Visualisation of data on a politically sensitive topic neutrally, interactively and interestingly

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Background

Arms control and the transparency of arms trade are means to build confidence and prevent conflicts in the global arena. Finland’s political principles of fostering peace, promoting export, and supporting the defence industry may come into conflict in Finnish arms exports. The debate around arms exports has at times been heated and the demand for impartial information obvious.

The detail and availability of the data differ between the five separate authorities responsible for arms export control in Finland. SaferGlobe, a peace and security think tank, has published a report about arms trade and arms control in Finland and worldwide for several years. This report has collected data from the different authorities and provided further analysis of selected export cases. In addition, the report has studied Finnish arms imports and recent developments in arms control.

Until 2017 the Finnish Arms Control Report was published as a paper booklet, which as a format was limiting for several reasons.

• The booklet could only be published once annually limiting the release of new information when it became available.
• The report often gained interest on the day of publishing but was rarely cited or used later.
• The paper format did not actually enable the readers to examine the data themselves, rather, to a great extent, the readers were dependent on the analyses SaferGlobe had made.

Solution

In 2017 SaferGlobe digitalised the Arms Control Report together with the Chilicorn Fund programme of the Futurice digital services company.

The internet page of the openly available digitalised report was released on the eve of the United Nations Disarmament week in October 2017. There are four main sections in the digitalised report.

• An interactive map in which Finnish military material and civilian arms exports can be explored by country and by year since 2003 (Figure 1). To put exports into a context, the Global Peace Index by the Institute for Economics and Peace is also presented. Arms exports can be examined on a global level or with reference to a single country (Figure 2). Users can also choose to study only civilian arms, (e.g. arms for hunting and sport), or military material.

• The digitalised report provides articles about individual arms exports, about the regulation of arms trade and on other topics which help to contextualise the Finnish arms exports (Figure 3).

• The Info page explains the terminology used, sources of data and the organisations behind the project.

• The Open Data section provides a downloadable data set of Finnish arms exports in greater detail (Figure 4).

The design process of the digitalised report was guided by presenting the information neutrally and serving a large spectrum of user groups, from ordinary citizens to researchers and from peace activists to journalists and politicians.

Impact

• The paper format did not actually enable the readers to examine the data themselves, rather, to a great extent, the readers were dependent on the analyses SaferGlobe had made.

• Numerous news outlets have used the digitalised report and provided a link to the report.

• Politicians have used the report and Members of Parliament have cited the report on many occasions.

SaferGlobe has presented the web service and the data set in many seminars and events and SaferGlobe was also invited to introduce the digitalised report to the Defence Committee of Parliament.

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• The feedback about the web site from all user groups has been very positive.

The digitalised report has solved many of the challenges SaferGlobe had with the former paper format.

The digitalised Arms Control Report of SaferGlobe is available at www.armscontrol.saferglobe.fi

SaferGlobe is an independent Finnish think tank, which produces high-level research and tools to promote peace and security.

www.saferglobe.fi