

# Assignment 7: Normal Accidents

This paper will be looking into explaining the concept of *normal accidents*. We will be looking at the case of the 2006 European “Blackout” and how it might be a normal accident, leading into further discussing whether the Corona crisis can be considered one.

From the name *normal accident*, it sounds rather uneventful. It is normal, after all. But it is in its normality that the danger resides. In a tightly coupled, complex system with many interacting parts, like a factory or an aircraft, unexpected errors are bound to occur, and there will most likely be safety measures in place for when they do. However, because of the interactivity of the parts, there is bound to be inter-actions that cannot be foreseen. (Perrow, 5). These accidents seldom happen, but it is from the character-istic that we with certainty can expect them to that makes them *normal* (Perrow, 8).

One such normal accident happened in November 2006 when the “European Blackout” happened. There were many causes, such as time constraints on strengthening the grid, bad practices among operators, bad timing on maintenance, temporarily changed settings, weather conditions, and a few more. All these conditions in accumulation were enough to trip the line and cause a blackout (Vleuten, 2033).

All of this even goes back to the when the power grids were made, and different nations were part of different sectors, creating a fragmented and thus weaker power grid (Vleuten, 2046). This is also why only some nations were affected, as some sectors had decentralized themselves from the other sectors, avoiding the weak connections.

Lastly, I want to discuss whether the Corona crisis can be considered a normal accident. Perrow describes an example of a normal accident about a day where all goes wrong, small things that by themselves would be slight nuisances, but in tandem lead to larger consequences (Perrow 5-7). If that can be classified as a normal accident, I would argue that the Corona virus also is the product of a normal accident. The coincidence of the virus ever coming to be in China is likely in itself a string of biological interactions. The spreading of it then happens through interactions between humans, through travelling as well. Someone might have gotten on a plane sick, thinking that it was just any other virus. But such an interaction might be the reason it became global.

## References

- Perrow, Charles, Normal accidents, 1984
- Erik van der Vleuten, Vincent Lagendijk, Transnational infrastructure vulnerability: The historical shaping of the 2006 European “Blackout”, Energy Policy 38 (2010)