Society After COVID-19: An Editorial Note

The Editors

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Abstract

This editorial note turns the attention of sociology to the immediate and pressing present of the COVID-19 pandemic with the aim of understanding the potentially long-term consequences of this extraordinary moment. We suggest to focus on important topics such as the meaning of social change related to COVID-19, the newly emerging social practices due to lockdown measures, the emotional and cognitive impact of the absence of important social rituals, and the political and social effects of enhanced surveillance in our societies. We offer *Sociologica* as an open forum to host contributions on these topics or on other research questions connected with the COVID-19 crisis.

Keywords: COVID-19; pandemic; sociology; longer-term consequences.

We are writing this editorial note in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that is putting under pressure scientists from many disciplines. Epidemiologists, virologists, and public health experts along with politicians, theologians, and media scholars are all, with their respective tools, analyzing the emergency, gathering information, answering questions, and posing research problems. Where are sociologists?

The dramatic social and human costs of the crisis call for global social responses. Meanwhile, the measures undertaken to face the emergency have an impact on social relations on many different levels. In this moment, the central task of our discipline is to reflect on the consequences and the implications of the ongoing *social* transformations. Here we propose a non-exhaustive list of open issues that need to be addressed with sociological tools:

- We hear much talk these days along the lines that "everything has changed." Accordingly, some propose a new periodization, BC/AC: Before Corona/After Corona. Although much is in turmoil and many aspects of social life are being (and will be further) altered, many if not most institutions will prove durable. Yes, this is likely to be a turning point in

many fields. But social change is not a toggle switch. Nonetheless, how might it matter that many people are expecting others to be encountering a world in which everything has changed?

- The Corona virus is hospitalizing and killing in great numbers. Measures to deal with the pandemic are tearing the social fabric. Basic forms of sociality have been proscribed — from elemental social rituals of greeting and departure to ceremonies of celebration and mourning. For centuries, for millennia, indeed defining of our common humanity, illness and death have brought loved ones ritually and physically together. Times of crisis and calamity such as war and disasters have been times of social gatherings, large or small, public or private. Whether on street corners in neighborhoods, in places of worship, in plazas or stadiums, we cope with the experience of shock by being physically co-present alongside those with whom *we're in this together*. The absence of such rituals is certainly likely to be damaging emotionally and possibly also cognitively. What practices will emerge in efforts to repair this damage?

- Will new everyday practices to limit the spread of the virus have longer-term consequences? Take, for example, the paradox that social distancing is the means for expressing social integration. Or think again about the phrase "self isolated" in the context of sociological theories of the self as the product of social relations — anything but isolated. And what about the emergence of new habits and routines of daily life? Will working and schooling from home have consequences after the pandemic? Will consumption patterns be affected? Will forms of assembly be reshaped by widespread experience with virtual meetings? Will paying people *not to work* become legitimated? Will coping with the virus crisis create habits and infrastructures to help us address the climate crisis?

- What are likely to be the longer-term consequences of new state practices in the name of public health? As testing, for example, moves from identifying the infectious to identifying the immune, will it give rise to new social classifications, and how will these be signaled, regulated, and policed? What will be the effects of enhanced surveillance (taken now in the interest of public health but perhaps used later for other political purposes) in terms of forms, infrastructure, and discourses about it?

Without the intention of bringing attention to sociology per se, we turn the attention of sociology to the immediate and pressing present with the aim of understanding the potentially long-term consequences of this extraordinary moment.

We offer *Sociologica* as an open forum to host contributions on these topics or on other research questions connected with the COVID-19 crisis. As an international online journal for sociological debate, with neither pay-walled access nor pay-for-publication policy, *Sociologica* can allow for rapid dissemination and open discussion. We commit ourselves to peer-review any contribution at the highest standards and publish rapidly all accepted papers.

We welcome proposals by scholars or teams of scholars for: (1) symposia on strategic topics for the post-COVID-19 sociology, organized through open calls for papers or as groups of papers already commissioned by symposia editors (or a mix of open and commissioned papers); (2) papers reflecting on the most important challenges, in the standard format of scientific articles or in shorter form; (3) flashback and focus papers discussing the COVID-19 outbreak in the light of social history or using sociological tools to reconsider its challenges; (4) accounts and reconstructions of the COVID-19 events in unconventional formats.

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