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SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF COVID-19

12-13 May, 2023



INSTITUTE
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SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF COVID-19

Published by International Program Committee of the Meeting "Social, Economic and Political Construction of COVID-19"

Institute of Social Sciences
Institute of National Significance
for the Republic of Serbia
Belgrade, 2023

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INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Belgrade

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF COVID-19

(International Scientific Conference)

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



Belgrade, New York, 12–13 May 2023

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS*

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF COVID-19

Organized by the Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade

and Lehman College, City University of New York

At the Institute of Social Sciences

and as a virtual event at the Lehman College

12–13 May 2023

* This International Conference is a part of the 2023 Research Program of the Institute of Social Sciences with the support by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia.

“Social, Economic and Political Construction of COVID-19” Day 1: 12 May 2023		
Time	Content	Form
Panel 1 Chaired by Marko Mandić		
10.00-10.05	Welcome Address	Institute of Social Sciences Representatives
10.05-10.25	M. Murat Civaner, <i>Vaccine Hesitancy and Vaccine Refusal in the Post-Truth Era: What Should be Done?</i>	Presentation
10.25-10.45	Miroslav Radenković, <i>Ethical Challenges and Considerable Hesitancy Associated with Mandatory Vaccination against COVID-19</i>	Presentation
10.45-11.05	Vladimir Vuletić, <i>The Anti-Vaxxer Movement in Serbia during the COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	Presentation
11.05-11.25	Jovo Bakić, <i>The Attitude of Far-Right Organizations toward Measures against the COVID-19 Pandemic in Serbia 2020–2022</i>	Presentation
11.25-12.05	Q&A	Rounding up Panel 1
12.05-12.20	Coffee break	
Panel 2 Chaired by Karen da Costa		
12.20-12.40	Katja Stoppenbrink, <i>Post-Pandemic Crisis Management. Why COVID-19 Is Conceptually a Crisis in the Making</i>	Presentation
12.40-13.00	Zoran Todorović, <i>Research Ethics Issues during COVID-19 Pandemics</i>	Presentation
13.00-13.20	Michael Kühler, <i>Ethical Issues of AI Use in Crises</i>	Presentation
13.20-13.40	Veselin Mitrović, <i>Chain Reaction: Disasters, Social Inequalities, and Bioethics</i>	Presentation

13.40-14.20	Q&A	Rounding up Panel 2
14.20-15.30	Lunch	
Virtual Panel 3 USA (Columbus / New York) chaired by Veselin Mitrović and Katja Stoppenbrink		
15.30-15.50	Dónal O’Mathúna, <i>The Ethics of Evidence and the COVID-19 Information Crisis</i> Ohio/Columbus (9.30-9.50 H)	Presentation
15.55-16.00	Welcome from co-organizer Lehman College New York (9.55-10.00) – Naomi Zack	Panel introduction
16.00-16.15	Maria Isabel Roldós-Prosser, <i>Understanding Health Disparities Metrics: Opportunities and Avenues to Address the Determinants and Causes – The case of the Bronx in COVID-19</i>	Presentation
16.15-16.30	Julie E. Maybee, <i>Disability, Home(lessness) and COVID-19</i>	Presentation
16.30-16.45	Michael Buckley, <i>Constructivism in Times of Political Crisis</i>	Presentation
16.45-17.00	Naomi Zack, <i>Post COVID-19 Introducing Disaster as Risk</i>	Presentation
17.00-17.40	Q&A	Rounding Up Panel 3
“Social, Economic and Political Construction of COVID-19” Day 2: 13 May 2023		
10.00-10.05	Welcome and following up	
Panel 4 Chaired by Murat Civaner		
10.05-10.25	Karen da Costa, <i>The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Disaster: How Human Rights Were Affected – with a Particular Focus on Brazil</i>	Presentation

10.25-10.45	Zorica Mršević, <i>Gender Aspects of the COVID-19 Crisis</i>	Presentation
10.45-11.05	Milica Topalović, <i>Challenges of the Social Protection System in the Republic of Serbia Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic in Working with Unaccompanied Minor Migrants</i>	Presentation
11.05-11.25	Bert Gordijn, <i>COVID-19 and the Ethics of Human Challenge Trials</i>	Presentation
11.25-12.05	Q&A	Rounding up Panel 4
12.05-12.20	Coffee break	
Panel 5 Chaired By Veselin Mitrović		
12.20-12.40	Bojan Todosijević; Olivera Komar; Zoran Pavlović; Dragan Stanojević, <i>Irrational Beliefs about COVID-19, Authoritarianism, and Politics in Serbia and Montenegro 2020</i>	Presentation
12.40-13.00	Iskra A. Nola; Ana Borovečki, <i>Public Health and Sociological Determinants of the COVID-19 Pandemic Measures</i>	Presentation
13.00-13.20	Đurđica Stankovć, <i>The Impact of COVID-19 on Green and Digital Transformation in the Republic of Serbia</i>	Presentation
13.20-13.40	Slađana Ćurčić, <i>Rethinking Human Security in the Post-COVID-19 World – Lessons Learned from the Humanocentric Approach to Health Security</i>	Presentation
13.40-14.20	Q&A	Rounding up Panel 5
14.20-14.30	General overview of the meeting	Closing discussion
14.30	Lunch	

The Social, Economic, and Political Construction of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is a disaster that triggered or amplified various crises in the health care, social, political, economic, and other systems, such as psychological and other more personal crises, plus a major epistemological crisis. Although the concepts of crisis and disaster share some similarities, these are not synonyms and should not be treated as such. Disasters are generally comprehended in two ways. On the one hand, the focus is on the issue of emergency management, while on the other, disaster is a more differentiated image of catastrophic events which vary depending on individual, group, or national resilience capacities. Crises are unwanted, unexpected, almost unmanageable pre-existing problems that have become more intense, sometimes to the breaking point.

The causes of the Disaster and Crisis could be partly detected in the intersection of the individual, organizational, and environmental issues that lead to them. Moreover, crises erode the system's legitimacy.

In addition to the misleading intertwining of these concepts and their constant and circular repetition, it has almost become true that nothing would be the same after the COVID-19 pandemic. The world will indeed be different in economic, political, and social terms. However, could the situation be the same as before?

Veselin Mitrović

Naomi Zack

Belgrade, New York, March 2020*

* Compiled from excerpts from our personal correspondence during the COVID-19 pandemic

**PANEL 1: CHALLENGES OF THE VACCINE
HESITANCY AND VACCINE REFUSAL**

M. Murat Civaner

Uludag University, School of Medicine
Bursa, Turkey

Vaccine Hesitancy and Vaccine Refusal in the Post-Truth Era: What Should be Done?

Vaccine hesitancy and vaccine refusal poses an important public health problem in today's so-called "post-truth" world. The World Health Organization defined vaccine hesitancy as a worldwide problem before the COVID-19 outbreak, and listed it among the 10 worldwide health threats in 2019. Studies after the onset of the COVID-19 have shown that the problem has increased significantly along with the infodemic. In fact, a study compiling the results of researches conducted in 23 countries in 2021 found out that one out of every four people had vaccine hesitancy.

In the face of this problem, an important area of tension arises for scientists who prioritize the benefit of society and also know that immunization is one of the most important tools in combating epidemics: how should widespread immunization be provided considering the vaccine hesitancy and vaccine refusal phenomenon? Mandatory immunization with legal regulations and trying to raise public awareness with the voice of authority may be options. However, historical experience has shown that it is not sufficient to simply articulate legal measures or scientific knowledge in the public domain and advise compliance. Another option is to create a broad societal consensus that will be formed through a social dialogue. In such a social climate, there will be no need to make immunization mandatory, and all members of the society will decide by taking into account the common benefit of all, with the awareness that freedom is only possible by showing respects to others' rights. Such a transformation is possible in a process in which individuals, who have lost their way in the post-truth/reverse-renaissance era and suffocate from inequality in today's liberal world, also participate. In order to contribute to such a transformation, medicine as a societal institution has a responsibility to consider the macro-determinants of vaccine hesitancy and vaccine refusal in practice and to restore trust in itself.

Keywords: Vaccine Hesitancy, Vaccine Refusal, Public Health, Health Policies, Inequities

Miroslav Radenković

University of Belgrade, Faculty of Medicine
Belgrade, Serbia

Ethical Challenges and Considerable Hesitancy Associated with Mandatory Vaccination against COVID-19

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) underlined vaccination hesitancy as one of the top 10 threats to global health, although it was often acknowledged that the vaccine is the crucial preventive component to protect the vaccinated person from the severe disease and death. Soon after, in March 2020 the WHO declared COVID-19 pandemic, with strong recommendations that the global population should be protected from the further distribution of SARS-CoV-2 through basic preventive measures and widespread vaccination.

Mandatory vaccination could be considered as a method of increasing compliance to vaccination agendas, and in the case of COVID-19, could be ethically justified if the threat to public health was serious, the population confidence in its efficacy and safety was high, if the anticipated utility was superior to the alternatives, but also if the penalties for non-compliance would be balanced. Unfortunately, it was revealed that misinformation on the vaccine efficacy, protection duration, and potential side effects were the most critical grounds for COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy.

Taking into consideration the previous facts, further analysis of the SARS-CoV-2 mandatory vaccination is still more than required, with a comprehensive consideration of basic ethical principles that might give us some rational directions in this sensitive issue.

Keywords: COVID-19, Ethical Challenges, Mandatory Vaccination, Vaccination Hesitancy

Vladimir Vuletić

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Belgrade, Serbia

The Anti-Vaxxer Movement in Serbia During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The topic of this paper is the anti-vaxxer movement in Serbia. The question we are dealing with is whether the anti-vaxxer movement exists in Serbia, that is, whether it is possible to identify an informal network of individuals and groups that are focused on causing civil resistance to health institutions with the aim of changing the legislation in the field.

Our assumption is that, if it does exist, such a movement must have strengthened and updated its activities through the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, the time frame of the research is limited to the period from March 2020 to March 2022.

An alternative hypothesis is that the anti-vaxxer movement in Serbia is a myth that served to raise moral panic during the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus facilitate realization of the plan by health institutions for the complete vaccination of the population against the disease caused by this virus.

In order to answer the questions and hypotheses, we analyzed publicly available content about the vaccination published in the indicated period on the social networks of Facebook and Twitter, and web portals, including web portals of electronic and printed media.

Keywords: Social Movement, Anti-Vaxxer, Moral Panic, COVID-19 Pandemic

Jovo Bakić

University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy
Belgrade, Serbia

The Attitude of Far-Right Organizations toward Measures against the COVID-19 Pandemic in Serbia 2020–2022

The research subject is the attitude of far-right organizations towards the measures of the Aleksandar Vučić regime against the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based on the previous research findings indicating that right-wingers in general, and the extreme ones in particular, were less concerned about the coronavirus, often expressing doubts about its very existence, or considering it artificially produced and deliberately released due to a conspiracy of the elites against the people. Their attitude towards the measures taken by the Aleksandar Vučić regime against the spread of the pandemic should have been in line with that. The harsher the measures against COVID-19, the harsher their criticism should have been. However, since some studies have shown that there have been far-right organizations serving the authoritarian regime, they have been expected to support all the regime's measures at all times. Indeed, it turned out that the "Srpska desnica", "Levijatan", "Srpska radikalna stranka", "Srpska stranka Zavetnici" and the leading supporters' groups welcomed the measures, or kept silent about them ("Svetosavski savez Obraz", which voiced its criticism only at the time of Easter, "Srbska čast" and "Nacionalni srpski front"). However, there were also some extreme right-wing organizations that harshly criticized the measures during the state of emergency ("Srbska akcija", "Narodne patrolne", "Zentropa"), and even those that continued to do so constantly: "Srpski pokret Dveri", "DjB-Suverenisti", "Živim za Srbiju".

Keywords: Extreme Right, Authoritarian Regime, COVID-19 Measures, Conspiracy

**PANEL 2: DISASTERS, SCIENCES, INFORMATION,
AND THE SYSTEM'S LEGITIMACY**

Dónal O'Mathúna

The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio, USA

The Ethics of Evidence and the COVID-19 Information Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has been associated with several crises, including the Information Crisis. Decisions were made about how to view, discuss and respond to COVID-19. Debates occurred, and continue, over public health policies, social restrictions, medical responses and whether treatments and vaccines worked or not. Such decisions should be based on evidence, but the reliability and trustworthiness of that evidence, and those presenting it, were questioned to unprecedented degrees. Concerns about misinformation lead to questions about the ethical responsibilities regarding evidence, especially healthcare information.

Much attention has been given to the role of social media in the Information Crisis and how to address misinformation and skepticism about information. Less attention has been given to the professional literature and the quality of what has been published in peer-reviewed journals during the pandemic. This presentation will explore the ethical responsibilities of stakeholders in the healthcare literature through the lens of the Information Crisis. Examples will be provided from peer-review articles about Ivermectin, a drug claimed to have efficacy in preventing and treating COVID-19, to demonstrate the ethical concerns and their practical implications. The presentation will conclude with recommendations on ethical responsibilities towards evidence for those using medical literature.

Keywords: Publication Ethics, Misinformation, Evidence, Ivermectin

Zoran Todorović

University of Belgrade, Faculty of Medicine
Belgrade, Serbia

Research Ethics Issues during COVID19 Pandemics

The COVID-19 pandemic has opened up many research ethics issues. Initially, the focus of the investigation was directed to the origin of the virus, opening the question of moral and other responsibility for the emergence of the pandemic. The safety of medicines and vaccines became a question both for experts and the general public, and ongoing clinical trials have not removed doubts. The standards for conducting clinical trials of drugs in development were relaxed, even according to the recommendations of the World Health Organization and the European Medicines Agency, which created doubts about the balance between reliability and speed of their implementation. Redefining bioethical principles in public health research proved necessary, and easing the measures against COVID-19 only softened the public debate but did not resolve some research related ethical issues.

Keywords: COVID-19, Research Ethics, Moral Responsibility, Experimental Drug Use, Public Health

Katja Stoppenbrink

University of Applied Sciences, Hochschule München
Munich, Germany

Post-Pandemic Crisis Management: Why Covid-19 is Conceptually a Crisis in the Making

The talk of the COVID-related crisis is widespread. (See, e.g. <https://www.newyorker.com/tag/coronavirus>, retrieved Dec 31st, 2022.) Drawing from conceptual analysis and history, I show that sometimes this usage is warranted. However, in many instances, reference to a ‘coronavirus crisis’ is unjustified as of yet. Rather than a purely descriptive term, ‘crisis’ is a thick concept, and talk of a ‘crisis’ refers to conditions that are dependent on human activity. I will expound the conditions under which we can conceptually understand the COVID experience as a ‘crisis’ and explain how an adequate crisis management would have looked like.

Keywords: Crisis, COVID-19, Crisis Management, Human Activity, Conceptual Analysis

Michael Kühler

Karlsruher Institut für Technologie (KIT)

Academy for Responsible Research, Teaching and Innovation (ARRTI)

Germany

Ethical Issues of AI Use in Crises

AI use has become ever more ubiquitous. However, the development and use of AI has also proven to raise some serious ethical issues, e.g., the tension between—under certain conditions—AI’s lack of transparency and ethical requirement, precisely of the transparency for justificatory reasons, the problem of algorithmic bias, problematic infringement on human autonomy, or questions of moral responsibility in case of autonomous AI. Such general ethical issues have even been explicitly acknowledged by the EU, which is why the EU promotes the concept and requirements of the so-called “trustworthy AI.”

When it comes to crises, such as the pandemic, there can be little doubt that AI can also be of great help, like when AI is used to develop vaccines more quickly, analyze particular infection risks in virology, or calculate different models for the spread of viruses based on public behavior. However, given the above-mentioned general ethical issues, using AI in dealing with crises and making respective public health decisions raises the question of whether, or in which guise, these general ethical issues present themselves here as well.

In my talk, I will address this question and discuss exemplary general ethical issues of AI use against the background of medical crises, such as the pandemic. For instance, assuming we want to use AI to analyze the health risk of particular groups and to make public health decisions based on these analyses, a lack of AI transparency would seriously impede the possibility of successfully (ethically) justifying these decisions. Moreover, the likelihood of algorithmic bias would already raise doubts about the decision being really beneficial to everyone—which also concerns AI use in the development of vaccines. On a more individual level, imagine an improved COVID app that could help individuals to lower their risks of getting infected by way of analyzing certain everyday scenarios and give corresponding advice on what to do and what should be avoided.

Would such an app be acceptable in terms of respecting human autonomy, or might it be considered (too) paternalistic?

The upshot of my talk will be that, while AI undoubtedly presents a fantastic chance of improving public health especially in times of crises, it should better do so without creating additional ethical problems.

Keywords: AI Ethics, Public Health, Crisis, Pandemic

Veselin Mitrović

Institute of Social Sciences
Belgrade, Serbia

Chain Reaction: Disasters, Social inequalities, and Bioethics

Disasters and Crises are not the same, although they share some similarities. While first are almost unpredictable, sudden, and have their own time frame, crises are more structured issues that may be or tend to become ongoing.

A latent social concern that causes cumulative damage is the intertwining of the terms of crisis and disaster in everyday, public, and scientific speech, which started to spread globally simultaneously with spread of the SARS-CoV 2 virus. Such an epistemological inversion of the pandemic is just one of the causes for the chain reaction which provokes accepting new realities which comprehend disaster as omnipresent and constant.

After the virus' outbreak, the world aimed at normalizing the everyday life, or returning to the pre-pandemic state.

However, the general aspiration of returning to normal, which developed during the pandemic, could in fact be a slow disaster, i.e. the pandemic aftermath, as it may involve returning to everyday discrimination, racism, and social and health inequalities. The general wish would, thus, in fact belong to the privileged, rather than marginalized and vulnerable groups.

This inverse nostalgia triggers one of the fundamental questions in Bioethics. What is the primary concern of turning the miserable survival of the most endangered, marginalized, and discriminated groups into something acceptable?

Alternatively, how to prevent firstly the epistemological reductionism and inversions during the pandemics and, secondly, to prevent bioethics from falling into the trap of turning into an omniscient and contingent discipline with aspirations to become a worldview.

Keywords: Disasters, Crises, SARS-CoV 2, Social Inequalities, Discrimination

**PANEL 3: COVID-19 AND
RELATED ISSUES AND EVENTS**

Maria-Isabel Roldós-Prosser

Lehman College, School of Health Sciences, Human Services & Nursing
City University of New York, Institute of Health Equity (CIHE)

Understanding Health Disparities Metrics: Opportunities and Avenues to Address the Determinants and Causes – The Case of the Bronx in COVID-19

Describing health disparity does not necessarily translate into health equity programs or policies. It is widely believed that health disparities are the outcomes of multiple causes operating at different levels and domains that play out over a long period of time. In this presentation, we will discuss the most recent definitions of how the science of health disparities has evolved to become one of the most multidisciplinary fields to address population health issues. Specifically, the following will be addressed: an explanation of health disparities research frameworks; a discussion of minority health vs. health disparities outcome metrics, and a discussion of definitions of health disparities populations. These definitions have become of great importance when characterizing and understanding COVID-19 related disparities.

Keywords: Health Disparities, COVID-19, Bronx, Determinants, Causes

Julie E. Maybee

Lehman College

City University of New York

Disability, Home(lessness) and COVID-19

U.S. society (and some other, Western societies as well) has a “home” problem. In this presentation, we will explore how a particular “home” problem – that we should think of as a certain kind of homelessness – contributed to constructing the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on people with disabilities.

Keywords: Disability, Home, Homelessness, COVID-19, U.S. society

Michael Buckley

Lehman College

City University of New York

Constructivism in Times of Political Crisis

One potentially harmful form of pluralism is 'affect-pluralism'. Affect pluralism refers to emotional, rather than intellectual political divergence. It occurs when people construct new identities based on their affinity with, or hostility toward, a political party. It is pernicious when the newly constructed identity denies to others the very privileges it reserves for itself. This presentation explains how political leaders cultivate affect-pluralism by exploiting familiar drivers of partisanship. The phenomenon, which has long been observed by those working in conflict resolution and atrocity prevention, exposes novel difficulties for a familiar way of justifying liberal democratic norms. According to this familiar view, the norms or principles that free and equal persons would accept as binding on their political social relations under hypothetical conditions are justified. The process by which affect-pluralism becomes pernicious, creates novel problems for this familiar, constructivist approach.

Keywords: Crisis, Affect-Pluralism, Identities, Constructivism, Partisanship

Naomi Zack

Lehman College

City University of New York

Post COVID-19 Introducing Disaster as Risk

Risk is something we live with as part of normal life – the risk of a car accident, getting the flu, getting stuck in an elevator. Risk is unwanted but largely accepted. But disaster is a surprising and out of the ordinary occurrence that we do not take in stride. At first the COVID-19 pandemic was a worldwide disaster but then people got tired of it and some had varying degrees of immunity, so that it has become a mere risk that most live with. I explore how the shift from disaster to risk is an existential change that makes our lives more dangerous and disruptive in ways that we now expect and are expected to take in stride.

Keywords: Post COVID-19, Risk, Existential Shift, Disaster, Everyday Life

**PANEL 4: HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELEVANT
POLITICAL ISSUES DURING COVID-19**

Karen da Costa

University of Gothenburg, School of Global Studies
Sweden

The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Disaster: How Human Rights Were Affected – with a Particular Focus on Brazil

This paper aims to examine the COVID-19 pandemic as a disaster, and explore its relationship to human rights, particularly the right to health.

The paper will use various examples to illustrate the discussed issues, focusing on Brazil as the case study. Brazil's mismanagement of the pandemic severely impacted human rights, particularly for certain population groups.

The paper will be structured as follows: first, the pandemic will be analyzed in the context of disasters. Second, the focus will shift to human rights affected by the pandemic, specifically the right to health and how it is framed in international human rights law. It will also briefly consider the cases addressed by supranational human rights monitoring bodies that may inform pandemic response efforts. Finally, the case study of Brazil will be examined to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which the pandemic impacted the country. Brazil will provide a more detailed picture of the ways in which the issues covered were at stake in the given country, severely affected by the pandemic. Finally, the lessons drawn from this case study may provide insights relevant for other contexts that may be facing similar challenges.

Keywords: COVID-19, Disaster, Human Rights, Right to Health, Brazil

Milica Topalović

Institute for Political Studies
Belgrade, Serbia

Challenges of the Social Protection System in the Republic of Serbia Caused by the COVID-19 Virus Pandemic in Working with Unaccompanied Minor Migrants

Since 2015, when the migrant crisis reached its highest intensity, Serbia, as a transit country on the Balkan route, has faced multiple challenges in working with the migrant population. The intensity of the burden on the social protection system during the following years was susceptible to changes because a higher degree of coordination and communication had been achieved between the relevant state institutions and non-governmental organizations – partners involved in the migration management process. Adaptation of state institutions to the “new reality” caused by COVID-19, as they gained experience, and created good practices in working with unaccompanied minor migrants, significantly improved the social protection segment of this vulnerable category of migrants. The paper aims to present the difficulties and changes faced by the social protection system in working with unaccompanied minor migrants, and to analyze the migration profile of the Republic of Serbia caused by the pandemic. In addition to the method of description, the paper will use the method of document analysis, as well as analysis of unpublished sources provided by social protection actors and collected by fieldwork.

Keywords: Social Protection System, Republic of Serbia, Unaccompanied Minor Migrants, COVID-19

Zorica Mršević

Institute of Social Sciences

Belgrade, Serbia

Gender Aspects of the COVID-19 Crisis

The specific position of women in the current times of crisis is analyzed, relying on the warnings by Simone de Beauvoir: "Never forget that it only takes one political, economic or religious crisis to call into question the rights of women." And now there is not just one crisis, as critical moments are piling up, one upon another, reinforcing each other's effects. The global pandemic of COVID-19 has not ended, even after three years of the pandemic, as climate changes continue, the armed conflict in Ukraine is not close to being ended or at least suspended, and an energy crisis looms. The burden of the pandemic crisis was borne mostly by women, as they work in health-risk areas, bear the multiple burdens of domestic and professional obligations, suffer increased violence in the family, and lose hard-earned labor and economic rights. We conclude that now more than ever, everyone needs inclusive decision-making in practice, because women bring the ethics of care as their contribution to security. Gender is a product of social practices and socialization processes, and women leaders are taught to be more cooperative, compromising and compassionate than their male counterparts. This is especially evident in times of crisis, when they advocate an approach based on human needs, and female voice in the decision-making process introduces the necessary dose of empathy and solidarity as an antidote to political exclusivity and rivalry.

Keywords: Construction of Gender in the COVID-19 Crisis, Ethics of Care, Inclusive Security, Human Needs, Antipode to Political Exclusivity

Bert Gordijn

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COVID-19 and the Ethics of Human Challenge Trials

Human challenge trials are experiments where human participants are intentionally exposed to pathogens. COVID-19 triggered a debate about the ethics of human challenge trials with advocates and opponents advancing a variety of arguments. This paper reviews the arguments in favor and against human challenge trials and develops a substantiated stance on the subject.

Keywords: COVID-19, Human Challenge Trials, Ethics, Experiments, Pathogens

**PANEL 5: SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL,
AND SOCIAL-TRANSFORMATIONAL
ISSUES DURING COVID-19**

Bojan Todosijević

Institute of Social Sciences
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Olivera Komar

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Zoran Pavlović

University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy
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Dragan Stanojević

University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy
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Irrational Beliefs about COVID-19: Authoritarianism and Politics in Serbia and Montenegro in 2020

Already the first definition of the concept of authoritarianism, incorporates elements of irrationality in the authoritarian subject's social and political attitudes. Authoritarian individuals are described as prone to superstition, beliefs in world conspiracies, etc. Later conceptions, e.g. Altemeyer's Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale, have tended to downplay the importance of irrational beliefs.

This paper aims to examine the role of authoritarianism in understanding individual differences in readiness to accept conspiracy theories concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and how this relationship is associated with political attitudes. One of the most striking features characterizing the current pandemic is the widespread 'popularity' of various conspiracy theories as explanations of the origin, spread, policies implemented to contain the spread of, and possible treatments for COVID-19. Such beliefs have undermined the systematic efforts of societies to adequately respond to this challenge. We hypothesize that authoritarianism can help in understanding the interaction between irrational social attitudes and politics.

The analysis is based on data from Serbia (two national-level public opinion surveys), and Montenegro (one comparable survey), conducted between April and September 2000. The results demonstrate that authoritarianism indeed predicts readiness to accept conspiracy beliefs concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore influences health related attitudes. On the other side, authoritarianism influences irrational beliefs and political attitudes independently.

Keywords: Authoritarianism, COVID-19, Conspiracy Beliefs, Politics, Serbia, Montenegro

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Public Health and Sociological Determinants of the COVID-19 Pandemic Measures

The COVID-19 pandemic will not be the last, the world is expecting pandemics in the future, some repeated and some new. A fair and resilient recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic is a must for all countries. Without such recovery, public health and social systems will never be able to operate at full capacity. All the measures used during the pandemic, especially those that obtained extremely good results, must become mandatory parts of the protocols for good pandemics' preparedness in every country. This pandemic taught us we should never ignore the basic sociological assumptions of the society that we address with crisis measures: its cultural and natural heritage, previous experiences, and historical points of views. Vaccination, as one of the most essential measures in the pandemic, caused the most controversy worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic. Distinguishing why individuals and groups decided to react by resisting vaccination and why crisis headquarters around the world used the same rhetoric with the same (negative) results in relation to vaccination needs to be studied and put in the context of each society. Also, the institute of the state of emergency proved to be extremely important in some situations, but many countries did not use it still. Furthermore, examples of exaggeration in the pressure on individuals and groups who resisted the vaccination but also other measures, such as banning socialization, must be placed in the context of age, sex, habits, and social environment, to enable more effective management of pandemics in the future. Often, individual or group responses to the measures imposed in crises are in fact classical responses to stress. By connecting the responses by individuals to a stressful situation with

the society's response, it is possible to soften the approach and rhetoric with more significant achievements in future crises. Reactions such as freezing, flopping, befriending, fighting, or fleeing are immediate, automatic, and instinctive responses to fear. If we understand them at all, it could help us to understand the experiences and feelings of the people we address with crisis measures.

Keywords: COVID-19, Crises, State of Emergency, Vaccination, Response, Preparedness

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Rethinking Human Security in the Post-COVID-19 World – Lessons Learned from the Humanocentric Approach to Health Security

The COVID-19 pandemic is a glaring example of the health-security nexus as a quite established topic in security studies. The traditional approach in health security considerations is the so-called state-centric approach, based on the securitization theory, with the state as the main referent object. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has opened up space for a different conceptualization of health security, i.e. the need for an analytical approach that places greater emphasis on people as referent objects. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to analyze COVID-19 as a health threat through the lens of the human security concept and to consider the relevance of this approach in the “post-COVID-19” context. So, the research question is – what is the special value of this approach in the conceptualization of COVID-19 as a health threat, both in terms of theoretical contribution and practical strategies and policy solutions? The article is based on academic literature review, but also on secondary data analysis relevant for the assessment of the state of human security, like the Human Development Index. It is expected that this analysis will clarify the potential of human security approach in coping with similar crises in the future, which is holistic, long-term and prevention based.

Keywords: COVID-19, Human Security, Health Security, Pandemic

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The Impact of COVID-19 on Green and Digital Transformation in the Republic of Serbia

The socio-political and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the need of finding innovative ways of doing business that will benefit society in the long term and contribute to the economy's competitiveness. Community and business entities have been brought to the point where green and digital transformation is no longer an option but a necessity. The paper aims to analyze the successful recovery and parallel transition to a green and digital economy in Serbia. The basic premise of the article is that the transition to low-carbon development, which is based on solid micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and ambitious reform programs, can contribute to the creation of an economic environment based on intelligent specialization and innovation, which will make the country more resistant to future crises. The consequences of the crisis are profound and have reached every sphere of society and economy. The research will identify long-term recovery and development corridors through decarbonization and green transition. Investing in digital technologies is an imperative of today, because more than a half of the companies have been missing the opportunities that digital business provides. Using circular business models and bringing production closer to consumption will reduce import dependence. In this way, the country's economy will be protected from earthquakes at the global level. The pandemic has shown the risks associated with traditional, linear supply chains: dependence on the People's Republic of China proved particularly costly due to interruptions in the supply chain.

Keywords: Green Economy, Smart Specialization, Digital Business, Circular Economy, People's Republic of China

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Ensuring Citizens' Trust in Institutions, Medicine and Physicians in the Times of a Pandemic

When it comes to emergencies, truthful, complete, and timely informing of the public is of crucial importance. With respect to new infectious diseases and new technologies of developing vaccines, it is vital to ensure independent scientific research, information sharing, and scientific criticism. These two interrelated premises are also tightly linked with citizens' trust in institutions, medicine, and physicians in the times of a pandemic.

This presentation aims to contribute to the debate on developing efficient strategies in combating threats to public health, based on the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of the analysis is the response by WHO to the pandemic, since the organisation has the leading role in managing global emergencies and threats to public health. The learnt lessons indicate that the citizens' trust in institutional response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been ruined due to the many shortcomings and lapses of the responsible authorities: immunisation without an informed free consent by the vaccine receivers, the lack of scientific debate about the COVID-19 vaccines, the lack of independent research, discrimination and campaign against the unvaccinated, censorship of independent media, and the suppression of the freedom of expression and opinion. The trust placed in the authorities has also been shaken due to many controversies related to the safety of mRNA vaccines, the lack of scientific consensus concerning the measures against the pandemic, and the public-private partnership between World Health Organisation (WHO) and pharmaceutical companies. AA controversy is also related to the 'infodemic management' by WHO, because it has been based on controlling the information flow and listening to the community concerns by using the *EARS (Early AI-supported Response with Social Listening)* platform, in partnership with private corporations and social platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Google, and Twitter.

The fact that non-state actors (including private foundations and vaccine manufacturers) have overtaken member states in financing WHO, contributes to the concerns about the reliability and credibility of this UN agency.

In conclusion, the first step in ensuring citizens' trust in authorities, medicine and physicians is to ensure timely, complete, and truthful information about all the issues relevant for public health and safety of individuals. This implies that the authorities which are sources of information, are reliable and free from the influence of pharmaceutical corporations, whose interests are primarily driven by profit. Moreover, this implies that solely the member states of WHO should have the decision-making role in this UN agency. This should be particularly respected in the process that has already started, of drafting a new WHO instrument on pandemic prevention, which will be legally binding for the member states.

Keywords: Right to Information, Infodemic, World Health Organisation, Private-Public Partnership

List of the participants in the international conference “Social, Economic and Political Construction of COVID-19”, organized by the Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade, Serbia and Lehman College from New York, USA

12–13 May 2023

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CIP – Каталогизacija у публикацији
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

616.98: 578.834]:3(048)
316.62:172(048)

INTERNATIONAL Scientific Conference Social, economic and political construction of Covid-19 (2023 ; Beograd, New York)
Social, economic and political construction of Covid-19 : (international scientific conference) : Belgrade, New York, 12–13 May 2023 : book of abstracts / [organized by the] Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade [and Lehman College, City University of New York] ; [editors Veselin Mitrović, Naomi Zack]. - Belgrade : Institute of Social Sciences, 2023 (Beograd : RIC Grafičkog inženjerstva Tehnološko-metalurškog fakulteta). - 40 str. ; 22 cm

"... at the Institute of Social Sciences and as a virtual event at the Lehman College" --> kolofon. - Tiraž 50. - Str. 8: The social, economic, and political construction of Covid-19 / Veselin Mitrović, Naomi Zack.

ISBN 978-86-7093-263-0

а) Ковид 19 – Пандемија – Друштвени аспект – Апстракти
б) Друштвено понашање – Етички аспект – Апстракти

COBISS.SR-ID 113679881

Lektor za engleski jezik: M. Prevodi | Grafičko oblikovanje: MITRACK |
Tiraž: 50 primeraka | Štampa: RIC Grafičkog inženjerstva Tehnološko-metalurškog fakulteta



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