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EDITORIAL

Human society has always faced all manner of crises. The question is not whether crises will emerge, but which kinds of crises, when and how they will arise. Wars, terrorism and natural disasters have killed many people and transformed the ways we live. Mature modern states were supposed to be prepared to deal with such contingencies, and have plans, institutions, resources, training and exercises. Infectious diseases were clearly designated a threat before 2019, but chiefly only among a narrow group of experts and health institutions. The Spanish flu pandemic in 1918 that caused considerable yet unknown numbers of infected and dead people was mostly forgotten, the sporadic outbursts of the Ebola virus were largely seen as a problem of Africa, while AIDS and the outburst of MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome-related coronavirus) in 2012 were brought under control. In 2019, global society was looking strong, yet increasingly fragile. And then the unexpected and unimagined happened.

The Covid-19 pandemic's arrival came almost as a complete surprise, despite the infectious disease experiences noted above. Even when the crisis was at its peak in China, Europe and the USA were primarily viewing it from a distance, thinking this could not happen to them. Typical underestimation of the threat made countries relatively unprepared to comprehensively deal with the crisis. Existing threats (like virus transmission and related deaths) might escalate into a crisis with serious implications for society. This threat has grown to become the biggest and most global crisis in human history. Another problem is that the crisis developed really slowly or incrementally, making our societies appear like 'frogs in slowly heating water' or without full awareness of the problem's gravity. It gradually forced many people into hospital and slowly killed them. The threat (the virus) is invisible to the human eye and its spread is also invisible until it is already too late. This is unlike many other threats (e.g. natural disasters, terrorist attacks, wars etc.) whose perpetrators and/or consequences can be instantly and clearly located in geographical space and time. This means that literally everywhere people were exposed to the health threat, such as in their homes, workplaces, leisure places, restaurants and even outside on the street.

The Covid-19 epidemic and associated crisis are a low probability-high impact event. Although its outburst is unlikely, when it does happen it will

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take a great toll. Our health systems were only prepared for smaller-scale epidemics, government systems were largely unprepared and societies almost completely unprepared. There were no comprehensive crisis management plans for this scenario, no inclusive crisis management exercises etc. The Covid-19 crisis has challenged human society from several perspectives, with many predicting that our world will no longer be the same once this crisis ends.

The purpose of this special issue is to analyse: (1) the Covid-19 crisis; (2) crisis response on the national or international levels; and (3) the associated dilemmas from a range of scientific viewpoints. We looked for articles on the theme from the perspectives of sociology, political science, international relations, security and defence studies, communication science, law etc. Multi- and inter-disciplinary approaches were also welcomed. We also sought articles on human rights during the crisis and articles on post-Covid power relations, the world order and Europe. Submitted articles went through a rigorous, double-blind peer review. Of the 36 initial article propositions, 9 articles were selected and sufficiently improved to earn a place in this special issue. In the remainder of this introduction, we shall briefly present the main ideas in the articles included. Readers should consider this as a meta summary of summaries of the texts. At the end of this introduction, some key recommendations to policymakers based on the texts included in this special issue are offered.

In *Failures in Crisis Communication during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Slovenia*, the authors stress the important role played by ordinary people in crisis management and crisis communication. Crisis communicators must know their audiences and, if people's respect of the crisis measures is important, then society needs to perceive the government's measures as needed, just and legitimate. The article studies several factors influencing the achievement of this based on in-depth interviews of a sample of women who were living alone during the first lockdown in 2020. The results present crucial communication mistakes that affected trust in the official communicators and failed to motivate and encourage the respondents to behave in line with the recommended and prescribed protective measures. The communication frame in Slovenia in the respondents' eyes involved too much fear-based rhetoric, a lack of respect shown to the public, considerable ambiguity about the measures, the exclusion of certain fields of expertise, the politicisation of some fields of expertise, exploitation of the epidemic etc.

In *Preparedness vs. Improvisation: A Response to the Covid-19 Crisis in Slovenia*, the authors focus on the crisis planning-improvisation relationship in theory and with respect to the Covid-19 epidemic in Slovenia. It is normal for elements of improvisation to arise in the crisis management of a complex crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the authors identify

too many elements involving significant improvisation in crisis management planning, decision-making, coordination and crisis communication in Slovenia. The government initially ignored the structural solutions already in place for managing a crisis and established a new improvised decision-making structure, did not create a comprehensive crisis management plan covering the political and operational response to the crisis and also communicated in ways that added to people's distrust.

In *Policing Anti-government Protests during the Coronavirus Crisis in Poland*, the author illuminates the processes of public interaction between the police and anti-government protesters during the Covid crisis in Poland by evaluating the crowd-control mechanisms used by the police. The article searches where the Polish model of anti-government protest policing during the Covid-19 pandemic lies on a continuum of antinomic ideal types of: (1) escalated force; and (2) negotiated management. It shows that the policing of the protests resembles a hybrid model that combines elements of coercion and negotiation, but also that it is closer to escalated force. Unequal police treatment of the pro- and anti-government protesters is detected. In terms of protecting the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and police tolerance for community disruption, this particular form of policing is close to escalated force. On the other hand, the communication between the police and the assembly participants, as well as the extent and manner of arrests, closely reflects both models.

In *Debunking 'The Great Equaliser' Discourse: A Minority Perspective in a Time of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Southeast Europe*, the author notes the wrong initial expectation that the Covid-19 pandemic would become 'the great equaliser' in society. The virus does not care about gender, race, nationality, economic status etc. However, the virus's rapid spread and several crisis measures actually magnified the pre-existing inequalities by exacting a heavy toll on already marginalised, exploited and extremely poor segments of societies. The article confirms the deterioration of majority-minority relations and deepening of the existing divisions and related stigmatisation in the cases of Bulgarian Roma and Kosovo Serbs.

In *American Anti-Chinese Racism during the Covid-19 Crisis and its Strategic Functions*, the authors stress that the Covid-19 crisis was accompanied by the rise of anti-Chinese racism in the USA. This racism is not new for America and has been used to inscribe borders between the superior/normal/rational/healthy US individuals and society on one hand, and Chinese individuals and society on the other, which are deemed to be inferior/abnormal/irrational/dangerous. Anti-Chinese racism was transformed during the pandemic and utilised to re-establish and re-consolidate societal cohesion and order and to re-legitimise and stabilise the existing socio-political and economic arrangements, stratifications, and hierarchies. It deradicalised and

racialised the (potential) revolt and resistance of most Americans against the current order by refocusing their frustrations from the elites onto “common foreign enemy”.

In *Control over One's Life during the Covid Epidemic: A Case Study of Multi-apartment Buildings in Ljubljana*, the authors examine how the pandemic lockdown has affected people's day-to-day lives and the sense of control they have over them in the case of multi-apartment buildings in Ljubljana. Their aim was to establish how the inhabitants of these buildings perceived control over their life and how it varies while accounting for a range of epidemic-associated occurrences in the building and among the residents during the unique episode of the lockdown in Ljubljana. The results show a dramatic drop in perceived control over one's life, from 75% of respondents in usual times to 35% during the pandemic. Contrary to expectations, groups with the highest levels of perceived control were those with the lowest education, in poor health, and single parents.

In *The Impact of Covid-19 on the Digitalisation of Administrative Procedures: Lessons from Slovenian Administrative Units*, the authors stress that the Covid-19 pandemic has also transformed administrative procedures between public authorities and citizens and businesses. Based on data from 58 administrative units in Slovenia, the article identifies evidence that can be used to design future public policies to properly respond to pandemic challenges. The authors find that Slovenia's administrative units do not (yet) reach the level of digital transformation 4.0 and do not (yet) fully implement the principles of good governance, although their procedures and procedural actions are gradually evolving into citizen-centred, smart governance. In this context, the Covid-19 crisis is both a problem and an opportunity for progress. Services and procedures on the state level must pay more attention to equality and balancing between legal rights and the public interest with efficiency-oriented measures.

The article entitled *Platformisation and Human Rights: Does use of the Slovenian #ostanizdrav app bypass privacy rights?* explores the public's fear of data misuse while using European Covid-19 proximity-tracing applications. The question is whether, to what extent and how the design of European proximity-tracing applications mimic the data-intensive web services of commercial platforms, namely commercial APIs and their data policy in order to bypass users' right to privacy. The authors reject the public fear of governmental dataveillance, but see the possibility of the misuse of data by companies.

In *Gender Inequality on Display in the Flexibilisation of Employment during the Covid-19 Crisis in Slovenia*, the authors stress the many risks in the area of employment associated with the Covid-19 crisis and related lockdown measures. Working parents face the challenge of combining their

work and family obligations due to the closure of schools and kindergartens. A considerable number have also encountered a greater risk of unemployment and the linked financial instability. Women have endured greater pressure and instability since their employment statuses appear to be more precarious. Authors' analysis of the most reliable survey data available confirm certain already existing gender inequalities and also reveal some new ones during the Covid crisis.

This special journal issue particularly wishes to contribute to discussions on the key societal challenges of crisis response during the global Covid-19 crisis by offering the following recommendations:

- The Covid-19 crisis has added to the general loss of perceived control over people's lives. Crisis communication efforts must address this feeling by providing accurate and timely information, while also taking into account that the feeling of lost control over people's lives is asymmetrically distributed in society.
- Crisis communicators need to know their audiences better and more directly involve people in crisis communication, show greater respect, use less fear-based rhetoric etc.
- While improvisation is a given fact in complex crises, the level of improvisation during the Covid-19 crisis in the fields of crisis management planning, decision-making and communicating was too high. All modern and responsible states must have in place crisis preparedness for all types of crises.
- A comprehensive approach to addressing health crises must include political and operational dimensions, multi-actor approaches need to be planned and exercised more.
- Police crowd-control mechanisms in the field of protest policing must evolve towards a hybrid model that includes mechanisms for negotiated management along with the classic use of force. Police should not treat pro- and anti-government protests and protesters unequally.
- Crisis managers and entire societies must be careful to ensure that the crisis management measures do not exacerbate pre-existing inequalities between marginalised ethnic groups and the majority, poor and rich, women and men etc. Employment risks need to be more carefully addressed by acknowledging different gender effects.
- Crisis managers and entire societies must take care that crisis management measures do not bolster existing forms of racism and intolerance, even if this is used to balance emerging national and international political asymmetries. Portraying an ethnic group as the culprit for a global epidemic does not solve the problem and will likely only aggravate it.
- The Covid-19 crisis is an opportunity to digitalise the public administration and its public services. Smart governance should be more

citizen-centred and greater attention must be given to balancing between legal rights and the public interest with efficiency-oriented measures.

- European Covid-19 proximity-tracing applications also entail some risks. We should not simply focus on the possibility of governmental dataveillance, but more importantly on the possibility of the misuse of data by companies.