In general, the study group has examined the paradoxes, dilemmas and tensions occurred in recent debates about ethical, political and social values in contemporary societies. We can observe that ethical problems have been increasingly a central topic in public debates in Nordic societies and in the international community. Both political decisions and daily practices in public institutions and private business organizations are increasingly faced with ethical problems and ethical issues. Moreover, there are more and more contexts and practices where ethical issues are central themes and where ethical reflection is itself a central theme. This tendency has been very present in the relation between democracy and administration, the obligations of business corporations in relation to profit maximization and economic efficiency, public and private management and governance, health issues, the relation to the environment and the use of natural resources, the social obligations of corporations and their responsibilities towards global poverty, democracy and environmental problems.

We had different themes on the agenda related to the general programme of the group and one of the themes was an examination of recent social theory in relation to the main topics of the study group. In particular, we can mention the foundations of social ethics in a post-secular society. On this basis, the papers that we present in this special issue of *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* address the basis for ethical imagination from the point of view of different approaches within social theory and political science, including critical theory, contemporary French and Italian philosophy (e.g. Badiou, Lacan, Agamben, Vattimo), and recent debates in international relations. Finally, we also present a reading of documentary film-making from the point of view of ethical theory, written by one of Europe’s prominent documentary film-makers.