|---|---|
| Fear | 6.5 | 7.3 |
| Positive feelings | 13.0 | 10.9 |
| Anger | 3.9 | 10.9 |
| Compassion/sadness | 16.9 | **32.7**** |

**Note**: Fisher's Exact Test, significant at *** *p*<.001, **p*<.05, **p*<.10

### Problems and solutions

Even if the problems and solutions presented in the parliamentary debate of the focusing events are event-specific, some general categories can be found. Since the debates during the plenary sessions are restricted in time, many comments emphasize only the solution aspect. Hence, the problems are exemplified very briefly, and instead the main focus here lies on the solutions presented. The school shooting was often mentioned in reference to a high amount of anxiety, depression or loneliness among adolescence in combination with few psychologists available as MP Alanko-Kahiluoto points out below. Subsequently, MP Heinonen emphasizes the need of changes in the school organization:

> The events in Jokela last week have finally alerted all of us to the fact that something needs to be done about preventing malaise of the youth. It is important to strengthen the distribution of income, but that action alone is not enough. The decay of the preventing measures provided to families, children and the youth must be stopped. (Outi Alanko-Kahiluoto, VAS, ptk 81/2007 vp)

> Our government has taken action concerning additional funding for special education, supportive education and the size of the student groups, all of which have a clear link to the malaise mentioned. (Timo Heinonen, KOK, ptk 39/2008 vp)

Moreover, this malaise was discussed in terms of it being a problem permeating all of Finnish society:

> But we must also continue supporting our families. The killings in Jokela, which have affected all of us, shed new light on the importance of this matter. The wellbeing of children or families cannot be reduced since the problems families face reflect how we are doing in general. (Katri Komi, KESK, ptk 101/2007 vp)

Problems following the water crisis were presented as a physical and mental indisposition amongst the citizens of Nokia, in combination with economic compensation. The inadequate crisis communication from the city of Nokia was mentioned as a problem:

> The accident in the water system in Nokia and the communication concerning the accident has been a matter of discussion among the Finns during the last weeks. The health of thousands of people in Nokia has been affected by the event. The event proves how vulnerable a system can be at its worst in Finland. The event also proves that effective, fast and objective informing is crucial after a disaster. Furthermore the event proves that the resources of a single municipality are insufficient when an accident of this measure occurs in a certain place. (Harri Jaskari, KOK, ptk 97/2007 vp)

Difficulties following the two natural disasters were portrayed as a physical damage, i.e. harvest losses or interruption in the electricity supply, and how to organize the economic compensations:

> The need for change in certain parts of the electricity market legislation were brought to light by the power failure following the storms of last summer and this New Year. In many places people were left without electricity for several weeks. The power failure also causes large financial losses to both companies and people. Many people have been subjected to health threats due to the lack of heating and water. (Lea Mäkipää, PS, ptk 23/2012 vp)

The main solutions put forward are presented in Table 15, ranked according to how frequently they are used. The economy category refers to the debate on economic resources, how to compensate both individuals and the affected region, and how to reallocate resources.

**Table 15.** Solutions advocated during the plenary sessions.

| | Man-made stronger (%) | Man-made weaker (%) | Nature stronger (%) | Nature weaker (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I | Economy (25) | Economy (34) | Research (43) | Economy (57) |
| II | Policy change (13) | Crisis communication (26) | Policy change (21) | Research (36) |
| III | Society (11) | Research (11) | Crisis communication (21) | Policy change (4) |
| IV | Research (9) | Policy change (6) | | |
| V | Crisis communication (5) | | | |

Kendall's *W* = .315

> Following the tragedy at the educational center of Jokela, a million euros of governmental grants will be granted to the municipality of Tuusula to cover various expenses concerning the tragedy. 100.000 Euros will also be granted for the investigation of the events. (Minister of Finance Jyrki Katainen, KOK, ptk 87/2007 vp)

> Ostrobothnia is flooded again and the government withdraws itself from paying compensations. Instead, the insurance companies step forward, but the question is: Who is going to pay the premium to the companies? (Lars-Erik Gästgivars, RKP, ptk 45/2013 vp)

The policy change category advocates that a law change or some kind of policy change is needed to solve the problem. When debating the school shooting, MP Peltonen points out that the education act needs updating. The discussion following the storm emphasizes a need for policy change:

> In my opinion it is thoroughly motivated to add a supplement about the duty to guarantee the welfare of the students in the education act. (Tuula Peltonen, SDP, ptk 4/2008 vp)

> The companies and associations which have been granted access according to the electricity market legislation have not done thorough enough preparations concerning the prevention and reparation of power failures. The legislation of today does not provide the customers of power companies' compensation for losses. With certain changes the legislation will be better adjusted to the need for power companies to be responsible for covering losses. (Lea Mäkipää, PS, ptk 23/2012 vp)

A focus on research and evaluation refers to learning from the event and developing new methods to avoid similar situations in the future, as seen in the debate contributions concerning the floods and the school shooting:

> Concerning the situation, and also surely concerning future floods, in the fall of 2011 the Ministry of agriculture and forestry pointed out 21 areas that are subjected to the greatest risks of floods. At this present plans are being made for these areas in order to prepare for possible future floods. These plans will of course be ready in some time, and then they will be actualized. The government has its responsibility, and the municipalities have theirs, and in some cases the land owners have to take care of their properties. (Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Jari Koskinen, KOK, ptk 45/2013 vp)

> The justice department has started a process of investigation on the disaster, and in that investigation the legislation and needs of changes concerning it will be evaluated through ground rules of investigation. It stands clear that the discussions that have been held and the statements from experts point to the fact that a change in the legislation concerning firearms will be evaluated seriously as a part of the investigation. (Minister of Justice, Tuija Brax, VIHR, ptk 97/2007 vp)

The crisis communication category calls attention to the development of better communication tools and strategies between leaders and citizens:

> As the informing from the government has been so weak and as the method of mass text messages was discussed after the tsunami disaster, what is the status of

> this right now? Could this be the method by which we, in the future, will be able to communicate rapidly in challenging situations? I will end this on a positive note. It concerns the water accident in Nokia. The fast and reliable courses of action are precisely the right way to deal with these things, and society as a whole will surely come to aid to if there is a need for it financially. But this kind of preparedness without fuss will surely be expected by the National defence also in the future. (Erkki Pulliainen, VIHR, ptk 97/2007 vp)

In the debate on the school shooting, a vast solutions category was society, and how to change attitudes and behavior on a societal level. The economy aspect was an important element in the debate concerning all four events:

> The recent heavy floods have clearly proven that there is a need to earmark a considerably much larger amount of resources to covering the losses of floods. In my opinion the amount of grants aimed at covering these damages is not sufficient. (Pirkko Ruohonen-Lerner, PS, ptk 107/2012 vp)

The debate following the Boxing Day storm had no specific economy solutions, however the policy change debate contributions dealt with questions of how to change the compensation policy to represent a more equal level and how to lower costs in the future.

> Concerning the change of legislation following the storm which brings with it the challenges of laying cables, I might point out as an important point the fact that the Minister of Transport and Communications has been susceptible enough to consider a change in the legislation that would make it possible to place electrical cables close to roads when possible. This would lower the costs with one third. In other words the more common use of cables, and legislation that makes it possible, is a part of the future. (Minister of Employment and the economy Jyri Häkämies, KOK, ptk 83/2012 vp)

The research aspect that advocates new methods and evaluation was frequently used during the debate on the two natural disasters.

> But it is important to build readiness so that the companies have enough electricians on call that are capable of doing work in the terrain, to do preventing work between storms and to remove trees that are close to electric wires that

> might fall on them so that the customers are not subjected to losses. (Lauri Heikkilä, PS, 23/2012 vp)
>
> At this moment various plans concerning the risks of floods are made, and in these plans the high risk areas of flooding in Finland, where the damages could be the worst, are evaluated. (Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Jari Koskinen, KOK, ptk 82/2012 vp)

The debates following the two man-made crises were instead more divided between different aspects of solutions.

## 7.8 Discussions and conclusions

Crises and disasters provide a different surrounding than everyday politics. As such, the political debate following focusing events might serve as a space whereby policy change is permitted, due to the emotional impact of these events and because of a motivation for attributions of blame. Moreover, the parliamentary debate is important since the meaning-making process affects what is portrayed as the problem and what should be done, creating a struggle amongst political actors regarding the definition of the event (Birkland, Camileeri & Warnement 2014, 2). This study focused on a previously understudied research area, a textual analysis of the political discourse surrounding focusing events with a varying degree of strength and origin. The framing, blame attribution, emotional arguments, and solutions put forward were empirically assessed through a quantitative content analysis of the Finnish parliamentary plenary sessions during a nine month period following the events. The analysis showed differences between the four events, and a summarization of the most important findings is presented in Table 16.

**Table 16.** The politicization of focusing events during the plenary sessions.

| | Blame | Framing | Emotions | Solutions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Man-made, stronger | Low | Attribution of resp. | Compassion/sadness | Economic |
| Man-made, weaker | Low | Attribution of resp. | Positive emotions | Economic |
| Nature, stronger | Low | Attribution of resp. | Positive emotions, anger, compassion/sadness | Research |
| Nature, weaker | Low | Attribution of resp., Economic | Compassion/sadness | Economic |

The main differences in the political discourse found between natural disasters and man-made events are firstly that the man-made events received a lengthier debate with a higher amount of contributions (Jokela $n = 55$ and Nokia $n = 35$, versus the storm $n = 14$ and the floods $n = 28$). Starting from the basic characteristics of the debate, there is a difference between the man-made disasters and the natural disasters depending on who is speaking. The three most dominant parties contributing to the debate following the school shooting and the water crisis are the three biggest parties in the parliament. However, when debating the natural disasters, two of the most dominating parties were the opposition parties PS and KESK. This is particularly visible after the flooding, where a vast majority of the debate contributions are made by the opposition. However, one explanation might be that the opposing Centre Party emphasizes rural issues.

When discussing how the events were portrayed through either episodic or thematic frames (e.g. Iyengar, 1989), the storm and the floods were more often discussed through an episodic frame, as such, the discussions focused on the specific event in question. In comparison, the man-made focusing events were discussed with a thematic framing, emphasizing a broader societal perspective. Especially the school shooting was discussed in a societal context on a more general level. Regarding the second research question, addressing whether the strength of the event affects the type of political discourse, the only result pointing to a difference concerns the solutions presented: more severe events are often discussed in terms of policy change (Rochefort & Cobb, 1994).

However, when answering the question posed in the title of this article, i.e. whether the politicization process of these events leads to a threat or an opportunity framing – the answer is that all the four focusing events were, to a great majority, discussed as critical threats, demanding a political response in the form of economic help to the affected actors of regions or research evaluations. Proceeding from the theoretical background discussed earlier in the paper, in conclusion with the results from the study, I suggest that the politicization processes in the formal political arena can be understood as follows (Figure 13). The bold marking represents the most common input during the Finnish parliamentary debates:

| | **THREAT** | **OPPORTUNITY** |
|---|---|---|
| Framing | **Economic**, Human interest, **Attribution of responsibility** | Conflict |
| Blame game | **Only diffuse blame** | Blame attribution |
| Emotions | **Sadness/compassion** **Positive feelings** Anxiety | **Anger** |
| Solutions | **Economic** **Research** Crisis communication | Policy change |

**Figure 13.** The politicization of focusing events in the Finnish parliament.

Whether an event is labelled as a 'disaster' or an 'accident' can have a major difference – especially when it comes to allocation of responsibility (Millar & Heath, 2004). This dimension is interesting when talking about man-made disasters in the form of accidents. Some of the examined plenary session contributions highlighted the fact that the water crisis in Nokia was the city's 'own fault'. Even though the case in Nokia was initially an accident, the city of Nokia was held responsible. This is an important link in the legitimacy of the political system. The aftermath of a focusing event can be

discussed in terms of constructing severity, agency or responsibility (Brändström et al., 2008). All of the events were portrayed as severe crises that violated core values in society, in combination with a construction of responsibility, visible through a high amount of attributions of responsibility frameworks used. Although, in this study, the construction of responsibility did not result in attributing blame to an actor (e.g. Brändström et al., 2008, 166), the question of accountability in the event of a crisis or disaster can be about an economic responsibility. This dimension was highly present in the Finnish parliamentary discourse, which brings us to the question of generalization to a broader context. Even though the events studied might not be seen as severe in a global comparison, in a Finnish context they are amongst the most severe crises during recent years. Although this study took a much needed step toward identifying the variables inside the politicization processes, I would like to call for further research on the combination of emotions, framing, blame attributions and their link to the solutions presented.

The dominant view of crises as threats included the use of human interest framing, i.e. positive feelings as well as sadness and compassion. Such feelings make the avoidance of blame more manageable, for instance by appealing to national solidarity (Boin et al., 2008: 98). In this light, anxiety might reduce the likeliness to blame others and instead favor information-seeking policies (Atkeson & Maestas, 2010: 181–182; 188). Keeping the status quo also means focusing mainly on research and economic solutions. An opportunistic interpretation with a result of policy change would probably focus more on conflict framing, blame attribution and feelings of anger. This study shows a statistically significant association between the conflict framework and feelings of anger. The uses of attribution of responsibility and economic frames were found in the views connected to both threats and opportunities.

This study identifies differences between different kinds of disasters. However, it does not compare disaster aftermaths to the "normal politicization process". Therefore, the question remains as to whether the politicization process continues to be the same during different types of events. Future research may expand these findings by comparing the politicization process in the media arena to the parliamentary discussion – are the same techniques used by politicians in the media to avoid blame,

and do the citizens accept a threat framing? More research going beyond the identification of frames is needed, in order to demonstrate how the behavior and use of different politicization processes affect public perception (e.g. Iannarino et al., 2015). It would also be of interest to compare different political contexts; while the Finnish system emphasizes consensus, other systems may favor two dominant parties. As such, an alternative system may provide more opportunities where power struggles can be studied. Hence, a question to consider is whether some of the answers to crisis communication and management are bound to specific political cultures, or do they recur in different systems.

# V. CONCLUSIONS

# 8. Another brick in the wall – Concluding discussion

Are crises and disasters really something that need to trouble the minds of political scientists? I was once asked a very similar question during a seminar, and indeed, looking back, it is easy to see that political scientists have been restrictive in their study of focusing events. However, if we start with the Greek word *polis*, meaning city, citizenship or body of citizens, and the derivate English word *politics*, the starting point is the human being. In this light, consideration needs to be given to the fact that the mind of a citizen has a negativity bias, i.e. people respond with greater attention to negative events, either unconsciously or through cognition. Furthermore, the structure of our society includes many actors and institutions acting as watchdogs in terms of investigating errors and looking out for disasters. Whenever a focusing event strikes –the result of either a natural disaster with great physical destruction or through the fear and sadness spread after a man-made event – citizens respond with emotions, allocating attention to this important issue. Focusing events differ from routine politics in many aspects; people approach the coverage by trying to understand a dangerous and threatening situation rather than by evaluating political positions. As such, the information processing, opinion formation and responsibility attribution are all linked to emotions (Kühne & Scheme 2015; Valentino et al. 2008). During a disaster or crisis, most participants in a community receive their information through similar media channels. Thus, a special meaning is given to the event in focus. The media will provide the initial information about what has happened as well as a possible blame and responsibility attribution during later stages. Naturally, both citizens and the media turn to the political leaders – asking questions concerning how this unthinkable event occurred and what will be done to avoid similar situations in the future. In this manner, the politicization game begins; i.e. the competition between the actors as to how the problem can be defined and framed. Moreover, to a great extent, it is during this process that possible solutions and how resources are to be

allocated are determined. As such, focusing events are political at heart (e.g. Boin et al. 2005).

This thesis sets out to discuss the concept of focusing events, and explores how different types of crises and disasters affect society. Focusing events are an important attribute of societal and political life. Although early political scientists acknowledge how society consists of systems that are interacting with each other, and how the feedback loop from the surrounding arenas affect the political agenda (Easton 1965; Lundquist 1971), few studies have gone beyond the (American) policy agenda, or the combination of the media arena and the political arena. Hence, an important starting point for this dissertation was to include all three societal arenas in disaster research.

Moreover, an important first stepping stone was to shed some light into the jungle of similar and overlapping concepts used to discuss crises and disasters, since a theoretical discussion and conceptualization are needed, not more concepts (e.g. Perry 2007). Hence, the theoretical discussion in this thesis eventuated into two aspects influencing focusing events, which are recapped in the two overall research questions below:

1. How does the magnitude of focusing events affect societal processes?

2. How does the origin of focusing events affect societal processes?

This concluding chapter will discuss the answers to the questions in the light of the specific research themes emphasized in the three studies. Looking at how focusing events affect politics, an emotional and a cognitive side emerge – albeit both tracks are closely related. Emotions in politics is a research area that has been gaining increasing recognition recently (e.g. Atkeson & Maestas 2012; Neuman et al. 2007). Furthermore, there is an affect effect in human political behavior, connecting emotions and thoughts, as well as influencing motivation, perception and judgment (McDermott 2007, 375). Hence, political science is approaching theories of neuroscience and psychology. At the same time, the framing of an event as a crisis, a natural disaster or as an event caused by human actions, affects possible solutions.

In conclusion, this dissertation has analyzed the meaning-making processes of politics in the aftermath of four focusing events. The main empirical findings are presented separately in Chapters 5–7. Let us now briefly recall the main themes in the three studies.

*Study 1: Citizens' Emotional and Cognitive Responses to Focusing Events – An Experimental Study,* aimed at including the citizen arena into the concept political processes. Citizens are ultimately the people who legitimize the political system by having trust in the leaders in crisis situations. By using a controlled laboratory experiment ($N$ = 30), the study analyzed both the unconscious reactions to disasters, in the form of skin conductance and pulse, as well as the self-reported emotions. This gives the study a unique opportunity to look at how these two measurements are related. Moreover, a questionnaire provided information about the subjects' views on responsibility and blame attribution following crises and disasters.

*Study 2: Media framing and blame attribution of focusing events* analysed the media coverage following the four disasters during the initial phase of the aftermath. As the theoretical discussion has emphasized thoroughly, the framing of the problem in the media is of uttermost importance for the political process. On the one hand, the coverage affects citizens' perception of the problem, and on the other hand, the media plays a role in attributing blame, thus paving the way to the solution debate. A quantitative content analysis of the leading Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat,* concerning both textual and visual coverage, was carried out during a two-week period. The aim of the study was to investigate the framing, blame attributions and solutions presented in the coverage. Moreover, the study provides a brief overview of the third phase of the media coverage.

*Study 3: Threat or opportunity? The politicization of focusing events in the parliamentary arena* analysed the formal political arena. When a focusing event has passed through the media channel, awoken feelings in the citizens, and finally reaches the arena where political action is possible, what happens next? The aim of

the dissertation is to analyse the discourse that precedes possible policy change. Hence, to locate emotional appeal, blame attribution and the different solutions discussed in the formal political arena– the study turned to the plenary debates.

## 8.1 Magnitude of an event

This concluding section will combine the findings from the empirical studies to answer the two overall research questions. The first questions highlighted the magnitude of focusing events. In the theorisation of the concept, an empirical tool was constructed to identify a variation in magnitude. In this first attempt, the magnitude was divided into events with a *stronger* and *weaker* degree of focus. In the real world, the strength of a focusing event is probably better represented by a floating index, than by two categories. Social sciences lie on the fine line between making sense of societal situations that are not necessary either simple or complex. "On the contrary, the perceived complexity of a situation depends in part on how well we can simplify reality, and our capacity to simplify depends on whether we can specify outcomes and explanatory variables in a coherent way" (King, Keohane & Verba 1994, 10). The three studies can thus be seen as an evaluation of the empirical tool – how well did the categories intercept the magnitude of an event? The laboratory study showed that concerning the self-reported emotion fear, the two events with a stronger degree of focus also scored higher. Moreover, looking at the amount of space given to the events in the media coverage, the magnitude is a good determination of how extensive the coverage of the event is. However, to really test the tool, more cases must be analyzed – preferably with a variance in geographical position.

The results from the first study, concerning citizens' reactions, showed tentatively that it was the magnitude of an event that affected the emotional reactions – a stronger degree of focus made the test subjects react more strongly. Statistically significant differences were found between man-made events, but not between the natural disasters. However, even if not statistically significant, the

relationship indicates that the same tendencies are present for natural disasters. From an evolutionary perspective, this finding is rather logical. It is the magnitude of danger we face that determines how strongly we react, and not specifically what caused the danger. The second study, analyzing the media coverage, shows a clear difference between events with a stronger and weaker degree of focus concerning how much space the issue was given. Revisiting the theoretical chapter concerning the media arena – the more attention an issue receives in the media, the more important the issue is perceived to be by the citizens (Strömbäck 2000). Another visible effect on the media arena is that a stronger magnitude is connected to an affective debate including possible solutions to the problem. This suggests that it is more likely that events with a strong degree of focus are connected to policy changes, since the events are seen in a bigger picture and remedies are actually discussed. However, if we compare events with a varying magnitude, the blame attribution and framing of the events differ. In the media arena, it appears that more powerful events receive more attention, as well as the important discussion on how to solve the problems. Contrarily, in the parliamentary arena, the empirical results point in a different direction. There are no clear differences between events with a weaker and stronger degree of focus – instead all four crises received a similar treatment, and the variance between the events can be explained by the origin of an event. When a focusing event passes the threshold to the parliamentary arena, it receives a fairly similar handling. The main difference was that events with a stronger degree of focus initiated a lengthier discussion about policy change.

## 8.2 Origin of an event

Turning attention to the second research question, which concerns how the origins of focusing events affect political processes, it is possible to see that, initially, the man-made disaster category differs internally, depending on whether the focusing event was the result of an accident or through the intentional use of violence. This is also the case in this dissertation, as the school shooting produced different

emotions than the water crisis, i.e. the water problems were caused by human error, while the school shooting was a planned and violent attack. The attributions of blame are inevitably different, and it is possible that despite being two man-made disasters, these difference show through in the empirical result. However, both events can be discussed in terms of prevention, and a clear actor being responsible for the event: Thus, I still find it fruitful to make the separation between natural disasters and man-made events, since the man-made events are different than the natural disasters. However, including several cases of both accidental cause and intended use of violence will make it easier to generalize the findings in future studies.

The theoretical expectations were contradictive, demonstrating that natural disasters often have visible, physical damage (Keshishian 1997; Williams 2008), while man-made disasters are easier to discuss in terms of a clear actor being responsible (Alexandrova 2015; Eriksson & Noreen 2004). The experimental results show mixed results; whereas there were some statistically significant differences between man-made and natural disasters when looking at events with a stronger degree of focus, only certain differences were found amongst the events with a weaker degree of focus. Moreover, there was a civic agreement that focusing events in general should have a high social responsibility. When the media coverage is examined according to origin, the main difference is that the two man-made disasters received a more even coverage during the six-month period, while the discussions of the natural disasters fade away more quickly. Even though the natural disaster with a stronger degree of focus was discussed in terms of an affective reporting and solutions, the coverage focused on the specific event with no broader implications for the society. As such, especially the six-month check showed tentatively that natural disasters were discussed in terms of economic frames, while man-made events were covered from a human interest angle or as a responsibility question. Nevertheless, in the parliamentary arena there were visible differences between events with different origins. The man-made events attracted debate contributions from almost all the coalition parties, while the natural disasters were discussed by the three biggest coalition parties and the majority of opposition parties. Emotionally, the natural disasters evoked more anger than the

man-made disasters, and interestingly, this was made through the use of appeals for compassion and sadness by the opposition party. This probably explains the relatively low number of blame attributions following all four events. Instead, the parliamentary debate emphasized positive feelings, or compassion and sadness, to discuss the problems – taking a clear responsibility for sorting out the situations, but mostly by giving economic help to the region or individuals affected by the situations. It is possible that other factors also affected the debates, such as the timing in terms of there being no upcoming elections in the near future. Hence, the events did not spark a competition or mudslinging between the parties. Moreover, a further explanation might be the Finnish context, which has a relatively strong hierarchal policy-making process and no strong traditions in terms of criticism.

## 8.3 Emotions and cognition in interaction

There can be no doubt that disaster research is an important political subject, and that many studies have meritoriously developed the theory of focusing events (Alexandrova 2015; Birkland 1996; 2006; Kingdon 2003). This dissertation contributes to the disaster field by analyzing focusing events in a broad perspective, as well as by comparing different types of events. Moreover, an important emphasis of the dissertation is to combine affection and cognition. Unconscious emotional responses provide the brain with clues about how to react to a situation. Should we fear a problem, draw back and evaluate our options? Should we be angry and find the person to blame? Or do we choose to focus on the positive aspects, despite having to face hard times ahead – looking for heroes, moving on together as a community? After the first emotional hours or days of a disaster situation, we turn to cognition. The politicization process of understanding what happened, why, and how to solve the problems has started. All three studies have looked at some aspect of emotions; the psychophysiological responses and the self-reported emotions, the visual material used to describe the events in the media, and verbal emotional appeals in the parliamentary debate. Thus, combinations of both our unconscious

emotional reactions, as well as the cognitive side of expressing emotions are addressed. As discussed in the first study, the best measurement of emotions in politics is still difficult to conclude, since psychophysiological reactions measure something other than what we say we feel. The theory of affective intelligence and researchers looking at emotions and political behaviour has mostly used the verbal, self-reported variables (e.g. Brader & Valentino 2007; Huddy et al. 2007; Marcus et al. 2000). Hence, these measurements fit better with the theory of AI. On the other hand, emotional appeal affects all of us equally, i.e. emotions also significantly affect highly educated intelligent people (Brader 2006), giving the use of psychophysiological methods an important contribution to political science studies.

Another interesting question concerns how emotional reactions are connected to the cognitive responses. This question will be discussed by showing a coordinate grid of emotions, on a scale from high to low, and cognition, in the form of blame attribution on an equal scale reaching from high to low, for each arena. At this point, since the *N* representing focusing events are low, I will only discuss how emotions and cognitions relate, and not include the separation of origin and magnitude of focusing events. In the citizen arena, I use the self-reported negative emotions, as well as skin conductance and pulse (see Table 1). The emotional appeals in the media arena are presented as the visual framing concerning the proportion of pictures during the first two days. The initial reporting is often extensive, and the first pictures are the symbolic ones, staying with us for a long period of time (Jokela $N$ = 45/high, Nokia $N$ = 2/low, the Storm $N$ = 22/medium, the Floods $N$ = 6/low). The percentage of debate contributions using some kind of emotional appeals in the parliamentary arena were 45 % for Jokela (medium), 26 % for Nokia (low), 57 % for the Storm (medium), and 45 % for the Floods (medium). Figures 14–16 show the three diagrams; note that a) represents man-made/strong, b) man-made/weak, c) nature/strong and d) nature/weak.

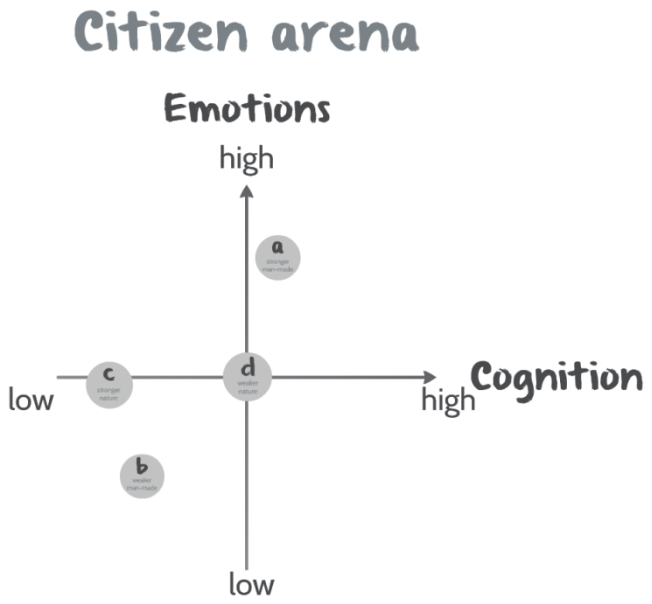


**Figure 14.** The emotional and cognitive responses in the citizen arena.

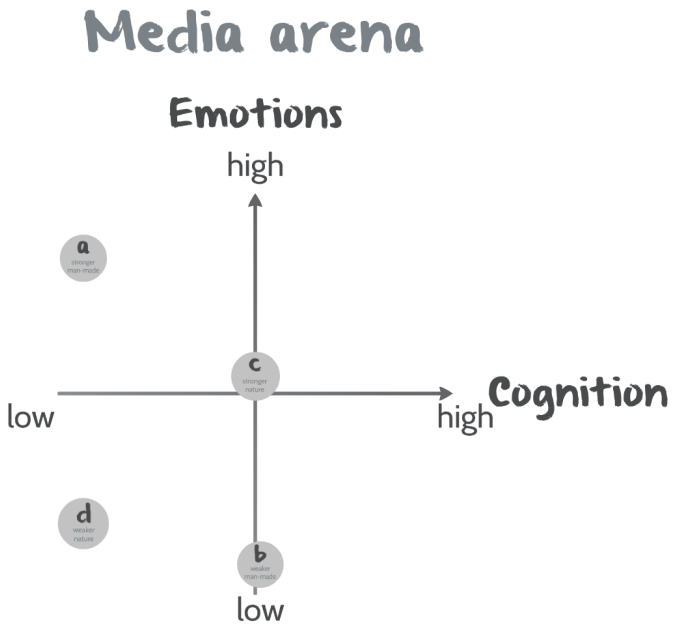


**Figure 15**. The emotional and cognitive responses in the media arena.

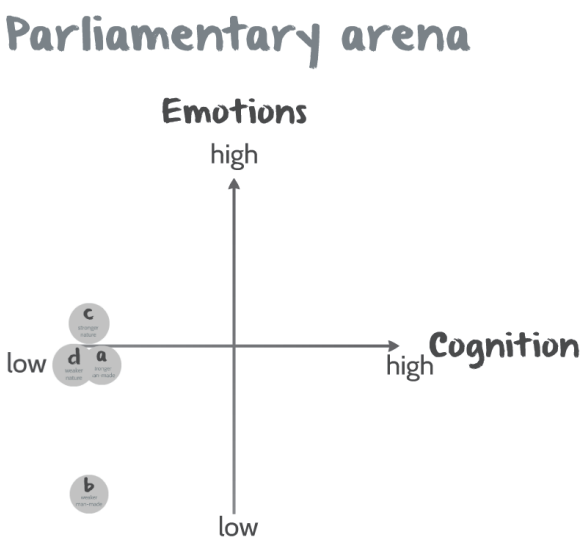


**Figure 16.** The emotional and cognitive responses in the parliamentary arena.

The citizen arena is the scene with the highest share of emotions, and also the arena where blame is fairly present. In the media arena, we still see appeals to emotions, and medium amounts of blame. However, moving on to the parliamentary arena, we discover the arena with the lowest number of attributions of blame, even though a medium appeal to emotions was present. Comparing the three arenas, it is evident that both the emotions and cognitions fade away the higher up in the political process we reach. Hence, a focusing event needs to gather extensive attention in the media, as well as in the minds of citizens, to actually reach the formal political arena. Once an event has made it to the parliamentary debates, the handling of the disasters is quite similar. Nevertheless, solutions and possible policy change is discussed more frequently when we are dealing with an event that has a stronger degree of focus.

## 8.4 Limitations and future studies

Every scientific study chooses a methodology, which means there will inevitably be limitations to consider. Studying only one country and one political system makes it difficult to produce generalizations (Carramani 2011: Harrop & Hauge 2003). However, analyzing only one country was a conscious choice in this dissertation: to meet the aims of the study and compare focusing events with a variance in origin and magnitude, initially the context needed to be held constant. The aim was never to say anything about school shootings or storms in general – but locate the differences between natural disasters and man-made disasters and events with a stronger versus weaker degree of focus in particular. Nevertheless, it would indeed be of interest to include further cases in this kind of research. Previous disaster studies often emphasize one disaster context, such as Hurricane Katrina (Atkeson & Maestas 2012), 9/11 (Entman 2003; Leffler 2011), or American school shootings (Fleming 2012). Birkland's seminal work on focusing events (1997; 2006) builds heavily on a few case studies. Using this methodological approach produces a global character that says something in depth, rather than in width (Swanborn 2010). Moreover, due to the economic and the timely aspects of a laboratory experiment, the number of cases had to be kept rather low.

One issue that is clearly apparent concerns the variation in magnitude that different focusing events can create. Previous research has solved this problem by using different concepts, such as catastrophe or disaster, whereby a catastrophe is more profound than a disaster (Birkland 1997; 2006; Nord & Strömbäck 2005). Yet, what is lacking in previous research is a clear operationalization of the concepts. We also encounter a linguistic problem when translating the concepts. We can probably agree that focusing events become more powerful with a stronger magnitude, as when the number of deceased increases (Alexandrova 2015). Nevertheless, using death tolls (Oh & Oetzel 2011) or economic losses (Yan & Bissell 2015) is problematic when conducting comparisons between focusing events with a different origin, as well as when comparing different geographical areas. In the Nordic context, or even in a European comparison, focusing events would not

be considered very strong according to such measurements. At the same time, on a national and European level, these events have political implications and should be viewed as strong focusing events. This dissertation tries to take a first step in the direction of defining the magnitude of focusing events. The studies tested the empirical tool on a small sample (four focusing events) within one context (the Finnish). Undoubtedly, the empirical tools will need more testing on a global scale with a higher *N*. Due to the nationalization and internationalization of disaster coverage in the news, we should care about global focusing events and how these events influence national and international political processes (Atkeson & Maestas 2012). The example of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan that was used in the introduction can be highlighted once again. The Japanese event had a strong influence on the global policy discussion concerning nuclear power, and highlighted the vulnerability of this energy form when disasters strike. Public attention to the issue was raised around the globe, e.g. the German response was to design a strategy for the abandonment of nuclear power over the next 11 years (Baetz 2011). In today's world, it is seldom enough to focus only on national solutions, since many disasters and crises are transboundary. Hence, it would be central to compare different political contexts. For future research, Alexandrova (2015) takes an important step when looking at the political implications of focusing events over a longer time period, in a broad perspective.

## 8.5 Final remarks

Despite its quite recent entry into political science, disaster research is a growing field of research due to the increasing number of disasters reported in the media. Within the field, this thesis pinpoints the importance of emphasizing emotions in social sciences. Contrary to popular belief, emotions are not the opposite of rationality or imply a lower standard (Brader 2005). Instead, the ability to recognize different emotions and how they influence political participation is a necessity in understanding social and political life. In a world filled with issues, problems, events

and actors seeking your attention or support, the fastest way to awareness is through emotions. Although it has been nearly ten years since the Jokela School shooting occurred, people still remember what they did when they heard about the event, the pictures shown in the newspaper and on television, and the following discussions between citizens, in the media and in the government about the explanations to why this happened. This study on citizens' emotional and cognitive reactions to four events showed that people place a high responsibility on society in times of crisis and disaster. However, this responsibility not only refers to the media or the political leaders, it also refers to the citizens themselves. This is interesting, because even though focusing events are inevitably part of a political framing and blaming game – at the same time, they make us vulnerable. They show that when we encounter difficulties, it is not the political affiliation that matters. Likewise, when people are sad and scared, it is not political promises that are initially required. Instead, people turn to emotions. Citizens are part of disaster politics, as can be seen in the fact that they are interested and follow the evaluation of governments in crisis situations (Atkeson & Maestas 2012). Thus, a collective interaction echoes through all three societal arenas to shape the definition of a focusing event. These events are events that will be processed in the minds and in the bodies of citizens, the media, as well as on the formal political arena. Indeed, these events are the trees we felt fall.

## Svensk sammanfattning

Fokuserande händelser är plötsliga, ovanliga och för med sig negativa konsekvenser för ett stort antal människor. Det handlar om det vi i vardagligt tal kallar kriser och katastrofer. En intensiv medierapportering i kombination med oroade medborgare gör att kriser och katastrofer är viktiga samhällspåfrestningar som beslutsfattare måste hantera.

Syftet med avhandlingen är att öka förståelsen för hur fokuserande händelser påverkar samhälleliga processer. Avhandlingens två övergripande forskningsfrågor tar fasta på jämförelsen av olika typer av fokuserande händelser. För det första, skillnader i hur naturkatastrofer och katastrofer som tillkommit genom mänskligt handlade påverkar samhället, och för det andra, hur händelser med olika stark fokuseringskraft påverkar samhället. Medborgarreaktioner studeras i en experimentell laboratoriestudie, den mediala rapporteringen analyseras genom kvantitativ innehållsanalys av texter och bilder, och på den parlamentariska arenan analyseras riksdagsdebatten genom kvantitativ innehållsanalys. De temaområden som identifieras i den teoretiska referensramen ligger till grund för analysen och tar fasta på de känslor som händelsen ger upphov till, hur händelsen kontextualiseras (framing), skuldbeläggning samt möjliga lösningar som förs fram.

Resultatet från studierna visar att skillnader mellan olika typer av händelser syns tydligast hos medborgare, uttryckt genom starkare emotionella reaktioner för händelser med stark fokusering, och på den mediala arenan, genom mer utrymme för dessa händelser. Då kriser och katastrofer med olika stark fokuseringskraft når riksdagen får de däremot ett relativt likadant mottagande. I jämförelsen mellan naturkatastrofer och människoskapade händelser visar resultaten att naturkatastrofer ofta diskuteras som specifika händelser, medan människoskapade händelser placeras i en bredare samhällelig kontext och diskuteras under längre tid.

Avhandlingen bidrar till diskussionen om hur våra känslor och vår kognition samspelar i krissituationer. De omedvetna signaler som vår kropp ger oss gällande hur vi ska reagera på en farlig situation kan påverka om vi är rädda, oroliga eller till och med positivt inställda. I ljuset av de tre studierna är det tydligt att de emotionella reaktionerna minskar ju högre upp i den politiska processen vi kommer. Trots att medborgare och medier reagerar starkt är de emotionella reaktionerna på den politiska arenan relativt milda och skuldbeläggningen näst intill icke-existerande.

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# Appendix A. **Coding scheme, media coverage**

Fokuserande händelse: [ 1 ] Jokela [ 2 ] Nokia [ 3 ] Stormen [ 4 ] Översvämning

Rubrik: _____

Datum: _____Dag: _____ (*om texten förekommer inom första två veckorna)*

Placering: [ 1 ] parad, [ 2 ] Kotimaas parad, [ 3 ] inne i tidning

Sidnummer: _____

Spalt höjd: _____ Antal ord: _____

**1.1 Producent**

[ 1 ] Eget material [ 2 ] Nyhetsbyrå [ 3 ] Kombination av båda

[ 4 ] Insändare [ 5 ] Expertkommentar

**1.2 Typ av text**

[ 1 ] artikel [ 2 ] ledare

[ 3 ] redaktionell krönika [ 4 ] insändare

[ 5 ] notis *utan ingress* [ 6 ] första parad

[ 7 ] andra parad [ 8 ] parad ingång

[ 9 ] vieräskynä [ 10 ] läsarbild

**2. Tema. Sakfråga**

Texten handlar om: *I rangordning. Det tema som klassas som nummer ett får mest utrymme i texten, ingår i rubrik och ingress.*

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

**3. Karaktär**

[ 1 ] descriptive *vad har hänt? Utgår från fas ett och mediernas roll som informationsspridare.*

[ 2 ] attributive, *försöka förklara och förstå situationen. Utgår från fas två.*

[ 3 ] affective *sätter händelsen i relation till bredare samhällelig kontext i fas tre.*

**4.1 Dominerande aktör**

| | |
|---|---|
| [ 1 ] akademiker/expert | [ 2 ] intressegrupp/förening |
| [ 3 ] journalister | [ 4 ] kommunal- eller statstjänsteman |
| [ 6 ] drabbad/ögonvittne | [ 7 ] medborgare |
| [ 8 ] politiska partier | [ 9 ] företag |
| [ 5 ] polis/räddningsverk/militär | [ 10 ] annan |

**4.2 Andra aktör** (samma alternativ som 5.1)

**4.3. Tredje aktör** (samma alternativ som 5.1)

**4.4 Fjärde aktör** (samma alternativ som 5.1)

**5. Blame attribution**

**5.1 Vem för fram anklagelse:**

[ 1 ] akademiker/expert

[ 2 ] intressegrupp/förening

[ 3 ] journalister

[ 4 ] kommunal- eller statstjänsteman

[ 5 ] polis/räddningsverk/militär

[ 6 ] drabbad/ögonvittne

[ 7 ] medborgare

[ 8 ] politiska partier

[ 9 ] företag

[ 10 ] annan

[ 11 ] Auvinen

[ 12 ] samhället

[ 13 ] medier/underhållningsbranch

**5.2 Vem är ansvarig: (samma alternativ som 6.1)**

**5.3 Tidsaspekt gällande problem, beror problemet på:**

[1=ja, 0=nej] dåliga förberedelser *ansvarstillskrivning utgår från aktioner före händelsen.*

[1=ja, 0=nej ] händelsens hantering *ansvarstillskrivning utgår från aktioner efter händelsen.*

Anledning till ansvarstillskrivning (*i text)*:

_____

_____

_____

**6. Framing**

[0 = nej, 1 = ja]

**6.1 Attribution of Responsibility Frame**

[ ] 6.1.1 Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?

[ ] 6.1.2 Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?

[ ] 6.1.3 Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?

[ ] 6.1.4 Does the story suggest that an individual or group is responsible for the issue/problem?

[ ] 6.1.5 Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?

6.1.6 Frame present 1 = yes, 0 = no

**6.2 Human Interest Frame**

[ ] 6.2.1 Does the story provide a human example or "human face" on the issue?

[ ] 6.2.2. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?

[ ] 6.2.3 Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?

[ ] 6.2.4 Does the story go into the personal or private lives of the actors?

[ ] 6.2.5 Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?

6.2.6 Frame present 1 = yes, 0 = no

**6.3 Conflict frame**

[ ] 6.3.1 Does the story reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?

[ ] 6.3.2 Does one party-individual-group-county criticize another?

[ ] 6.3.3 Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?

[ ] 6.3.4 Does the story refer to winners and losers?

6.3.5 Frame present 1 = yes, 0 = no

**6.4 Morality frame**

[ ] 6.4.1 Does the story contain any moral message?

[ ] 6.4.2 Does the story make reference to morality, God and other religious tenets?

[ ] 6.4.3 Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?

6.4.2 Frame present 1 = yes, 0 = no

**6.5 Economic consequences frame**

[ ] 6.5.1 Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?

[ ] 6.5.2 Is there a mention of the cost/degree of expense involved?

[ ] 6.5.3 Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?

6.5.4 Frame present 1 = yes, 0 = no

**7 Bilder och grafik**

**7.1.1 Bild 1 höjd**

**7.1.2 Bild 1 spalt**

**7.1.3 Aktörer som syns på bild**

[ 1 ] akademiker/expert

[ 2 ] intressegrupp/förening

[ 3 ] journalister

[ 4 ] kommunal- eller statstjänsteman

[ 5 ] polis/räddningsverk/militär

[ 6 ] drabbad/ögonvittne

[ 7 ] medborgare

[ 8 ] politiska partier

[ 9 ] företag

[ 10 ] ansvarig person

[ 11 ] annan

**7.1.4 Framing för bild 1**

[ 1 ] lives lost, döda

[ 2 ] lives saved, reder upp efter händelsen ex. brandmän, räddningsverk polis – bildtexten fokuserar på dessa aktörer om även drabbade finns med på bilden

[ 3 ] physical, images of destruction

[ 4 ] human interest, drabbade personer – om bilderna visar starka känslor sätt i nästa kategori

[ 5 ] emotional, sörjande människor,

starka känslor

[ 6 ] vanliga människor, åskådare

[ 7 ] politiker, beslutsfattare, expert

[ 8 ] annat

[ 9 ] Auvinen/annan skolskjutare

**Samma för bild 2–5.**

7.6.1 Grafik 1 höjd

9.6.2 Grafik 1 spalt

7.7.1 Grafik 2 höjd

9.7.2 Grafik 2 höjd

# Appendix B. **Coding scheme for the parliamentary debate**

**I. Basic characteristics**

Datum:_____

FH händelse: Jokela [1] Nokia [2] Stormen [3] Översvämning [4]

Vilket slags ärende: [1] ptk ... + fler kategorier efter hand

Vad diskuteras: _____

Vem pratar: [1] minister [2] riksdagsledamot [3] president [4] annan, vem?

Parti: [1] Saml [2] C [3] SDP [4] VF [5] SFP [6] Gröna [7] KD [8] Sannf [9] annat

Regeringsparti [1] Opposition [2]

Antal ord: _____

Andel av inlägg: [1] mycket liten, [2] liten [3] rätt så stor [4] mycket stor

Tema: _____

**II. Blame attribution**

Vem för fram anklagelse:

[ 1 ] akademiker/expert

[ 2 ] intressegrupp/förening

[ 3 ] journalister

[ 4 ] kommunal- eller statstjänsteman

[ 5 ] polis/räddningsverk/militär

[ 6 ] drabbad/ögonvittne

[ 7 ] medborgare

[ 8 ] politiska partier

[ 9 ] företag

[ 10 ] annan

[ 11 ] Auvinen

[ 12 ] samhället

[ 13 ] medier/underhållningsbranch

Vem är ansvarig: (samma alternativ): _____

Tidsaspekt gällande problem, beror problemet på:

[1=ja, 0=nej] dåliga förberedelser *ansvarstillskrivning utgår från aktioner före händelsen.*

[1=ja, 0=nej ] händelsens hantering *ansvarstillskrivning utgår från aktioner efter händelsen.*

Anledning till ansvarstillskrivning (*i text)*:

_____

_____

**III. Framing**

[0 = nej, 1 = ja]

**6.1 Attribution of Responsibility Frame**

[ ] 6.1.1 Does the comment suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?

[ ] 6.1.2 Does the comment suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?

[ ] 6.1.3 Does the comment suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?

[ ] 6.1.4 Does the comment suggest that an individual or group is responsible for the issue/problem?

[ ] 6.1.5 Does the comment suggest the problem requires urgent action?

6.1.6 Frame present 1 = yes, 0 = no

**6.2 Human Interest Frame**

[ ] 6.2.1 Does the comment provide a human example or "human face" on the issue?

[ ] 6.2.2. Does the comment employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion?

[ ] 6.2.3 Does the comment emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?

[ ] 6.2.4 Does the comment go into the personal or private lives of the actors?

6.2.5 Frame present 1 = yes, 0 = no

**6.3 Conflict frame**

[ ] 6.3.1 Does the comment reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries?

[ ] 6.3.2 Does one party-individual-group-county criticize another?

[ ] 6.3.3 Does the comment refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?

[ ] 6.3.4 Does the comment refer to winners and losers?

6.3.5 Frame present 1 = yes, 0 = no

**6.4 Morality frame**

[ ] 6.4.1 Does the comment contain any moral message?

[ ] 6.4.2 Does the comment make reference to morality, God and other religious tenets?

[ ] 6.4.3 Does the comment offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?

6.4.2 Frame present 1 = yes, 0 = no

**6.5 Economic consequences frame**

[ ] 6.5.1 Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?

[ ] 6.5.2 Is there a mention of the cost/degree of expense involved?

[ ] 6.5.3 Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?

6.5.4 Frame present 1 = yes, 0 = no

**III. Problems and solutions** (Birkland & Warnement 2013; Vliegenthart & Roggeband 2007)

What is represented as the problem?

What to do? Which action is deemed necessary and why?

**IV. Semantics – emotional debates** (Brader 2006)

[0 = no attempt, 1 = some appeal, 2 = strong appeal]

**Amusement/humor appeal.** [0, 1, 2]

**Fear appeal (fear/anxiety).** [0, 1, 2]

**Enthusiasm appeal (hope/joy).** [0, 1, 2]

**Anger appeal (anger/contempt/disgust).** [0, 1, 2]

**Pride appeal** (satisfaction in what's been accomplished/who we are). [0, 1, 2]

**Compassion appeal** (sympathy). [0, 1, 2]

**Sadness appeal** (disappointment/regret). [0, 1, 2]

# Appendix C. **Plenary session contributions**

## The school shooting in Jokela

Tähän edellä sanomaani viitaten näen erittäin perustelluksi tehdä perusopetuslakiin lisäys oppilashuollon järjestämisvelvoitteista. Esitän, että kyseiseen pykälään lisätään uusi momentti, joka kuuluu: "Oppilashuolto tulee järjestää kouluissa niin, että oppilaalla on mahdollisuus saada oppilashuollon palveluja". (Tuula Peltonen, SDP, ptk 4/2008 vp)

Hallituksemme on nyt ryhtynyt toimenpiteisiin aivan erityisellä tavalla näissä asioissa ohjaamalla lisäpanostuksia erityisopetukseen, tukiopetukseen, ryhmäkokoihin, joihin liittyvät ongelmat ovat selkeä osa tätä pahoinvointia. (Timo Heinonen, KOK, ptk 39/2008 vp)

Miksi näin tapahtuu? Voimmeko jotain oppia tästä? Samalla on selvää, että me emme halua syyllistää ketään. Me tiedämme meidän koulun korkean tason, tiedämme sen hyvän työn, jota opettajat tekevät. Mutta aina jää miettimään, onko jotain, mitä voidaan oppia. (Eero Heinäluoma, SDP, ptk 75/2007 vp)

Viimeviikkoiset Jokelan tapahtumat ovat viimeistään herättäneet meidät kaikki siihen, että jotain on lasten ja nuorten pahoinvoinnin ehkäisemiseksi tehtävä. Tulonsiirtojen korottaminen on tärkeä, mutta ei yksin riittävä toimenpide. Perheiden, lasten ja nuorten ennalta ehkäisevien palvelujen rapautuminen on pysäytettävä. (Outi Alanko-Kahiluoto, VF, ptk 81/2007 vp)

Tuusulan kunnalle Jokelan koulukeskuksen tragedian vuoksi jo tälle vuodelle ehdotetaan miljoonan euron harkinnanvaraista valtionosuutta erilaisten tästä tragediasta kohdistuvien kustannusten maksamiseen, samoilen tapauksen tutkimiseen 100 000:ta euroa. (Minister of Finance Jyrki Katainen, KOK, ptk 87/2007 vp)

Oikeusministeriössä on käynnistynyt onnettomuustutkintaprosessi, ja siinä tutkinnassa myös onnettomuustutkinnan normaalien pelisääntöjen mukaan arvioidaan voimassa oleva lainsäädäntö ja sen muutostarpeet. On tietysti selvä, että jo nyt käyty

keskustelu ja asiantuntijalausunnot viittaavat siihen, että tutkimuksessa arvioidaan vakavasti aselainsäädännön muutosta. (Minister of Justice, Tuija Brax, G, ptk 97/2007 vp)

Mutta myös lapsiperheisiin panostusta on jatkettava. Asian tärkeys on auennut uudessa valossa meitä kaikkia koskettaneiden Jokelan koulusurmien jälkeen. Lasten tai lapsiperheiden pahaa oloa ei pidä väheksyä, sillä juuri perheiden ongelmat heijastavat sitä, miten meillä ylipäänsä menee. (Katri Komi, C, ptk 101/2007 vp)

## The water crisis in Nokia

Nyt käsiteltävässä lisätalousarvioesityksessä tältä samaiselta momentilta ehdotetaan valtuuksia myöntää Nokian kaupungille vesijohto-onnettomuudesta ja Tuusulan kunnalle Jokelan traagisista koulutapahtumista aiheutuneisiin kustannuksiin molemmille avustuksia enintään miljoonan euron verran. Tarve näihin avustuksiin on kiistaton. Molemmat tapahtumat olivat katastrofeja, joiden hoitamisesta osa kuuluu ehdottomasti valtiolle. (Elsi Katainen, C, ptk 58/2008 vp)

Nokian vedenjakelussa tapahtunut onnettomuus ja siitä tiedottaminen ovat puhuttaneet viime viikkoinasuomalaisia. Tuhannet nokialaiset ovat saaneet terveyshaittoja tämän tapahtuman johdosta. Tapaus osoittaa sen, kuinka häiriöaltis järjestelmä itse asiassa Suomessakin voi kriittisimmillään olla. Tapaus osoittaa myös sen, että onnettomuuden tapahduttua tehokas, nopea ja tosiasioihin perustuva tiedotus on aivan ratkaisevassa roolissa. Kolmanneksi tapaus osoittaa sen, että yksittäisten kuntien resurssit eivät kerta kaikkiaan riitä, kun tällainen onnettomuus tapahtuu tietyillä paikkakunnilla. (Harri Jaskari, KOK, ptk 97/2007 vp)

Tosiaan Nokialla eletään edelleen erittäin vaikeassa tilanteessa. Siellä on ihmisiä jo toista ja kolmatta kertaa vatsataudissa, ja he myöskin kärsivät jälkitaudeista niveltulehduksina jnp. Myöskin tämä paikallinen elinkeinoelämä on kärsinyt kohtuuttomia taloudellisia tappioita. Tässä nyt kysyttiinkin jo sitä, tuleeko valtio näissä jollain tapaa avuksi, mutta kysyisin vielä lisäksi: Kun tässä on tämä viranomaisten tiedotus ollut

aika heikkoa ja kun tsunamionnettomuuden jälkeen puhuttiin tästä massatekstiviestijärjestelmästä, niin mikä sen tilanne on nyt? Voisiko se olla nyt tulevaisuudessa sitten se väline, millä saadaan tietoa mahdollisimman nopeasti levitettyä aina tämmöisissä vaikeissa tilanteissa? Sitten vielä yksi myönteinen asia tähän loppuun, ja se on tämä Nokian kaupungin vesiongelma. Näinhän juuri pitää toimia, nopeasti, varmasti, ja yhteiskunta sitten kokonaisuutena varmaan tulee apuun, jos semmoinen tarve tulee rahoituspuolella. Mutta tällaista valmiustilaa tietysti Puolustusvoimilta edellytetään jatkossa ja ilman nurinoita. (Erkki Pulliainen, G, ptk 97/2007 vp)

## The Boxing Day storm

Muutostarve sähkömarkkinalain eräisiin kohtiin tuli ilmi viime kesän ja vuodenvaihteen myrskyjen aiheuttamien sähkökatkojen yhteydessä. Monin paikoin ihmiset saivat olla vailla sähköä jopa viikkoja. Sähkökatkokset aiheuttivat monin paikoin suuria taloudellisia tappioita niin yksityisille ihmisille kuin yrityksillekin. Monille henkilöille on syntynyt jopa terveydellistä uhkaa lämmityksen ja vedensaannin keskeytyksistä. Sähkömarkkinalain mukaisen luvan saaneet yhteisöt ja laitokset, sähköyhtiöt, ovat olleet puutteellisesti valmistautuneita katkosten ennaltaehkäisyyn ja niiden korjaamiseen. Nykyinen sähkömarkkinalaki ei turvaa sähköyhtiöiden asiakkaille kuin osakorvauksia kärsityistä vahingoista. Eräillä muutoksilla saadaan sähkömarkkinalaki paremmin vastaamaan nykyajan käytännön vaatimuksia korvausvastuista myös sähköyhtiöiden osalta. (Lea Mäkipää, PS, ptk 23/2012 vp)

Mutta tärkeää on varautuminen siihen, että pidetään yhtiöllä riittävästi sähkömiehiä, jotka kykenevät maastokelpoiseen työhön ja voivat myrskyjen välillä tehdä ennalta ehkäisevää työtä ja poistaa linjojen läheltä mahdollisesti linjoille kaatuvia puita etukäteen, ettei asiakkaille aiheudu vahinkoja. (Lauri Heikkilä, PS, 23/2012 vp)

Kyllä ministeri Häkämies on toiminut poikkeuksellisen mallikkaasti tämän myrskyasian hoidossa. (Timo Heinonen, KOK, ptk 23/2012 vp)

Ehkä voisi sanoa hyvin tärkeänä pointtina sen, että kun liikenneministeri on ollut niinkin myötämielinen, että on valmis harkitsemaan tieliikennelain muutosta niin, että ne kaapelit silloin, kun liikutaan teiden läheisyydessä, voidaan siihen välittömään

yhteyteen, siihen pientareelle laittaa, niin tuo on kolmanneksen halvempaa. Eli siinä mielessä se on tulevaisuutta, että kaapelointia lisätään, sitä vauhditetaan ja myöskin lainsäädännöllä sitä edellytetään. (Minister of Employment and the economy Jyri Häkämies, KOK, ptk 83/2012 vp)

## The floods in Ostrobothnia

Österbotten svämmar över igen, och staten drar sig ur ersättningarna. I stället för staten träder försäkringsbolagen till, men frågan uppstår: vem är det som ska betala bolagens premier? Det borde inte vara oklart för någon att översvämningarna i Österbotten inte förorsakas av de personer som bor i Österbotten. Ärade talman! Översvämningarna beror på vattenflödet uppströms. (Lars-Erik Gästgivars, SFP, ptk 45/2013 vp)

Mitä tulee sitten tähän vallitsevaan tilanteeseen ja varmaan niihin tuleviinkin tulviin, niin syksyllä 2011 maa- ja metsätalousministeriö päätti 21 erillisestä alueesta, joihin kohdistuu suurimmat tulvariskit. Näille alueille tehdään paraikaa suunnitelmia, millä tavalla sitten varaudutaan mahdollisesti tulevaisuuden tulviin. Tietysti aikanaan ne suunnitelmat valmistuvat ja niitä lähdetään sitten toteuttamaan. Valtiolla on oma vastuunsa, ja myös kunnilla on oma vastuunsa, ja joissakin tapauksissa myös kiinteistöjen omistajien pitää huolehtia omasta omaisuudestaan. (Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Jari Koskinen, KOK, ptk 45/2013 vp

Nyt budjetissa on kuitenkin rahaa liian vähän näihin vahinkoihin verrattuna, kun niitä on muuallakin tapahtunut. Nyt tarvitaan tietysti selkeä viesti ministeriltä, että vahingot korvataan lakien mukaisesti mahdollisimman nopeasti, ja olisi toivottavaa, että tässä tilaisuudessa se viesti saataisiin. (Antti Rantakangas, C, ptk 82/2012 vp)

Tällä hetkellä tehdään erilaisia suunnitelmia näistä tulvariskeistä, joissa arvioidaan ne Suomen kannalta vaarallisimmat paikat, joissa tulvavahinkoja voisi eniten tulla. (Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Jari Koskinen, KOK, ptk 82/2012 vp)

Viimeaikaiset poikkeuksellisen kovat tulvat […] ovat hyvin osoittaneet, että on syytä varata selvästi nykyistä runsaammat resurssit tulvien aiheuttamien vahinkojen korvaamiseen. Hallituksen lisätalousarviossa poikkeuksellisten tulvien aiheuttamien vahinkojen korvaamiseen suuntaama määräraha on mielestämme alimitoitettu. (Pirkko Ruohonen-Lerner, PS, ptk 107/2012 vp)

Jenny Lindholm

# The Tree We Heard Fall

## Analyzing the Societal Processes Following Focusing Events

Every day, an extensive number of events occurs. What gives some events strong focal power, whereas others fade away without political impact? From a political science perspective, issues that are important for the general public, issues related to serious societal problems and issues receiving extensive attention in the media are all plausible issues that will rise onto the formal political agenda. From a neurological perspective, people pay more attention to negative events. The combination of these criteria gives us focusing events. These events are sudden, unusual, and have negative consequences to a large number of people – and are generally referred to as crises and disasters.

This dissertation examines how different types of focusing events affect societal processes by comparing man-made disasters to natural disasters, and events with a stronger versus weaker degree of focus. By analyzing citizens' emotional and cognitive reactions, the media coverage as well as the parliamentary debates following four focusing events, a broad approach to disaster research has been applied.

Åbo Akademi University Press | ISBN 978-951-765-812-6