

The aptness of the Norwegian *koronadugnad* metaphor

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Full paper

On 12 March 2020, the Norwegian government instigated measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, the most drastic policies of any Norwegian government in peacetime. As similar scenes were being played out around the world, governments, health authorities, the media, public institutions – indeed, everyone – required ways to communicate about such an unprecedented global emergency. Consequently, "from its very beginning, the global understanding of the pandemic was a metaphorical one" (Olza et al., 2021, p. 100): metaphors facilitate communication, especially with regards to explaining difficult concepts and persuading people to follow your lead.

A particularly Norwegian metaphor used when introducing those measures concerned the ‘dugnad’ tradition, a cultural practice of voluntary work carried out collectively to benefit the common good, closely linked to Norwegian identity and values. This paper traces the trajectory of dugnad metaphors related to COVID-19 in Norwegian public discourse, to shed light on the aptness of their use. Aptness is here analyzed in terms of ‘resonance’ (the public reaction to the metaphor), and follows a threefold categorization: imposition, endorsement, or resistance. The data consists of all articles appearing in the three largest Norwegian online newspapers (*Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet*, *VG*) from March 2020-June 2021 that included the lexeme DUGNAD in connection with the pandemic.

Findings indicate that the prime minister’s initial call to dugnad in March 2020 struck a chord with the Norwegian people, with public endorsement highlighting many features of prototypical dugnads. However, resistance, anchored in alternative dugnad characteristics, also appeared at the start of the pandemic and became more prominent over time. A metaphor that is successful at the start of an emergency may thus become less successful as time passes – an important lesson for the future.

References:

- Olza, I., Koller, V., Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I., Pérez-Sobrino, P., & Semino, E. (2021). The #ReframeCovid initiative: From Twitter to society via metaphor. *Metaphor and the Social World*, 11(1), 98-120. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1075/msw.00013.olz>