

Media and Communication 3

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Introduction

The third proceedings of the Media and Communication series is dedicated to the corona crisis, to different segments of this phenomenon, and to an attempt to use a variety of approaches in order to reach the level of understanding of our time that is expected from scientists and science.

The events related to the corona crisis were the ones to show the strength and influence of the modern mass media. The connections between politics, the media and corporations observed earlier in theories have become visible. However, these connections have never been so strong and so effective as in this case. This presents a space for analysis that had to be used.

This year's proceedings offer the views on the corona crisis as seen by a part of the regional scientific community. The views are different, sometimes diametrically opposed. The idea was to give a range of thoughts on all aspects of the corona crisis.

It is not easy to talk about the times we live in, about the media strategies we are exposed to on a daily basis, about health policies and approaches that have changed very often and that have varied from country to country. For that reason, these texts should be understood as an attempt of contribution of the interdisciplinary science of Croatia and its region to the entire body of knowledge about the corona-crisis phenomenon.

Media and Communication 3 thus brings different aspects of the phenomenon in which we have found ourselves and in which we still live. Some of the texts are dedicated to media-medical issues because it has been shown how important it is to convey the messages of the medical profession correctly in the media. Some of the texts analyze the condition of an individual in the system of media mediation which 'bombards' them on a daily basis with necessary but very often unnecessary information. The focus is also on various modes of psychological defense against the pressures of the media and the profession, and the pressures of living indoors.

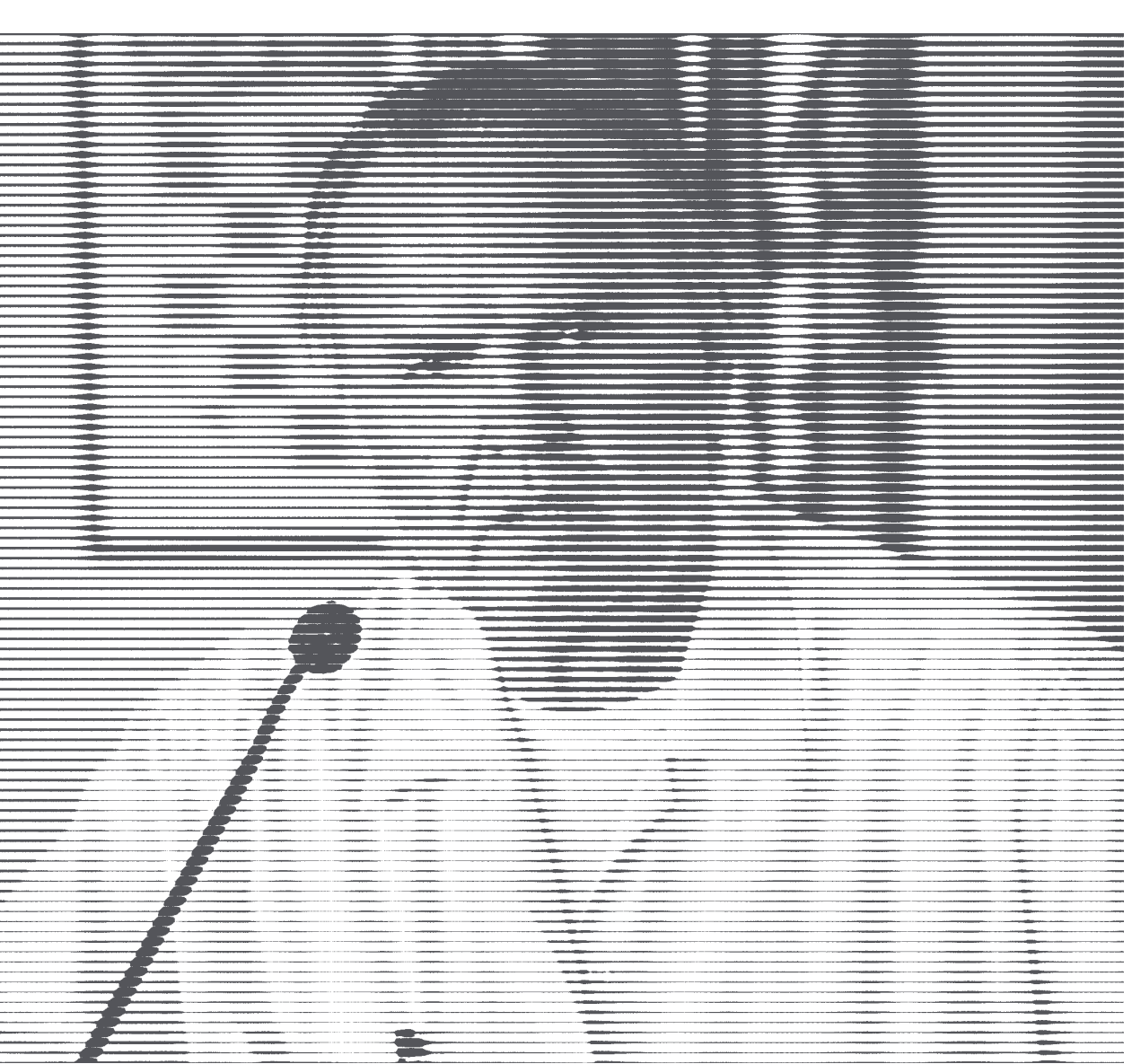
Our first and foremost thanks go to University North since with their support we have before us an extremely topical reading that we believe will fill some gaps in the analysis of the corona-crisis phenomenon. Unlike everyday media appearances, attitudes that change, these or those strategies being suggested, this is an attempt to summarize.

Even though we are still enclosed in the situation and we are still in maps that set some medical-political boundaries and conditions of movement and behavior in general, before us is a document of time that will, if nothing else, testify to the generations to come on how, how much, and why we erred in our judgments.

Prof. dr. Sead Alić

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Virus as Medium

Key words virus, medium, messages, infodemia, free market

Abstract The COVID-19 virus has given us numerous vague signs which serve like information transformed into messages. These messages have been interpreted in various ways by scientists, crisis headquarters, political parties and governments. In this sense, the COVID-19 virus has become more than just a message. It is a medium to be interpreted or instrumentalized; just like modern mass media, it imprisons us within a 'prison without walls'.

More than any other text, book or author, COVID-19 has been successful in turning our attention towards the manipulative character of mass media. This small virus knows no borders or wires, the differences between skin colours or account balances. This is why it reveals the fact that every individual in the world is important, that dialogue and comparison of different views are important, as well as the issue of governments and corporations using the media for their ends.

The impact of the media becomes dangerous if allowed to follow only the rules of the market, since the free market is obviously more free for rich investors, who are mainly not so keen on truth or the common good. This text interprets the current infodemic as a confirmation of the diseased media dimension of the world and as another call for critical reflection on the systems of media representation which are still not being taken seriously enough.

Virus kao medij

Ključne riječi virus, medij, poruke, infodemija, slobodno tržište

Sažetak Virus COVID-19 poslao nam je mnogo nejasnih znakova. Oni su kao informacije prevedene u poruke. Te poruke su različito interpretirane od strane znanstvenika, stožera, političkih stranaka, vlada. Virus COVID-19 je u tom smislu više od poruke. On je medij koji se interpretira, instrumentalizira; koji nas poput suvremenih masmedija zatvara u 'zatvore bez zidova'.

COVID-19 je uspješnije od svih dosadašnjih tekstova, knjiga i autora uspio skrenuti pozornost na manipulacijski karakter suvremenih medija. Mali virus koji ne poznaje granice, žice, boju kože, saldo na računu – podcrtava važnost svakog pojedinca u svijetu, važnost dijaloga i sučeljavanja argumenata, te problematičnost instrumentaliziranja medija od strane vlada i velikih korporacija.

Poguban je utjecaj medija ukoliko se oni prepuste isključivo zakonitostima tržišta jer je slobodno tržište logikom stvari slobodnije za bogate investitore, u pravilu nesklone istini i općem dobru. Infodemiju tekst interpretira kao potvrdu bolesti medijske dimenzije svijeta, te kao još jedan poziv kritičkom promišljanju nikada dovoljno ozbiljno shvaćenih sustava medijskog posredovanja.

I Contextualization

1. A sick society

Once upon a time, philosophers were also often doctors. Among them was Ibn Sina (980 - 1037), better known as Avicenna across Europe. In his medical encyclopaedia *al-Qanunfi al-Tibb* (The Canon of Medicine), he mentions 'al-Arba'in-ya' ('the forty'), meaning the forty days of isolation needed for those who might pass an infection to others.

In modern times, almost universally, philosophers are not doctors. Neither am I. The only contribution I can make, is to suggest two possible trains of thought, relating either to the possibility that someone dabbled with coronaviruses in a medical lab, or the possibility this is actually a dangerous warning to humankind sent by nature.

In accordance with these times that prioritize the exploration of consequences instead of looking at the causes, I must also delve into questions delineating the paradox of behaviour patterns taken by politics, media and the general public when dealing with the phenomena of the current pandemic and infodemic. These paradoxes reveal how belatedly we have become aware of decisions being made in our name. If sentences that follow are laden with irony or cynicism, it is merely because this is the only available outlet for our protest, as we dwell within our catacombs.

The first thought by such a catacomb-bound cynic might sound something like this: How come there is such fear of the coronavirus when all countries in the world (those taking themselves and their skies seriously) are buying increasingly modern and expensive military aircraft? From great heights, these can be used to shoot at invisible targets. Supposedly super-precise projectiles of the all-powerful warplanes may be capable of hitting even invisible targets...

Decreased funding for scientific research (in countries that need to protect their skies), certainly increases the competitiveness among scientists. No doubt among them will be also those who in order to survive, will invent national variants of the vaccine. (The short history of the corona crisis is the history of including more and more teams from countless countries

in the production of vaccines). We'll support them it seems, in the same way we support different political parties, religions, sports teams or opposing parties in court. Vaccines are thus adorned in national uniforms and aligned with the East or the West.

In transition countries of the Balkans, the healthcare system has for decades been, like so many other things, a way to 'legally' transfer budget funds into private companies, who then return these funds to the political decision makers who made possible the original transfer. This laundered money is then invested into 'sadly' visible movable and immovable property, and every once in a while, we are entertained by Kafkaesque situations. After three days of a media virosis, the temperature decreases and the problem simply disappears. A precursor to our modern pandemic was the scandal of transforming social ownership into private (through legalizing theft or stealing without legalization).

In Zagreb where we have built the Arena (a sports-recreation market on the outskirts of Zagreb, nearby a site for a new hospital), we are quite aware that (in Fromm's sense), we are a 'sick society' and that we are in need of large healing centres. The Arena seeps out money, but the corona crisis has created the illusion that it might be used as an infirmary for those infected with the virus.

We are then reminded of the national football stadium because the football club playing on this field in Maksimir could not be more embarrassing. The team makes huge amounts of money and lives the high life, while playing on a shabby stadium into which so much has been invested that two such stadiums could have been made with the same amount of money. All of this lays forgotten, but a new idea springs to mind – a national stadium could probably house even greater numbers of patients than it would be possible at the Arena centre!

We minimally adjust regulation on the media although we know that the dependence of all media in this country on the political power of the ruling party will not be changed. If we had truly independent media, there might even be some shameful faces among those 'fighters for the common good' – that is, among the politicians. This might happen if it becomes public knowledge how they have been using science, the media and the integrity of scientists, in their project of transforming

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reasonable conversation into statistical lists and graphs. (Each day we track the number of the newly infected along the same media line of tracking the numbers of incoming tourists). This crisis has sent us a virus which manages to reveal instrumentalized non-free media and Potemkin-styled regulation.

We have left our faith in reason to the age Enlightenment and self-incurred immaturity to Kant, while we transform democracy into a ritual of abandoning politics, this ritual being re-enacted every four years when we turn all our knowledge and capabilities into a great big zero on a small paper containing numbers and names of a new arrogant structure. We thus choose a new oligarchy in celebration of this 'holiday of democracy'.

Is it any different in the rest of the world and what have we adopted? At the global level, we have given up morality, thought, humanistic values, discussions on the reasons for human existence, creativity and the development of human sensitivity as a precondition for a better world. Local sheriffs overuse the trend of turning everything living into unliving matter so there are always new political, religious, academic and business structures. Their chief motto: 'As long as we support each other's interests no one will be able to think through our web of regulations, laws and decisions, and if necessary, we'll have someone teach them a lesson.'

Due to its negation of everything living, human and creative, *homo sapiens* currently has a good chance of simply – disappearing. To make it clearer, we don't need war or nuclear heads for our self-destruction, we don't need any fighter planes. We shall be destroyed by something to which we ourselves are habitat. Just as we have destroyed the Earth that provides us with life, we shall be destroyed by a virus that will remain alive as long as there are living creatures on Earth. A biological war is being waged against us. It is almost irrelevant if this is nature rebelling or if some Malthusian project is at work. At the same time there are too many of us and we are headed in the wrong direction.

Followers of Thomas Robert Malthus (1766 - 1834) remember his words: 'All children born above the number needed for keeping the population number at the required level, inevitably need to disappear, unless room is made for them through the death of grown-up individuals... This should be an active

policy of the government... We must encourage nature's work in creating this mortality instead of stupidly and hopelessly preventing it. And if we fear frequent visitations of famine, through rebellions we must entice other forms of forced and natural destruction. Instead of promoting hygiene among the poor, we must encourage other habits. Our cities need to have narrower streets, with more people crowded in their houses, and we need to provoke the return of the plague. In the country, settlements are to be built close to standing water and especially in swamps and unhealthy conditions. But above all, we must strongly discourage specific medication against diseases and those well-meaning individuals who are actually mistaken in thinking that they are doing humanity a favour in finding resources for the total annihilation of a particular disease.¹

The words of this 'demographic prophet' now seem to have come true. A great number of people on Earth represent a –surplus: they produce garbage, live in unhealthy conditions, fight for human rights, point the finger at the rich and overly rich. The virus of awareness on the unsustainability of neoliberal capitalism is unstoppably spreading across social networks, anarchist webpages and obscure communities that still value opinion. This makes the difference between the rich and the common people even more visible. It is no longer possible to peddle dreams through movies, soap operas or novels. The walls of social structures can no longer be demolished by the glamour of cable tv. Everything is boring and has been seen before. People now demand to have real life gladiators in real life arenas. This is why we are frequently served stories taking place in the interiors of villas, yachts, luxury airplanes, distant islands and unfamiliar protected destinations.

Setting up financial heavens on earth was a development that introduced the insatiable onto a new level of the game. The rich asked themselves the 'logical' question: Why shouldn't the whole planet Earth be a sort of tax oasis? That's a good idea, but what if all the nations of the world oppose it? Their thoughts perhaps went in this direction:

After becoming the owners of the means of production, as well as of corporations used for manipulation, and institutions that make their decisions legal, the noblemen come to a joint conclusion: The Earth is too beautiful to belong to everyone. It can only be the property of those who can afford it.

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¹ https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Robert_Malthus

Followers of nature as a self-renewing Logos that creates magnificent beauty on Earth, unfortunately have no power at the moment. They are trapped (alongside all the rest) in the stampede of escaping the deserved punishment. They can only occasionally, as they are running, shout to the public no longer there: Told you so!

But all is not lost. We are now faced with the times of recognizing structures, configurations, ways of action which we already know and somehow remember. It seems that modern communication of health recommendations includes numerous elements of the marketing and religious sphere. These similarities simply cannot be hidden anymore.

This of course does not lessen the concern of any human being on earth today for the medical dimension of the problem. It also does not mean that all thought needs to be narrowed down to non-medical elements. This is just one of the possible ways of thinking. Possibly the least important one. However, it is indicative...

2. The invisible brings change more visibly

The Earth has not been the centre of the universe for quite some time now. The Sun no longer revolves around the Earth, and human reason has not fared too brightly in comparison with subconscious structures of the human being. Throughout history, egocentrism has lost its battles. In order to survive, it has hidden under the guise of imperialism, nationalism, eurocentrism, colonialism and neocolonialism. It invented the idea of progress as a mask to hide the well invested (robbed) treasure of 'uncivilised' peoples. Finally, it hid inside the idea of democracy, as it understood that stealing is simpler if it is done in the name of democracy i.e., its introducing into 'uncivilized' parts of the world.

At the same time, everyone knew this but not many tried to oppose it. Repressive systems have managed to close down all communication channels, and developed subtle euthanasia methods, in addition to making fun of and marginalizing any

serious critical thought that might question the existing system of lies and manipulation, or of human hypocrisy.

And then a virus came along, closing us within ourselves, enabling us to have the time to think about everything: ourselves, the value system we live in, false democracy, how we are condemned to prestige, competition, crushing anyone on our way to success. It gave us the time to acquaint ourselves with the strangers inhabiting our own houses and apartments... Suddenly all the things we swore we could not live without, became irrelevant. Sports came to a stop. Media stars stopped shining. We could no longer brag to each other how we experienced a religious ritual, concert of a world-famous celebrity, or a cruise visiting tourist destinations across the world.

We have spent our lives running away from ourselves, joining football, political, national and religious masses, and then a half-living virus condemned us to ourselves. How will we manage? We are used to 'crazy' football events and the 'crazy' emotions of their supporters. We are used to 'crazy' concerts, parties and celebrations of winners... but we were not prepared for the 'crazy' facing of our own loneliness. If this does not make us actually crazy – there is still hope for humanity.

There seems to be a secret link between Bacon's suggestion that 'understanding must not be supplied with wings but rather hung with weights', and the supposedly odd fact that sometimes illness and misery can provide us with the greatest progress in self-knowing and understanding of what is important. When we are healthy and strong, we often run towards the unimportant, prescribed and stereotypical. We think we are the ones directing events, even when seduced and manipulated by the media, we merely perform someone else's program which has been subtly imposed through the media.

The current situation tells us that no matter how 'big' we are, our destinies may be decided by tiny viruses. It is interesting that these, balancing somewhere between life and death, may decide on the life or death of as all, members of a species that has proclaimed or feels itself to be the centre of the universe.

Life however, warns us yet again that we are not so high up in the hierarchy and any attempt to seek an exclusive position for ourselves may end up fatally. It is now clear that we must

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be aware of the necessity to give 'due respect' to the demands of invisible viruses that know no differences in borders, sex, gender, skin colour, worldview, religious or any other creed. We ironically 'long' for the times when we fought only about Ustashas and Chetniks, different skin colours, followers of this or that religion.... Slowly but surely, we come to understand that life is much more than our divisions and that we are actually quite small in comparison with the invisible.

There are almost infinite levels in understanding the pandemic, its source, spreading and impact on humanity. Facebook serves as a modern encyclopaedia of associations people think of as they try to make sense of what is happening to them. Instead of systematizing the serious and less serious, the funny and the stupid, the arrogant and the religious approaches, I shall rather try to understand the consequences from a philosophical and sociological point of view, since these point to a new value system emerging in our world.

The fact remains that one small virus is currently putting into question the whole of visible reality into which we have enclosed the surface of our Earth. This might not be the intention of the virus (regardless of whether it has been produced in a laboratory, whether it mutated or was sent down by a universal supernatural force we call God). The virus knows no boundaries, and any obstacles are apparently only ways of putting off the time when billions of these tiny dead-alive beings shall become part of us and decide who lives or dies.

No social theory, including that of Marx, has managed to convince people they are actually – or that they should be – equal. No words are strong enough to warn loudly enough that we must search for forms of equality and our own self-realization, which are truly possible only in a world where people see they are enriched by each other. Every day this invisible virus reminds us this equality is necessary and that we need to keep searching for ways to achieve it.

For example, the virus might teach a nation that wants to be the biggest and best – that the healthcare system in which we don't take care of everyone, but only of those who have enough money – is filled with holes through which disease can pass easily. If we don't protect everyone, how can we protect ourselves from a virus that does not discriminate among its hosts? Is there a limit this virus will not break and is there a

magic amount of money to isolate its owners from the rest of the world? An ironic question for the system that refuses to protect everyone might be: Are weapons useful in the defence against the invisible?

The paradox of American democracy, or mediacracy (influencing voting behaviour through mass media) is in the fact that the arrogance of a democratically chosen leader can cause the death of a large part of the population that actually brought this arrogance into power. Weapons cannot prevent human contact regardless of isolation, drone deliveries or piling up weapons in the basement.

The carelessness of rulers leads to an *infodemic* of the highest degree, this media illness that may spread different tangible forms of the same arrogance throughout the population whose anxieties are to be alleviated, by the media that often shares its corporate interests with politics. However, the awareness of the almost unstoppable character of this invisible threat which has managed to shake up the healthcare system of numerous nations – serves as a warning against the unsustainability of the human world if it continues to focus on identifying differences among people instead of focusing on equality, if it is blind to the dying of famine victims and holds ‘the right to revenge’ every killed person from an invading country, the right to colonial and neocolonial impoverishment of the third world and punishing this world by wars and sanctions when it dares to rebel.

Philosophers interpret our world, but a tiny invisible virus may soon change it more efficiently than it has ever been achieved by philosophical ideas. And even if we manage to tame this virus, the current value system of the world will sooner or later see the spread of a new and probably more fatal one.

Since a virus cannot be killed (as it always exists somewhere between life and death), our activities might only make it stronger. Somewhere in its living-dying depths, the dead-alive virus feeds on Hölderlin’s lines on being strengthened through that which cannot kill it...

Like a being that feeds on hatred and the wish to exterminate humanity, the virus is changing, upgrading, building new systems of defence and attack. We are the ones who give new names to new virus models. These names are like infinite

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shades of colour. When shall we realize that we cannot name all the colours? Can we understand that in attacking viruses through coordinated action, we actually coordinate the birth of their new models and new power?

3. Colonizing the human psyche

Instead of medieval theologians and representatives of religious hierarchies, today we have global players who rely neither on God nor man. Frightened by the threat of impending collapse of the social system that has enabled them to materially exploit that part of the earth's population not yet hungry, they acquire new avenues in producing surplus value by the wages of fear produced through the global media and global bureaucratic structure. After colonizing countries, enslaving nations and waging imperialist wars – they have now decided to – colonize the human psyche.

Just as they 'brought civilization' to the countries they colonized i.e., saved; proclaimed people of a different skin colour to be of a lower race (to be treated like animals); after killing millions in their war squabbles on the distribution of influence and spoils – similarly today they offer the human being a new kind of salvation, which might not be theological, but medical.

The secret to salvation in a tangible form has always been in the surplus value and the expansion of the market. In this way salvation was offered to those with the power to save the ones offering it. The logic of global players continues to be as follows: Let's offer them salvation – The idea of salvation will save us as well!

On the other hand, the human and until recently, the divine in man, has been left to 'antiquated thinkers' who still question concepts such as *will, freedom, truth, morality, justice, equality, spirituality* or *God*. Their number is decreasing however, as spiritual matters do not fit into scientific measurements, and negating the omnipotence and applicability of scientific methods means to stand in heresy against the rational logic of capital and its eternal quest for new colonies, new gold deposits and new countries that hold potential slaves and oil fields...

The colonization of the human psyche is based on the production of fear. In a similar way that the pharmaceutical

industry first produces an inferiority complex in tv viewers (through show programs presenting 'photoshopped' or 'surgically enhanced' individuals), and then within advertising segments offers a solution that brings 'security' and 'confidence' – global players have decided to produce a *global fear*, to turn governments into advertising agents, and medical scientists into mere extras. Salvation is – the end of fear. To achieve this, it is necessary to believe that salvation is possible and that all facts not supporting it represent a scientific heresy.

Old overused ideas such as wars, repressive national systems or dictators and terrorists, could not work in the production of fear at this scope. What the global fear required was an invisible enemy.

It is basically irrelevant whether this invisible enemy first appeared as Nature's attempt to draw our attention to ourselves, or whether a viral 'artificial insemination' was at play – the result is the same: a chance that the global players could not pass up (unless of course they already prepared the whole thing in advance).

The global screen produces fear in people. National bureaucracies, which are all deep in debt, accept the game of skirting around problems and postponing the solution for the age of salvation. Fear produces the need for a product (medicine) which may liberate us from this fear. Global players (former slaveowners, feudal lords, knights, capitalists, owners of corporations) then become saviours and saints.

But not for long. Their greed is also global. They explain that the product will have to be consumed regularly in order to avoid any possibility of new descents into a state of panic. This preventive treatment against fearing an invisible enemy is achieved by paying visible amounts from national budget funds to people and corporations whose incomes are increasing so fast they will soon buy out all the scientists who know how to count those infected or dead.

We no longer need to wage war, conquer countries, enslave nations, manage slaves, force workers on 16-, 14-, 12-, 10- or 8-hour shifts of hard labour. The colonization of the human psyche through producing fear of an invisible enemy is the ultimate invention of global players. It is better even than terrorism.

The immorality of producing surplus value now turns into a moral judgment on those who do not agree to take the 'cure against the invisible enemy'. We are prepared to hate those who do not see the invisible enemy. We run to the other side of the street when we meet someone not afraid of the invisible enemy. This must be a heretic questioning the extra profit of an ultra-small group of people that holds shares in companies producing the drugs against the invisible enemy. This heretic probably finds it strange that an ideal system for making money has been created and no one can't and won't do anything about it. Finally, this is salvation as the final act of history.

Rich apostles now replace poor ones, and the richest people on earth are the ones to lead us to heaven. Well isn't that nice...

4. *Covido ergo zoom*

Thinking has always been linked to a specific medium. In the beginning we uttered our mythical, religious and philosophical judgments, without noticing how we adapted these 'words of wisdom' to the medium of orality in which we were then 'swimming'. We wrote 'wise songs' or short sentences (so others might easily remember and share them) and these mesmerized their audiences just like modern slogans.

The muses inspired us to write these songs. Strict men of ancient times with no ear for music rebelled against poetry because among the poets there were also people who probably weren't inspired by the muses and yet wrote poetry (this 'sophism of the poetic form', this lie in poetry survives today as well). Poetry was accused of separating men from the gods, and prose was offered as a more dignified approach.

And so we fell into prose. Grammar took on the garment of logic. Geometry gave birth to ideal shapes which serve as prototypes for all future ideals to seduce human souls.

Since the muses were not in charge of prose, these texts became more and more ordinary, common, empty... We made a deal with the devil.

Alongside muses and poetry, we grammatically and logically excluded from public life the poetry within us, the possibility of creating a true spiritual community.

Faith was taken over by prose as well. Religions were caught in the medium of prose, thus falling victim to the rational approach. The greatest believers were those who could argue their beliefs best, the ones who knew all the sacred lines, people who proved themselves to be far away from any kind of poetry and mystical sense of the divine within.

In such a situation it is no wonder that currently there is little interest in religious hierarchies. Patterns of political action are obvious within them. These similarities push the object of religious action into the political arena. The scent of heaven is lost in earthly instructions on how to politically position oneself, what to do, who to cheer for, which worldview to adopt... Modern political hierarchies grow from the same delusion, are more efficient in the short term, but the lives of individuals are also such that, rationally speaking, the individual is mostly interested only in the short term.

Religious hierarchies now learn from political ones and make the same mistakes. Muftis and imams suddenly take on the role of politicians, thus failing everyone who believed in them. Christianity has operated on the principles of politics for a long time. God has become a means of division instead of connection...

Weapons for killing people of other faiths have been blessed. Religious education is introduced in schools, without realizing that as a school subject it will serve as the strongest opponent to faith as such. It might produce a certain number of religious nerds, but it will irrevocably deprive many children of exploring their own approach to faith. In an education system organized according to strict rules, as a subject of cramming, God will be reduced to a mere fact. Faith will be replaced by knowing the facts, and spiritual conversation by competing in the knowledge of dogmas.

When letters became the main medium, the Scriptures became Holy. This is the first mediological recognition of the importance of media representation. The medium of the letter is the medium of a 'portable God', to use the words of Régis Debray. The fundamental difference between Christianity and Islam is in the mediological instructions: Christianity says 'read', and Islam demands 'learn' (in the mediological sense this means 'utter', along a particular melody, that is – sing)

The electronic age has introduced the 'death of God'. We intuit that the God of Scripture is dying and there is a vacancy on the throne of the Absolute. The media emerge from the shadows, looking for a place they deserve. The tv set becomes a new pulpit for priests of a new order to talk down to the citizens. There is almost no room for faith anymore.

The digital age of social networks calls into question not only religious education in schools, but the school itself as an outdated form of religious education. Large corporations are silently preparing to take over education systems. Zoom, Google Meet and similar platforms are not merely ways to offer education. They also give us a taste of 'perfect' lectures available at low prices, which might push out the idea of education we have been used to. The global destruction of identities will explode most strongly through changes in the education system. In the age of literacy, our allegiance was with *Cogito ergo sum*. And we have lost. The slogan of the new era is rather 'Covidio ergo Zoom!'

A new revelation awaits and it will be of a medical nature. Salvation will be offered through its slogans like commandments that must be unquestioningly obeyed. Anyone who disobeys these commandments will be considered a heretic and as such banished from the New Church.

II THE MEDIA DIMENSION OF THE CORONA CRISIS

Since the medical dimension of the coronavirus crisis cannot be analysed in this paper (as I am no expert and have no wish to discuss it), this text can only examine its media dimension, which has at times escalated to such a degree that comments on social networks labelled it a world war. Disregarding the medical element might be considered a handicap, but I suppose an analysis of media behaviour may discover quite interesting issues to be addressed by the medical profession and its scientists, as well as owners of the media or even journalists. My aim is to structure this segment in relation to phenomena that have appeared in addition to the corona crisis, and became more obvious as time went on.

1. Dialogue

There is no culture that will not advocate for a critical approach and the necessity of open dialogue on any possible subject as part of a democratic society. Dialogue should help us all in shaking off the legacy of groupthink and through confronting opposing views, allow the truth to appear in all its 'openness'.

But what happens when there is a need to coordinate the behaviour of all citizens within a country? How can dialogue survive in a situation when politics takes the reins of mainstream media and chooses what is good for the society as a whole? As a rule, this is done by the party currently in power. However, during the pandemic, in Croatia and other countries, there appeared a great and unexpected 'understanding' between position and opposition.

In other words, it is interesting how the media have abandoned the opportunity for a direct confrontation between different approaches to the corona crisis. The main media representatives of all possible approaches were generally the followers of the central line of defence against COVID-19. Others could only take to the streets or social networks.

The absence of any real dialogue could be interpreted as the effort by the people and institutions in charge to stand united against the coronavirus crisis. At the core of this is the clear and understandable idea that unless all of us follow the instructions responsibly – the virus has a larger scope of action and might last indefinitely.

This 'self-evident' idea is unfortunately not supported by the fact that all totalitarian societies also invoked a similar 'wisdom'. All such societies profited from such an approach. But behind their success there were always horrors perpetrated against those who did not accept the totalitarian idea.

What is present here then is the absence of any real dialogue or discussion with clear arguments and different approaches i.e., the total lack of objective media reporting on all possible aspects and approaches related to the corona crisis.

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2. The propaganda matrix of public presentation

BE RESPONSIBLE. STAY AT HOME. FOLLOW THE MEASURES. USE DISINFECTANTS. AVOID SHAKING HANDS AND HUGGING. AVOID PUBLIC GATHERINGS. KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE OF 2 METRES. TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER. These are some of the messages/slogans offered by the propaganda segment of the anti-coronavirus action.

Advertising messages have been shaped by media outlets, retail marketing, by national, regional and local headquarters (most active in finding the 'solution' to the coronavirus crisis), as well as various companies and creative participants on social networks.

'THE INSTRUCTIONS ARE THE SAME FOR EVERYONE. HELP EACH OTHER IN THE RIGHT WAY. HELP THOSE WHO KNOW WHAT TO DO. BE SMART. STAY AT HOME. PROTECT OTHERS AND OURSELVES.' These are messages from a TV commercial which even made the effort to complement these sentences with 'apocalyptic' movie scenes.

If someone was to collect all the information on the broadcasting of these messages/slogans i.e., on the amount of space taken by these messages in the press, on billboards and elsewhere – it would definitely prove that never in history has there been so extensively funded advertising activity, and this is true for Croatia as well as other countries.

One possible issue emerges from the fact that these messages are not the product of a unified global strategy by relevant scientists, but just those selected few who have created an image of the corona crisis based on research that was never completed and inconclusively defined results of scientific debates among the world's most relevant immunologists and other experts.

Messages appear as slogans aimed at changing the behaviour of the public. It is realistic to ask: How can a citizen/viewer behave when advised to stay at home, 'be smart', avoid handshakes and hugs, keep at a distance from other people if going out etc.

The daily repetition of these messages, the inclusion of political, sports and cultural authorities in their transmission,

creates a strong sense of excommunication among the citizens if they merely question the meaning of any of these sentences (for example, the advice on hand-washing was the subject of many jokes).

What is at work then is a medical-political campaign, implemented through public media services, but also taken over and upgraded by the commercial media. What is at work here is a marketing campaign of considerable strength. This represents the most intense shaping of the global population ever since the campaigns for the First and Second World War.

The ridiculous aspect of these campaigns becomes obvious as the interest for vaccination decreases and the general public gains insight into alternative opinions by medical experts who were not included in discussions reported by mainstream media. Then local 'peculiarities' begin, in the form of travelling buses, prize tickets and other ways to encourage vaccination. A recent measure was to limit state subsidies supporting companies hit by the corona crisis to those with a sufficient number of vaccinated employees.

Regime authorities that have managed to prevent critical confrontation of opposing views now have the opportunity to present their mistakes as successes. The purchase of too many doses of vaccines is now a chance to propose the vaccination of children. Political games sometimes take the form of suggesting the free vaccination of citizens from other countries or one's own nationals in other countries. People who make any discussion impossible are seen as benefactors. This is part of the salvation strategy that aims to save the saviours from the ones supposedly being saved.

3. Recording the nasal condition or re-cording the disease

Social networks enabled citizens to gradually join discussions on the corona crisis. They expressed their scepticism in various ways and through various experiences. One woman for example did a PCR test three days in a row, and even though she was positive on the first day, the subsequent test results were negative. The (recorded) explanation by an expert was

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particularly absurd, suggesting that the first swab picked up all of the coronavirus, so it was not present during later tests.

Such cases open up numerous dilemmas, but are also interesting for uncovering the system as a whole. It is important to note, of which evidence already exists, that PCR tests do not detect the disease but only the presence of the virus in the organism. Such presence can result in disease, but not necessarily so. The disease can be severe or very severe, and in combination with pre-existing conditions, may even lead to death. But it can also manifest in mild symptoms and a relatively quick recovery.

Light contains an infinite spectrum of colours. We perhaps have countless viruses and this leaves space for the invention of new enemies. Some other virus may take the place of COVID-19 already tomorrow, perhaps a virus that has lived in humans for millennia. However, only the modern combination of politics, medicine and big business can reveal that this enemy is indestructible and unknowable, but we must fight it in a coordinated way – by supporting the efforts of those who have invested the most in the production of untested vaccines.

Examples from social networks of course cannot be taken as evidence of anything. Even serious research into attitudes on social networks cannot be considered relevant. Headquarters with brave thinkers of medical and political calibre will treat such cases as viruses, a viral infection on the highway of agreed positions by crisis headquarters and policies.

The inclusion of such discussions and situations in a more serious discourse on the coronavirus crisis might shed some different light on the propaganda efforts of political-healthcare (para) institutions. All the more so as public space seems to be always reserved for the same authorities who always say the same things in the same unconvincing manner, always using similarly unconvincing reasons.

4. The political organization of scientific authorities in medical science

One phenomenon that will surely be the subject of research in years to come, is the impact of politics on scientists, and immunologists in particular. The advice that we should listen

to science is now reduced to the level of caricature as scientists have become spokespersons for particular political views. If they do not comply with serving political intentions they are replaced.

The so-called headquarters have become a puppet theatre run by centres of political power. These of course operate from a large enough distance and remain invisible. Aided by the media, scientists have finally admitted that science is also in the orbit of political values, and there are no independent scientists, or confrontations between differing expert views. Those who think differently are simply ridiculed and often sidelined to the margins of society.

One day more detailed research will surely be done into how some scientists claimed one thing before the pandemic, and then changed their views after receiving funds for research into COVID-19. Scientists who simultaneously worked as advisors on projects for vaccine manufacturers and starred as opinion makers in the media will also come under more scrutiny.

By transforming scientists into rows of soldiers, politicians have opened up new ways of disciplining their citizens/viewers.

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5. The Covid contagion of news, prime time and tv specials

All programs of the most popular tv stations have come to serve the political idea of disciplining the general public for the sake of ensuring defence against the virus. This may be interpreted as the final useful inclusion of media in the realisation of essential needs of the society. Especially when it comes to distance learning through a public service tv program. Classes have been carried out mainly without interruption, and employees of the Ministry of Science and Education could record the successful implementation of the curriculum.

In addition to classes for elementary school students, public broadcasting offered prime time for Covid coverage on tv news, discussion in tv specials as well as constant commercials and messages. The propaganda contagion took over tv program creators and through them spread to the nation/nations. Unsurprisingly, social networks frequently included

angry attitudes towards anyone who dared question anything from the compendium of accepted views. Those infected with propaganda aggressively attacked others who wanted more analysis, dialogue, facts, studies, research – in one word, some common sense. This proved to be useless as all common-sense views had to be proclaimed by the united propaganda of mainstream media.

6. In search of untested vaccines

Media hysteria had to end at some point. Since there was no way to go back or deny all that has been said – the discussion on vaccination as the solution became inevitable. The vaccine appeared as a *deus ex machina*, an instrument of total catharsis.

First steps that suggested the impossibility of finding a cure for the virus (since any attack on a virus provokes it to adapt and become more resistant), were soon replaced by a winning combination: vaccines were suddenly presented as the new magic wand to cure all ills with just one or two tiny needle pricks.

Those who warned of the necessity for serious research spanning several years, were stigmatized. In such circumstances, vaccine manufacturers were able to negotiate unbelievable and unacceptable (hitherto unknown and non-medical) conditions. They could offer their vaccines without being accountable for any side-effects.

Years of work that were once needed to introduce a drug on the market were now replaced by a sense of safety that propaganda instilled in future consumers of the vaccine. The media repeated the necessity to vaccinate as many people in the world as possible in the shortest period of time possible. What was suggested then, was carpet bombing the population with an untested vaccine that surely has its side-effects (for which no one will be responsible).

In the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, an atmosphere of searching for sufficient quantities of vaccines was created. This was a matter of reputation, resourcefulness of national leaders, their negotiating abilities in providing their citizens with a sufficient number of vaccines on time. Opposition critics could use the lack of vaccines as potshots against the ruling party.

Some politicians suggested the surplus vaccines could be given as donations to other countries or toyed with the possibility of opening the country to vaccination tourists.

As time went by, an increasing number of scientists started claiming that the vaccine is more dangerous than the coronavirus itself. As the number of such views increased, the rhetoric of policies that invested in vaccines which were now not used became more aggressive. Children then became the new possible consumers of the vaccines.

7. Wandering around with or without masks

Masks have become a way to differentiate between followers of Propaganda Action and those anarchist individuals who might most easily be called antivaxxers. Arguments on the failure of masks to keep out viruses seemed irrelevant. It was forbidden to talk about the harmfulness of masks for the older population whose protection was a priority. In many countries not wearing masks prompted physical abuse by the police, public transport officials or other institutions.

Comparing citizens to slaves of colonial masters or seeking answers were of no use. Animated videos and infographics vividly presented the idea on wearing masks as a useful way of reducing the possibility of infection.

8. From lockdown to the Swedish model

Some regimes benefited from the corona crisis in introducing curfew to silence protests of their population. All political problems seemed irrelevant in comparison with the invasion of a virus that spread at such a rate that governments had no choice but to partially or completely stop the economic, social, cultural, and to some extent religious life of the community. The same thing that once served as a direct call for rebellion, protest or even overthrow of the government – a ban on gatherings – was now smoothly allowed. Faced with an invisible enemy, restrictions now seemed well-intentioned. Violent

actions by the police were now justified as protection of 'the rest of us'. The individual was no longer a subject, but an object of concern to prevent the spread of the infection throughout the community.

At the same time, the Swedish model was not much commented upon or discussed. Any discussion of this type would lead to old questions and doubts about the accepted measures. The media could now only occasionally wheel out new data on the infection incidence in Sweden. They failed to mention that these figures related to the number of people who had the virus in their system. Differences in the numbers of those deceased before and during the corona crisis were also disregarded.

Playing with closedowns of entire companies put the private sector under state bureaucracy control. At the point of ruin, it was now almost completely dependent on state subsidies. One does not need too much imagination to conclude how these subsidies were distributed as the system of developing a trusted relationship with only a select few companies has been carefully nurtured for decades.

9. One bat as a trigger for the possible clash of civilizations

Looking back, we think of the scenes from the Wuhan market. These were supposed to make us disgusted with eating habits of the Chinese, thus linking them to the outbreak of the pandemic. Images of countless coffins in Italy simultaneously served to heighten the hatred against China. Occasionally there were also discussions on the possibility that the virus was artificially created in a laboratory and then 'released' on purpose or accidentally.

Without discussing this idea further, it should be noted that something quite similar to an attempt of unleashing a pandemic clash of civilizations did happen. This would have united western powers in accusing China for enabling conditions in which COVID-19 was born (whether naturally or artificially).

This of course prompts stories on the co-ownership of institutes and organizations that work both in the research and development of vaccines. All this has an unpleasant stench of business carried out at the highest level, making the rich richer and the poor even poorer in the process. Instead of Huntington's division of civilizations along religious lines, we now have a new medical division in terms of the attitude toward the pandemic.

In this context, the great enemies Iran and Israel have been given 'adequate' labels. Iran 'proved' itself to be a conservative country in which the number of those infected grew to catastrophic levels, while Israel served as an example of responsible behaviour as it managed to vaccinate almost the entire population in quite a short period of time.² This population did not include Palestinians who ended up as the losers of the story yet again. Time will tell whether this administrative decision that failed to help them, actually just exposed them to a virus that will later be considered similar to the common flu.

10. Have the creators of terrorism found a more lucrative business?

One important phenomenon in these times of Covid, is the almost total disappearance of terrorist attacks across the world. This can be explained by the closedown of borders and their strict control as well as the frequent checks of medical documents on border crossings. Time will tell whether this constitutes an argument or an illusion.

It seems somewhat odd that sophisticated terrorist organizations would be stopped by certificates they are supposed to show at the border. In any case, 'sleepers' are already located in the countries where terrorist actions are planned. But miraculously, terrorists seem to be otherwise engaged.

Terrorism appears to be an outdated means of disciplining the population. Elections will now be won not by leaders fighting terrorism, but rather by those brave fighters against an invisible enemy in the form of a virus.

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² It should be added that previous information from Israel noted that vaccination cannot prevent the spread of the infection at the same level as naturally acquired immunity. New data from Israel shows that up to 55 percent of new cases are recorded among the vaccinated population. Any penalization of young people who do not take the vaccine makes no sense in this context.' <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/poucak-iz-izraela-ucinkovitost-pfizera-poprilicno-pala-u-zastiti-od-zaraze-ali-smrti-nerastu-15085921> Accessed: 6 July 2021

The total absence of terrorism during the corona crisis could be more significant than it is generally commented upon. The scope of what the corona crisis is hiding will become more obvious in time when new actors take the scene after this particular crisis passes.

11. How the pandemic obscures the refugee crisis

The corona crisis has helped in neglecting problems of inequality in the modern world that have led to migration. Not in the sense that inequality has disappeared, but the prevailing attitude was that limitations on the movement of all people, including refugees and migrants, were now acceptable. The media have lost their sense of empathy towards people in refugee camps who have been dying, getting sick, freezing and otherwise living in inhumane conditions. Refugees ceased to be a news item and the difference between rich and poor countries was no longer an issue under media analysis.

12. Love at a distance

The fundamental human need to be realized as a complete human being through love has been significantly obstructed during the corona crisis. All advice by political headquarters' experts called for life on a distance. In order to save itself, the human species had to stop being what it is. In order to be happy one day, people only have to give up spontaneity, closeness, socializing, travel and everything that makes life interesting and beautiful. Institutions in power have erected psychological fences between people without thinking that these will exist even when (and if) the fight against the virus is successful.

13. The medical argument for denying access to medical services

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Healthcare systems of numerous countries are currently in crisis. State bureaucracies are finding it increasingly difficult to deal with growing expectations of their citizens and decreased budgeting possibilities. This problem goes hand in hand with global issues currently hitting capitalism.

Without going into analysis of possible causes and effects, some tendencies can still be identified.

An invisible virus has managed to cause a visible lack of healthcare services for citizens of the world. The excuse of course being that doctors are too busy with the current crisis and all space is taken over by Covid patients.

The lines of people waiting at their GPs are similar to the lines forming on state borders. They both have the same level of impatience, anger and lack of understanding.

Operations are often postponed and a visit to the doctor becomes an illusory attempt to explain something to your doctor in an environment resembling a factory line.

Situations like these help us develop the habit of not expecting healthcare to be at our service, but to be obscured by some wall impossible to jump over. Even if we managed to get through, the spaces expecting us would not be medical but industrial.

14. Covid passports

Something unimaginable to the old libertarian spirit (our everyday life being under surveillance by Big Brother) has now become a looming danger. The excuse of course is that same invisible virus which has been given mythical strength in order to move weak mortals towards eternal labelling. All previous differences among people can now be reduced to owners of databases on all of us as citizens of the second or some even lower order. The danger of COVID-19 yet again goes unchecked,

there are no questions and comparisons of death rates, no autopsies, additional controls of PCR test reliability, no exact scientific data on vaccines etc.

In comparing dystopian scenarios with the reality of ignoring debate and questions posed by numerous Nobel prize winners, academics, doctors and other experts – the bleakest scenarios come to mind.

15. How the media produces fear

Ever since Orson Welles and his War of the Worlds, the effect of creating fear through mass media is well known. Of course, fear had been created before, but never as intensely and successfully as with the radio play which with no explanations or announcements launched into a 'live coverage' of an alien invasion.

The modern immersion in mass media means that the word 'viewer' should always be added to define the word 'citizen'. The trust of citizens/viewers in various truths may vary, but in situations like these, it is so great that success is guaranteed.

Announced in various disaster films, the apocalypse seems to have moved over to the news and TV shows on real life events. Bodies of those who have died from COVID-19, coffins that couldn't be transferred to the cemeteries, burials without the presence of families, images of doctors falling off their feet, getting sick, dying – all this played a part in the drama that had to have an effect. Citizens/viewers across the world prepared for the coming of the real modern apocalypse which had been frequently announced.

Fear became the strongest emotion which then disabled life in all other dimensions. Locked in fear and plugged into the media, people kept looking for new information on possible sources of fear.

The horror is now part of everyday life. Everyone knows someone who died in horrible pain, who didn't make it, died on the respirator etc.

Orwellian minutes of hatred now have their regular slots in news programs, and are present everywhere in the form of caring for people, advice given by doctors, press conferences by

political-healthcare headquarters, reports from hospitals and constant counting of those infected or dead.

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16. The dubious strengthening of political bureaucracy

Political bureaucracy has evolved further. Democratic principles could be pushed aside and the general public would most often not even know about it. Measures introduced were partly made according to instructions of the World Health Organization, but were also partly implemented as a way to discipline the population. This is particularly obvious now when looking back on all the events that have taken place.

A particular dimension that points to the questionable strengthening of political bureaucracy comes in the form of attitudes on the vaccination of children and not issuing subsidies to business entities that fail to vaccinate their employees. The wrong tower started shaking with this news and a worm of doubt found its way into the minds of numerous citizens. There was a danger that the exclusive given by COVID-19 to the politicians might become their stumbling block. The fall would of course be 'apocalyptic' for anyone who had participated in the spreading of fear in the media, asked citizens to use untested vaccines, that is, everyone who took part in the creation of panic as part of the corona crisis.

17. The virus as a good business opportunity for large capital

In a way, nothing particularly surprising has happened...

The sophisticated instincts of big business realized long ago that they could increase their sales by playing to the sentiment of stereotypes which is always a pleasant tune to the ears of readers/listeners/viewers. Multiplied indefinitely, stereotypes become our world.

We live in stereotypes, buy what is closest to them, say stereotypical sentences and do not feel we ourselves have become a more or less smooth stereotype living according to the expectations of those around us. Our stereotypes are the ones that choose presidents of all democratic countries in the world. We reach for a new president in the same way we reach for detergent at the supermarket. We advertise our presidents in the same way...

The system of 'values' based on stereotypes, hypocrisy, silence, uncritically accepting decisions by incompetent authorities, stepping over corpses, fighting for privileges, conformism, nepotism, corruption, false morality of false mediators between earth and 'heaven'... all this can more or less function until someone appears, so 'small and naive' to barely be visible, and until they tell the flock and its shepherds: 'The Emperor has no clothes, his crown is false'.

Then it will suddenly become clear that no military aircraft will help us, that fountains (as in all other public procurements) are refreshing not our environment, but someone else's pockets. We shall then realize in an instant that those who have become rich are people in politics or people close to the people in politics. We might suddenly realize we have brought into power people who thanked us by surrounding themselves with their own flunkies and used their position to gain even more, through legal loopholes and media campaigns.

Democracy, freedom and equality are today merely a scenery hiding interest groups of political, business, academic, media and other interconnected interest lobbies.

On the other side of social networks there are much stronger networks of interest-linked structures that take care not to step on each other's toes. And while we as sheep put our photos on social networks, agreements are made through those other networks, determining who broke the mafia code and who is to be thrown at the feet of the public.

Sacrificing those who took something too far and through this endangered the whole structure of this other network, represents a ritual for satisfying an amazingly resilient but also amazingly naïve public. With every new announcement of a sacrifice, the public is pacified and with possible evidence and punishment for members of the hierarchy, the public is

paralysed/euthanised. The public is the fairy tale monster whose hunger can be quenched only by occasional sacrifices of that other network – the hierarchy.

A healthy society is given strength by the public, and a sick one by silence. In a healthy society, if someone from the government sets up a job for a friend, this is clearly a symptom of a disease and a sign that the organism needs to be treated. In a sick society on the other hand, this becomes a rule. In a healthy society positive energy of all people in a community would accumulate. Sick societies dispossess individuals of the little energy they have left. In a healthy society we would use the media to make our lives more beautiful, interesting, better, more noble, healthier, spiritually richer... In a sick society we can only conclude that the media themselves have helped the disease to develop i.e., through them the virus of evil spreads.

We must not forget: In the beginning there was Logos, meaning the word, but also order. Not a word to be used as an excuse and dusted off whenever one needs to hide different forms of evil. Every moment demands from us a new word to build Logos as a harmony in which we can grow as human beings. Every moment is a new beginning. That is why our words always have to be new, creative, responsible, alive, lively... And are they?

The pandemic offers us with an answer as it makes us take a long look at it as if in a mirror, making us explain to each other how and why we fell into such a deep hypnotic sleep so that it seemed everything was alright and we were on the right track – on the road to progress. Half-awake we say what first comes to mind. We don't see the plan of the network outside our 'social networks'. We don't see that for them we are in the way on this lovely place in the Universe.

A few more words need to be said on unmasking media trash during times of a virus pandemic. Some ideas by Marshall McLuhan sound like a warning only now. What would he had to say of the world today?

He would probably conclude that the coronavirus has shown how we truly are a global village. He would say it is only now obvious that our nervous system is outside ourselves and that we have the ability to momentarily react to everything happening in any corner of the Earth. Also, that the virus can

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show us how national distinctions are fragile and a product of technology that has enabled us to recognize ourselves within letters of the press. That the virus is a message, and the content of the virus media is our life which is being tested. He would probably say it was high time we realized we cannot go on unpunished in failing to understand the world we are creating through media we do not understand.

McLuhan would see the current infodemic as an invisible danger because we have failed to see the media as a potential source of danger. We belatedly become aware of that which is closest to us, into which we are submerged, and for us people, these are – the media. Today we are with them and within them like fish that live in the sea but will be ‘the last to become aware of the surrounding water’.

He would probably compare the infodemic to how the scientific community behaved towards the French chemist Louis Pasteur, who warned doctors that the greatest enemy they needed to face was actually ‘invisible’. Pasteur was misunderstood in a way similar to how messages by media theorists are disregarded as they warn that without understanding the almost imperceptible influence of mass media we are rushing towards a mediocracy – a society shaped by corporate interest groups, politics, pharmaceutical industry, oil and weapons manufacturers – all linked of course with owners of mass media.

Mediocracy is a premortal state of a democracy in which the voice of the people is bought through marketing campaigns not much different from campaigns selling any other product. Mediocracy is a caricature of democracy in which the people pretend they are making decisions and those chosen by them pretend they are working in the interest of ‘their people’.

Royal crowns are still in danger of being toppled by an invisible viral crown. Alongside all our future expenses, we might also inherit the experience of how it is necessary to stand against false idols, self-imposed and ‘chosen’ kings, false envoys of God as well as lies by the economy that leads people into ruin.

The virus is a mirror. It is our choice whether we can stand to look at our reflection.

18. World Cup with an invisible football

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One of the visible forms of global coordination in the position and roles of nations in the modern world may be called the World Cup played with an invisible football.

Prime ministers are selectors with strong teams. Each team is dominated by medical experts on the invisible ball and tactic. And although the word of the prime minister leading the team is final when it comes to tactic and strategy, the medical part of the team is the one calling the shots.

The teams have different tactics. One wants to send the players to the field only if they wear masks while others think this will not stop the invisible virus, but will make it more difficult for the players to breathe. Some prefer the tactic of ignoring the invisible ball, while others use the opportunity to fix things outside the field by manufacturing fear based on the mere possibility of losing a player or the game.

Judges who sometimes run to the field also need to observe all safety measures. They might wear policemen's uniforms but also their own. They listen to their governments so sometimes they might beat up a player not wearing a mask or put him in jail. Sometimes they take off their masks because some governments prefer the game to be played with lungs full of air.

Organizers of the World Cup worked long and hard on setting up the competitive climate and rousing the national fire for the successful game of invisible football. National alpha males wear their sports uniforms and are followed obediently by women who have some criticisms but are too scared. Every day the media reports on the chart position of individual nations and whether they are leading or failing.

Only some commenters are allowed to publicly speak on this competition. These are the experts for this type of sport who claim they have actually – seen the ball on the field.

19. The bureaucracy spectacle

Analysis of additional (and some would say unimportant) non-medical segments of the global corona crisis, sheds a bright light on the medical dimension of the problem – all different hues are fading into each other and can be interpreted differently. At the same time this mainly media dimension of the phenomenon also shines upon old mechanisms which only now become visible. Structures of action are recognized, configurations come to light. Times behind us seemed to intuit and announce them. The same intention seems to be at work, only now it has gained strength and 'legitimacy', especially in terms of the destructive impact of the corona crisis on culture.

Most politicians in a transition society would say that a society without culture and art would be an ideal society. It is simpler to discipline all other segments of the society (forms of action) than artistic individualists, those researchers of the unimportant, anarchists in love with the idea of independence and freedom. A society without culture is a negative utopia of people depending on paragraphs and political power. Without people to comment on how the system works, all this could be much easier.

Modern culture has already been marked with the stamp of political bureaucracy. It is an already established political cultural passport (a cultural passport pre-dating the Covid passport). With it you have confirmation that you are a 'cultural person', can take part in projects, be given awards, travel, read your verse to children.... You gain access to culture if you are microchipped and labelled as a good citizen who agrees to vaccination and all the regulation of the ruling authorities. If he was alive today, in these circumstances Janko Polić-Kamov would write his most famous work *Curse!*

Art and culture have long been on respirators maintained by the Ministry of Culture. What is happening today is more reminiscent of kitchens where starving artists with 'certificates' can get some food. And if someone had tried banning cultural movements, socializing, plays, concerts, performances, theatre and film performances a few decades ago... the barricades of resistance would have grown like mushrooms on the streets. However...

The invisible aggressor of unknown origin made it possible to introduce measures that the cultural community would never have allowed. The manufacture of fear in people, unfortunately, has disciplined us so much that people of culture are ashamed to remember – the freedom they hold within.

Misfortunes never come alone. Sometimes they are announced years in advance in symptoms that societies may recognize or not. Just as journalism lost its fight to PR, the freedom of critical thinking has lost to – propaganda. Propaganda could easily win when politics and big business punched the air from journalists' lungs. Lawsuits against journalists announced totalitarian tendencies at the level of our global *brave new world*.

The man who understood the importance of spectacle in human history, who saw spectacle as a precursor to religious rituals – Gay Debord – would be both pleased and miserable today. He would be pleased because it turned out yet again he was right, and miserable because a global spectacle with an invisible aggressor has shown all the power of seduction and manipulation. We have become part of the *Religion of Propaganda by Headquarters' Preachers*.

The authors of the new global spectacle seem to have set themselves the task of checking to what extent it is possible to shape the collective consciousness of people on the whole planet. So far, they are surprised by their own success.

Since building a camp for all the people in the world is too great an investment, they had no choice but to produce walls within people, fear of the other, of socializing, fear of walking and talking freely. Prison rules (masks, distancing, ban on socializing, being inside...) was to be introduced – without walls. The paradox is that, in an Orwellian fashion, *global propagandists* have presented their imperial aspirations as – caring for people.

Pessimism as the spiritual state of the nation can make most use of severe, sincere, moral and knowledgeable followers of propaganda slogans. They pose no problem to manufacturers of untested vaccines. They simply remain responsible because the key media slogan tells them: 'Be responsible'. They stay at home because an order in the form of a suggestion promising health tells them – Stay at home. These are then

prison slogans for a campaign that has brilliantly branded an unexplored and untested product i.e., service.

Politicians on the other hand, who have always dreamed of being the arbiters of culture, star as spokespersons for propaganda campaigns by global players of seduction and manipulation. They confidently utter sentences they later abandon quite flexibly. They are convinced of the things they will soon disown. They seduce the people to whom they will soon explain that they themselves have been seduced. This is neither a Croatian nor a regional story. This story is totalitarian.

And instead of calling this a new totalitarianism, there is the 'new normal'. Instead of thinking of ways to resist the onslaught of global propaganda, today we are talking about the number of rented apartments on the Adriatic coast. In countries that destroy critical thought, ignore the development of humanistic thought; in countries where journalists are key enemies of the truth – a different outcome cannot be expected.

Culture is unnecessary for disciplined people. If global propagandists have succeeded in their intention of turning people into prisoners in the open – culture no longer makes any sense. But, to the great regret of all totalitarian systems in the world, the truth is like water – it finds cracks and gathers in small puddles that slowly grow into small lakes. Rivers will flow from them soon.

The spectre of a global propaganda campaign has long been felt in how the government has been treating culture. Political systems were destroyers and saviours. They destroyed conditions for the significance and survival of culture, only then to emerge as co-financiers and leading saviours. They destroyed what they were supposed to enable, in order to employ verified personnel, to verify incoming personnel at the door of culture.

**Virus kao
medij**

—
Sead Alić



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The Tipping Point – When, How and Why did We Start Thinking ‘Pandemically’?

Key words pandemic, crisis, media manipulation, tipping point, future world

Abstract Suspended between theories of manipulation and the public health catastrophe that continues to shake our world, there is a whole range of answers to the questions posed by scientists, doctors, politicians and ordinary folk – when, where, how and why did it all begin? Given the various concepts and ideas on the future CORONA world, it is important to keep asking and (still) avoid simple and mind-numbing answers. The world of media has also reached or surpassed a tipping point – can we even shake the illusion we deserve some ‘new normal’? Or perhaps the future holds a ‘new abnormal’ world, alongside the ‘old abnormal’. On the one hand the pandemic has changed our behavioural patterns, and will continue to do so, but it has also changed our way of thinking, reaching conclusions and perceiving the external world and the world within us. On the other hand, are we in part historically

Točka preokreta – kada smo, zašto i kako počeli misliti pandemijski?

Ključne riječi pandemija, kriza, medijske manipulacije, točka preokreta, svijet budućnosti

Sažetak Između teorija manipulacija i zdravstvene nepogode koja je potresla svijet nalaze se brojni odgovori na pitanja znanstvenika, liječnika, političara i običnih ljudi – gdje je, kada, kako i zašto sve započelo? Obzirom na razne koncepte i ideje o svijetu KORONA budućnosti, bitno je stalno postavljati pitanja i ne (još) priklanjati se jednostavnim i zatupljujućim odgovorima. Svijet medija također je dostigao ili prešao točku preokreta – možemo li se uopće riješiti iluzija kako zaslužujemo nekakvo „novo normalno“. Ili, naprotiv, čeka nas svijet „novog nenormalnog“, ali i uz „staro nenormalno“. Pandemija, s jedne strane, mijenja i mijenjat će ne samo naš način ponašanja, već i naš način razmišljanja, zaključivanja i percepcije svijeta unutar nas i izvan nas. S druge strane, vraćamo li se dijelom i povijesno unatrag, pristajući na polu-diktature, zatvaranja, nekretanja, bezličja i skrivanje

regressing through our acceptance of half-dictatorship, lockdowns, immovability, blandness and hiding our smiles? Why and how might the philosophy of the media help with this challenge of views in some new TECHNO-FEUDALISM? Will we adopt any new lessons? We must first remember the legendary children's show SESAME STREET and its revolutionary insight – you can teach children only if you attract their attention first...

osmijeha. Zašto i kako bi filozofija medija mogla pomoći u ovom izazovu mišljenja u nekakvom novom TEHNOFEUDALIZMU? Hoćemo li nešto naučiti? – moramo se najprije sjetiti legendarne dječje tv serije ULICA SEZAM i njene revolucionarne spoznaje - djecu možete naučiti nešto samo ako im privučete pozornost...

A world that follows the rules of epidemics is a very different place from the world we think we live in now.
— **Malcolm Gladwell**

Numerous aspects of our lives, of physical phenomena as well as the psychological, human reactions to new and unexpected circumstances, have been marked by the age of corona, which still has not passed, and in some aspects it will practically never disappear. It will continue to change our world alongside all the challenges and (lack of) adaptation stemming from our attempts to control what has befallen us. First however, it should be noted that the issue is not only the reaction and adaptation to an emergency health phenomenon, which is complex also in terms of its medical aspects and attention focused on the World Health Organization and the globally present pandemic. It stretches all the way down to our individual lives, endangered not only by the actual disease, but also by the fear and anxiety due to the possible consequences, progression of the disease and spread of the contagion. The role of media, faithful followers and interpreters of such crises should also be examined.

The global pandemic¹, faced basically by all countries and regions of the world to a higher or lesser degree, with more or less serious consequences, is actually also a specific global phenomenon within which there is also the non-medical and non-healthcare aspect. This aspect is interlinked with events relating directly to the spreading, stopping or weakening of the disease, and is still stimulated, whether we like it or not, by the specific social and psychological reactions to the disease. It is becoming increasingly evident that the impact of the coronavirus on healthcare processes is also closely linked to the influence of politics (as *the art of the possible* but also as manipulation with public opinion), and interest appetites of elite groups² as well as other social classes facing these new circumstances. Also, it may turn out that these non-medical causes and effects (which do not necessarily have to be unscientific or inexpert) 'work at' strengthening their influence or even use it in order to manage social and media changes or trends.

We therefore aim to explain the significance of 'new' events precisely through the discussion of the extent to which the

¹ A pandemic is the spread of a disease to large areas, covering different countries, a whole continent, more continents or the whole world. Until today, the term was used for infectious diseases such as the plague, cholera or influenza. Lately, pandemic diseases can also be said to cover AIDS, which across a span of several years covered all continents and almost all countries of the world. Further reading at: <https://medicinski.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=10508> But in comparison with previous pandemics, the corona pandemic became the 'most global' one not only due to its harmful consequences for the human health (mortality rate) but due to the literal participation of the whole world in its progress, as well as the global reach of the media.

² An elite is a group of people, a minority that holds influence and surveillance over some or all aspects of social life. The idea of a ruling political minority was first developed by Plato, who gave this status to philosophers. Classical theorists of elites, including V. Pareto, G. Mosca and R. Michels, believe that societies are always divided into the ruling, managing elite and an underprivileged mass. An elite is made up from individuals who have reached the highest level in their specific areas. <https://enciklopedija.hr/natuknica.aspx?id=17725> However, in terms of corona, an elite can also be a group that believes itself to be 'chosen and privileged', which enables it to decide in the name of everyone (and in their absence) on the necessary limitations, not only in terms of healthcare, but in all other aspects as well.

pandemic and its consequences and circumstances have impacted opinion, everyday politics, corporate economy, practical sociology and philosophy, etc. This is specifically important in terms of media, freedom of media and mass media actions. It means accepting the simultaneous strengthening of previously hidden or at least socially less acceptable instances of curtailing or limiting freedom, whether in terms of space, time or democratic and civil rights. Unfortunately this is a matter of interdependence and feedback in which effects and consequences on health are increased or changed precisely by politics, interests and interest groups, lobbyist and corporate activities, influenced by the hunger for profit, as well as the factors of human depression, helplessness and inactivity.

The coronavirus and its effects on global society, regional perspectives as well as individual affinities and possibilities – all of which can collectively be termed *the future of social changes* – in the first months of 2021 face new energies, changes and reversals. It is becoming increasingly clear that – partly due to the changing climate in parts of the world where winter is coming to an end, but also due to the wider use of vaccines – that the severity and death toll of the virus will gradually decrease. The problem will be ‘different’ from the healthcare point of view, as well as from the previously mentioned non-medical aspect, and we should ask ourselves whether we are ready for change and a return to the ‘old state of affairs’ under circumstances in which activities of political institutions will continue to change, as will our psychological reaction to the existing crisis. Actors, passive and active throughout the crisis, transform and seek new positions in which to strengthen their power of surveillance and the ‘never-ending dream’ – achieving the greatest possible amount of control over our actions, motivations, wants and driving forces of our minds.

In order to address this issue, one needs to go back chronologically, thematically and purposefully to the moment when the first twist slapped us in the face – when we were suddenly yanked out of what we considered to be the old normal into some new circumstances. The question remains whether the previous state of affairs was either old or normal. At the beginning, these new circumstances did not seem like possible or logical causes of some global turning point affecting regions and territories. Much has already been written, analysed and

discussed on the coronavirus, but here we aim to examine those moments, or rather the time when we started thinking pandemically. When, how and why did we agree to changes we have 'spun' to such an extent that we have become very active participants in further changes, which we at the same time regarded as something unknown, unexpected or alien?³ Changes we have often refused to name as such.

We should also clearly and purposefully focus our efforts on the (mass) media sphere and (mass) media dimensions⁴ of this global event that in a short time managed to instil deep changes in almost every aspect of our lives and activities. Comparisons with other historical periods and circumstances when different epidemics spread dangerous diseases through old civilizations, the medieval and modern era, may bring a range of deeper insights and conclusions, or even help us in psychosocial coping with what we are faced with. But it is certain that no epidemic, regardless of its severity or mortality rate, has ever taken place with such a presence and impact of the media, ranging from print to electronic media, especially the Internet.

Pandemic or infodemic - the chicken or the egg of the media?

It can be stated as fact that the media themselves were one of the main actors in the pandemic, impacting the situation in both positive and negative ways, because the pandemic event was actually more global than ever or anywhere in history. The use of the neologism *infodemic* is thoroughly justified if we take into account that the media as a whole and in individual instances, served as the main instigator of the whole atmosphere due to their type and function. Not only in terms of providing information on the causes and effects of the pandemic, but because they also served as the goal and means of a complete reversal towards a more unsettled, frightened, and in a way, sicker society. Of course, here we do not discuss the goals of the medical profession or efforts and hard work by healthcare workers and those who truly care about fighting for the good health and lives of individuals.

3 In some Tibetan temples passersby can roll large prayer wheels containing old inscriptions, and they keep spinning smoothly and continuously, never-ending. Each passerby and visitor tries to spin them again (as fast as they can go) – the symbolism of transience and one's own participation in what is now and what is to come i.e. leaving the responsibility to one's heirs and people (strangers) to continue the karmic journey. The difference between these wheels and a situation in which we keep 'spinning' the same thoughts and fears about corona, is perhaps in the fact that in Buddhism, what you leave behind needs to be filled with warmth, joy and positive thoughts for the ones who will follow – despite the transience and the possibility of negative outcomes.

4 It should be noted that we consider the media in general through the impact of mass media, the largest and most prominent (global and local) keepers and distributors of information, and through the impact and work of social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc., as well as forums and the activity of haters, trolls and average users). In the following ideas and analysis, *mass media* are defined through the term and phenomena of the *media* as the totality of what is realized and interpreted by the media during the pandemic, as it creates and gains infodemic characteristics of pandemical thinking.

The issue in fact is the interference and efforts to hasten the transformation of epidemiological circumstances into pandemics, ways of thinking which would instrumentalize the development of events, this time not only in the medical sense, but also in terms of changes in social circumstances, environment and psychological aspects. These would then finally bring about an economical struggle and pause in economic activities and the current dynamic within global, regional and national frameworks. These are no conspiracy theories which could be discussed in a whole separate paper, but rather these are emerging structures formed from elements of a *post-truth* society and community, from the *fake news* of weapons and tools used by the media, and the use of the current state of affairs for crudely and strictly political goals and purposes.

The pandemic can and should be analysed as an infodemic from the perspective of the philosophy of the media, when examining the general and specific current role and effect of the media and its mediation in human relationships. This also includes the impact on the exchange of everyday and mental data of every conscious human being from the outside in and vice-a-versa. The lessons and messages we receive in this fashion can surely help as part of the analysis and evaluation in this age that we can rightly define as a moment in which the already known idea of the media constructing reality instead of truthfully mirroring it is further developed and confirmed. The media aims to represent reality with as much fuzziness and manipulation as possible, thus ceasing to serve as correctives in line with traditional journalistic and professional values. Instead they obscure reality and become the ones who justify a newly constructed reality that serves their own interests or rather, the interests and goals of the quasi-elite.

If we are to achieve a wide-ranging explanation of the context in which this medical phenomenon appears, alongside the causes and consequences of the problems affecting (mass) media in the local and global sense, we should not merely focus on the beginning of the epidemic or the official proclamation of a pandemic. We must examine the changes in reporting styles and interpretation in the media, as well as the consequences on public opinion and the general public in the global sense, and on other levels, all the way down to the mentality of the individual.

It is therefore first necessary to examine the so-called tipping point, the (spatial and temporal) watershed that changed our established way of thinking not just as readers, listeners or viewers, but also as critically analytical individuals that could be said to represent a healthy society and a healthy general public.

Let us begin with the idea by Malcolm Gladwell who posited in a sociological sense that 'the best way to understand the emergence of fashion trends, the ebb and flow of crime waves, or, for that matter, the transformation of unknown books into bestsellers, or the rise of teenage smoking, or the phenomena of word of mouth, or any number of other mysterious changes that mark everyday life is TO THINK OF THEM AS EPIDEMICS' (text capitalized by N.V.)⁵ Gladwell begins his extensive research with the notion that ideas, products, messages and behaviours also have their 'medical' characteristics – they are activated and begun, spread and developed as infectious diseases.

Gladwell lists three main rules of an epidemic (or in the case of corona, a pandemic) – the first one is *contagiousness* with clearly noticeable patterns of infectious behaviour in psycho-sociological phenomena like the ones in infectious disease. The second rule relates to the fact that *little causes can have big effects*, and third, that *change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment*. It is similar to the principle of how for instance, chickenpox spreads through a classroom or how the flu returns every winter.

Gladwell sees this third principle as the most important one – the idea that epidemics start or end in one dramatic moment we may or may not notice, but after which things and circumstances are quite different and therefore require different types of behaviour and solutions. He notes that it is this principle 'that makes sense of the first two and that permits the greatest insight into why modern change happens the way it does. The name given to that one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once is the Tipping Point.'⁶

Gladwell translates sociological phenomena ranging from fashion trends to crime rates, into healthcare or biological aspects in order to deepen the sociological and/or psychological meaning regarding human society. For example, contagiousness is for him a general rule which, like epidemiological

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5 Malcolm Gladwell, *Točka preokreta. Kako male stvari mogu dovesti do velikih promjena*, Jesenski i Turk, Zagreb 2011, p. 10. (Tipping Point, Hachette Book Group, New York 2002);

6 Ibid, p. 11.

causes and characteristics may turn into a contagion of laughter, shopping for clothes or surprising characteristics of anything in our environment. Little changes can truly lead to big results, for example, the speaker's motivation or the tireless presentation of one's own example. Such is the possibility of a sudden and drastic change after relatively expected gradual advent of smaller oscillations, whether in the development of illnesses or trends – the sudden moving of homeowners from areas controlled by criminal groups for example, or sudden migrations or the spread of new technologies.

Such phenomena of course also have their dialectical cause and interpretation, not just as sociological or epidemiological changes. Our aim is to learn if and how it is possible to examine a 'reversed' process – can contagiousness, small changes as precursors to big results and sudden surprising changes lead to a turning point in the current global state of affairs? Applying this idea onto our situation, we come to the conclusion that these three rules are currently true, as the world of the coronavirus pandemic has led to what we are now experiencing in the media and psychosocial sphere – the phenomenon of pandemical thinking. This also means a lack of critical thinking, preponderance of fear and disbelief, and pandemical behaviour we have been led to, or which has partly been imposed on us.

One thing can be ascertained with some ease – the Covid-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, was first identified as a new respiratory disease Covid-19 (Corona Virus Disease 2019). The condition first appeared in late December 2019 in the city of Wuhan (11 million inhabitants) in the Hubei province in China. In January 2020 it grew into an epidemic in China, and then spread to numerous other countries and reached all continents. It was sparked by the previously unknown coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. In order to stop the spread of the disease in countries with no efficient healthcare systems, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared an international state of emergency on 30 January 2020.⁷

As early as 9 February 2020, the number of registered fatalities surpassed the total number of deaths during the SARS virus pandemic in 2002/2003. The speed and dramatic extent of the epidemic were also evidenced by the WHO report from

⁷ https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandemija_COVID-19
Here we won't discuss fake news and politicized comments on how 'China deliberately (!) spread the virus'. It has been shown that China, and other countries such as New Zealand or South Korea, fought coronavirus decisively, not only in the medical sense, but owing to the culture of the population and their following of prescribed measures. In this way it managed to suppress the coronavirus, much to the chagrin of Western 'mainstream media' of Trump's era, and became an actual role model for procedures taken by the government as well as the public and population. At the moment of writing this text – January 2021, the coronavirus continues to be an extensive problem mainly in the so-called Western world, while countries in Asia and Africa, and their experience with the coronavirus are no longer the focus of Western mass media (on purpose?).

26 February 2020, the first instance when a greater number of people were infected outside of China than within its borders. Furthermore, starting from 28 February 2020, WHO analyses and reports assessed the risk as 'very high' on the global scale, in comparison to the previous estimation of a 'high' risk. Finally, on 11 March 2020 the WHO officially identified the epidemic as a pandemic, making it the first pandemic after the one of swine flu, in 2009.

In Croatia, the first case was confirmed on 25 February 2020. This was a 26-year-old who visited Milan in the period between 19 and 21 February (Italy was among the countries with a sudden rise in the number of those infected). After he tested positive, he was hospitalized in the University Hospital for Infectious Diseases Dr. Fran Mihaljević in Zagreb. Two new cases were confirmed on 26 February, the twin brother of the first patient and one Croatian who had been working in Parma. After 29 February, Croatia had a total of seven confirmed cases, and then the number of those infected doubled in just 10 days. On Wednesday, 11 March 2020, the Minister of Healthcare in Croatia, Vili Beroš issued the *Decision on declaring the epidemic of the disease Covid-19 caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus* on the whole territory of the Republic of Croatia, and the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on the same day.⁸

Although it may not appear so at first, analysing the statistics and recorded cases is somewhat easier than to examine, determine and assess the moments or period in which we 'started' thinking and acting first 'epidemicly' and then also 'pandemically'. In part this is due to the fact that for a while, numerous elements were interpreted in two different ways – one part of the general public did not perceive the coronavirus as something dangerous, and some were quick to disregard published facts. All of this was aided by the often conflicting views by experts, as well as all kinds of self-proclaimed experts, and by new legions of haters and trolls, alarming and confusing the public, as could be expected in this world and age of image and superficiality.

Social networks, forums and anonymous paid or volunteering instigators of fear and anxiety, unfortunately became the centre of spreading infodemic aspects, which proved to be no less dangerous than the pandemic ones. This included the

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8 During 2020 the number of newly infected people in Croatia increased in hundreds and thousands, by the end of the year reaching up to four thousand newly infected a day and dozens of deaths. The beginning of 2021 brought lower numbers, but this time measures weren't relaxed.
<https://zdravstvo.gov.hr/userdocsimages/2020%20coronavirus/odluka%20o%20progla%C5%a0enju%20epidemije%20bolesti%20covid-19.pdf>
https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandemija_koronavirusa_u_Hrvatskoj_2020.#Dolazak_i_%C5%A1irenje_koronavirusa_u_Hrvatskoj

obscuring of actual events, casting doubt on science and medicine, as well as common conspiracy theories which were once again resurrected.

Of course one should always note that conspiracy theories are not to be mixed with the usual logic of capital and megacorporations, of governments and elites that favour manipulation, and for whom the foundation of economy, management and conquering structure is in imposing force and often absurd rules that the masses and most of the general public do not understand. Although radical conspiracy theories (aliens and lizard men.) and critiques of society and media often start from similar (partial) information, the relevance and conclusions by conspiracy theorists (even the most persuasive ones) compared to well-intentioned social critics are quite different in their nature and scientific methods.

Attempts to merge specific manipulation techniques, instances of exaggeration, generalization and averting attention by established elites and ruling classes, with absurd theses about the perennial 'external' influences on the helpless and innocent public, prove to be fertile ground for the further 'contagion' with fear and anxiety. Problems do not necessarily arrive from the outside and from other countries, regions, ideologies and religions, as members of these quasi-elites would have us believe. The general public and the elective body are not always innocent either, as they very often elect the same options or do not even participate in the elections, thus passively voting for the next or same 'elite'. The issue of helpless, atomized individuals continues to be one among the more or less hidden foundations for the ruling and privileged classes. This is the essence of their political and economic power, and often the psychosocial power as well.

Ivan Krastev, an intellectual and expert on Eastern European studies and modern Europe, has an interesting view on circumstances surrounding the coronavirus. In a particularly well executed study of the coronavirus pandemic, he emphasizes the changes in the pandemic world which we did not see coming, although there were some warning signs. The National Intelligence Council predicted as early as 2004 that it is 'only a matter of time before a new pandemic appears, just like the influenza virus which killed millions people worldwide during the 1918 - 1919 pandemic'. Such an event, the report continues,

might 'stop world travel and trade during a longer period of time and stimulate world governments to spend huge amounts of resources on the struggling healthcare system'.⁹ Furthermore, Krastev notes that in a TED talk¹⁰ from 2015, Bill Gates predicted and announced a global epidemic of a highly contagious virus, in addition to warning that the world and various countries are not prepared enough to face it. Even Hollywood had its continuous 'warnings' through horror movies on global deadly contagions.¹¹

The crisis as a chance or time wasted?

The pandemic of thinking (about corona) i.e., thinking about the pandemic may be said to have begun with the moment when the disease was officially declared a pandemic. This however is not entirely true, since it was still often not clear in the public or the media, what was actually happening, even when the number of those infected began to rise significantly. It could be said that a healthcare crisis was beginning, while the more overwhelming crisis – mental and social, local and global – appeared somewhat later. This included the already mentioned absurdity that during this period the general public started dividing into groups – 'apologists' of the pandemic, often named as scared servants to the global conspiracy theory, and the opposing side, often seen as irresponsible and unreasonable. The media followed its superficial and sensationalist instincts, pitting one group against the other, while increasingly disregarding the 'third' category of moderate readers, listeners,

⁹ Ivan Krastev, *Pandemija nostalgije. Kako koronavirus mijenja Europu* (The Nostalgia Pandemic: How the Coronavirus is Changing Europe), TIMpress, Zagreb 2020, p. 9.

¹⁰ TED, an abbreviation of Technology, Entertainment, Design, was established in 1984 and organizes motivational talks on specific topics. The length of the talks ranges from 3 to 18 minutes, and speakers include various notable individuals, experts from across the world, famous or important for their discoveries or successes in various areas such as education, business, science, technology and creativity. Available at: www.ted.com

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¹¹ Here we should note that neither Krastev nor the author of the current paper, take into account any conspiracy theories that 'reveal' planning and conspiring to release a contagious virus from a laboratory, nor do they link Bill Gates with plans for the mass chipping of humans or radiation of 5G technology. However, such ideas were most often used, not only by members of obscure organizations and regular trolls and haters scouring social networks, but also by journalists and the media in general, especially some news websites whose influence increased during corona and surpassed the impact of print media. The influence was mainly due to casting doubt and worry, in short, the manufacture of anxiety and fear of technology, which then increased the number of 'clicks' on these webpages. We emphasize the possible warning signs before the so-called tipping point itself, which have not been heard or understood well enough, which was also the case with other dramatic and sudden changes in history, not only related to medicine.

viewers and online news readers, actual experts, scientists, doctors and those who were interested in solutions instead of bouncing off problems in the media.

Unfortunately, ever since the first reports and comments, the pandemic also became an infodemic, in its multitude of contagious texts, newspaper articles and approaches following the goals and styles of a post-truth society. The basic tenet here is that truth is not as important as inciting emotions and likes through things like corona deaths or statements that need to carry the punch of great tension and anxiety. This then of course increases the likelihood of clicks and frantic searches for *opinions-we-approve-of* and decreases the need for verified and true facts on the extent and consequences of the disease.

The American sociologist C. Wright Mills already warned of the fact that 'wielded power becomes manipulation' and such methods and techniques later developed precisely in the wake of disasters such as wars or mass starvation. They are also present in the definition and spread of 'deadly democracy' and forced freedom – an oxymoron preferred in particular by Western governments, participants and instigators of warfare and economic operations in the Third World. This is the so-called soft control in which people and the public are smothered within the rules of the system instead of being directly eliminated – 'in a modern society, coercion has been monopolized by the democratic state, and is rarely necessary as a continuous measure, but those in power often use it in hidden ways.'¹²

Such involvement by the government in the turn of events during the corona crisis, depending on the character of its rule and actual level of democracy, was the determining factor in the gradual move from pandemic events to pandemic thinking in the community, at the local and global level. Regardless of their autocratic or democratic characteristics, the already corroded democratic rule in a large number of countries, ranging from the U.S. to Europe and Asia, acquired new holes and patches, as the ruling class, governments in general and the so-called elite understood how the corona pandemic as an emergency situation could be used for increasing control.

As opposed to historical attempts to implement something similar, the control of the pandemic provided a reasonable

12 Further reading in: Slobodan Reljić, *Kriza medija ili mediji krize* (Crisis of the Media or the Media of the Crisis), Službeni glasnik, Belgrade 2013, p. 112.

and justified goal, which could also be aided by technology in numerous ways and in planetary proportions. Mass media as modern technological tools are now liberated from the traditional requirement of being a corrective and mirror to society that cooperates with the public in order to strengthen its critical faculties and intelligence. By their nature being alienated things and aspects, mass media now enter into pacts with the government. They do not do this openly, of course, but gradually, in the mere *failure to do something* and the disregard for the standard and accepted rules of reporting and sharing information.

Of course we must not overgeneralize, as there is no clear distinction between black and white in terms of media, even though some wish there would be. Those months when the power of the coronavirus weakened, revealed how some media returned to their original principles and (again) started exploring and exposing the levels of corruption, injustice, poverty or economic and military domination. For some luckily and for others unfortunately, the coronavirus spread not only through physical space, but also in the media. The wish to increase the extent of political power was stronger first for governments, and indirectly for some elite groups, so they continued to exploit the situation. However big or small, totalitarianism is a life form that grows and learns quickly, aided by the fresh water provided by the media.

As rightly noted by Sead Alić, 'the crisis makes it impossible to infinitely perpetuate the system of flagrant reiteration of untruths as a form of ingraining the preferred way of thinking into the heads of viewers as potential citizens. Once the resources run out, needed for paychecks, pensions, payment of accrued interest etc., then the flickering smiles on the screen, the game of promises, false security and pre-emptive attacks – lose their footing.'¹³ However, the weakening of the disease and the (apparent?) return of citizens to their half-forgotten circumstances, as well as the relaxing or tightening of measures, can make media users go slightly crazy. Within the superficial fight and worry for human plight and the already mentioned return to 'how it was', the media actually offer increased anxiety and fear, fuzziness and distraction. These are individuals and actions that did not meet expectations during

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¹³ Alić, Sead, *Masmediji zatvori bez zidova. Tekstovi filozofije medija* (Mass Media – A Prison without Walls: Essays in the Philosophy of the Media), Centre for Media Philosophy and Research, Zagreb 2012, p. 66.

the emergency situation, or cannot satisfy them anymore, but are kept in place by the institutions and governments because – any kind of power tastes just as sweet.

In the media sense, every crisis, including the pandemic, therefore strives to offer interpretations that are either optimistic or pessimistic, depending on which emotions are to be invoked in those who click and pay for the advertisements. However, the only correct interpretation would be to show things in their reality! 'Every crisis is primarily caused by the need to redistribute media space among the political, economic, religious and cultural actors/agents/groups/classes in society. Just as a nation can be led to war owing to the media, it cannot be led out of the war without them. The crisis helps us understand the media. Understanding the media is the beginning of a new era.'¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 68.

Slobodan Reljić is openly critical of certain media, and emphasized even before the appearance of the coronavirus that in some media, journalism is in fact 'wholesale trade in poison.' Such an endeavour constructs the public into a mass, preferably an uncritical one and susceptible to excessive emotional outbursts which in a vicious circle reproduces mass without solidarity. A critically aware public should contain solidarity at its core and in the way it acts.

However, the increasing influence of media on the lives of individuals and society as a whole seems to be taking place in a paradoxical back-and-forth direction. At the same time there is increasingly a lack of trust among the general public and the masses in the veracity of media truths, as well as the growing level of mistrust, contempt and even hatred among the public and online forum commenters towards the media (not necessarily only among the haters). The sentiment of the media towards its consumers is sometimes similar. However, in the end all these negative thoughts and (media) hatred constitute the poison we all drink, certain that someone else will be the one poisoned.

The audience gives different amounts of attention to different news. According to one research by Doris Graber within the PEW Research Centre¹⁵ carried out between 1986 and 2003, the most prominent stories were the ones on endangering the safety of media users or violating social norms. 'Fear-arousing situations attract the largest audiences... These are reactions

¹⁵ PEW (Pew Research Center) – independent research centre based in Washington. <https://www.pewresearch.org/>

to events that threaten survival, and these reactions mobilize cognitive resources inducing attention... News (particularly images) can operate as sources of stimuli equivalent to lived experience. Hatred, anxiety, fear, and high elation are particularly stimulating and are also retained in long-term memory.¹⁶

The silent (voluntary) death of media and journalism

What then is the biggest – and not always recognized – (harmful) role of media among centres of power, different forms of manipulation, faster technological and social communication, in terms of the relationship between power and media? ‘Politics is the process of allocation of power in the institutions of the state... power relationships are largely based on the shaping of the human mind by the construction of meaning through image-making... ideas are images (visual or not) in our brain. For society at large, as distinct from a given individual, image-making is played out in the realm of socialized communication. In contemporary society, everywhere in the world, the media are the decisive means of communication.’¹⁷

Castells sees the overall media system as a system and set of communication organizations and technologies that encourage individuals’ own decisions or what they believe are their own decisions. It adapts to close-knit social groups, famous role models (whatever they may be) and strengthens or weakens communication in a society, which proves to be extremely important during pandemic times. In the context of the coronavirus, media policy is not only the fight for their users or for survival – a fight in which print and even electronic media are falling behind social networks. In the symbiosis between government and media which exists during pandemical thinking – the generally accepted way of thinking – the meaning of media is gradually transformed into managing media politics within the media, while politics as an art of the possible primarily becomes media policy.

A pandemic way of thinking makes objects, individuals and groups susceptible to focusing on mere numbers of those newly infected, sick, hospitalized, dead, without really

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16 Manuel Castells, *Moć komunikacija*, Multimedia Clio-RTS, Belgrade 2014, p. 195; (Communication Power, Oxford University Press Inc., New York 2009, p. 156)

17 Ibid, p. 234 (2009: p. 193).

understanding the meaning of these categories. At the same time numbers of those who have recovered are barely mentioned, even though this should be one of the ways to give some hope to the population. But is that really necessary at all? Maybe it would decrease anxiety and stimulate solidarity and activism, which are among the greatest dangers for the calculated union between the media and pure politics.

Pandemical thinking also includes the belief that there is no need for messages, organizations and leaders not closely related to the coronavirus, or rather its sensationalist and spectacular aspects, to even be present in the media. Thus it is impossible for them to gain any significance or permanence in the mind of the public. 'The fact that politics is essentially played out in the media does not mean that other factors (for example, grassroots activism or fraud) are not significant in deciding the outcome of political contests. Neither does it imply that the media are the power-holders. They are not the Fourth Estate. They are much more important: they are the space of power-making. The media constitute the space where power relationships are decided between competing political and social actors.'¹⁸

18 Ibid, p. 235. (2009: p. 194).

Here however we must depart from a mere criticism of the media during the corona crisis – among the institutions, groups, social classes and decisions, who would then survive the criticism of all those descriptions, explanations, comments and interpretations of measures and requests by the government and healthcare professionals? Or who would speak truthfully of their own mistakes, information traps, personal interpretations, ego-trips induced by haters and trolls, everyday wise guys and conscious individuals.

In this case who would 'cast the first stone at the media who have received and taken on a difficult task – to report on the situation with the virus, the state of different countries and nations, the global situation, internal affairs, foreign threats, global, regional and local changes happening every hour of the day? They are analysing global changes which are practically without precedence in modern history (not taking into account epidemics like ebola or the plague) down to individual personal behaviours and, first and foremost, the relation to Oneself and to Others in times of overarching emergencies like wars or epi/pan/demics.'¹⁹

19 Nenad Vertovšek, *Drveno željezo medija* (The Wooden Iron of the Media), *Medijska kultura*, Nikšić 2020, p. 157.

Criticism of the media, a Sisyphean task of trying to separate the roles and goals of so-called serious journalism and media on the one hand and social networks on the other during times of corona, should not in the end be a fruitless task. We must remember that journalism as a whole began to die out many years before the coronavirus appeared, after suffering several difficult illnesses threatening the profession. It was already losing its breath when the coronavirus came along as a momentary relief at a time when the media patient lay in its bed. Leo Rafolt also comments on this situation, noting that 'the world is shaped today on the slopes of information, beyond the binarism of truth and lies, and so tries to take over what we once called the news. In late winter and early spring of 2020, the world was ravaged by one such news item, in the form of information. They named it corona, then Covid-19, and it was simply a virus, one of many modulations existing on the border between living and nonliving, biology and chemistry. The information itself soon became a virus. The virus became information.'²⁰

In his book, Rafolt identifies moments and phenomena that actually pull members of masses or elites away from reality, mainly away from the comforting world in which everyone had to know their place. Hashtags, numbers of those infected and dead, limited travels, social distancing as the bogeyman of the new era, these have spread like a virus through Europe and other parts of the globe. Alain Badiou painted the age of corona in even harsher and direct terms, probably due to his intellectual experience and images lived through, saying that 'one will need to show publicly and dauntlessly that so-called 'social media' have once again demonstrated that they are above all – besides their role in fattening the pockets of billionaires – a place for the propagation of the mental paralysis of braggarts, uncontrolled rumours, the discovery of antediluvian 'novelties', or even fascist obscurantism.'²¹

Velimir Šonje is another critic who analysed the situation when Croatia was firmly in the grips of the corona crisis. A scientist and economist, he meticulously analyses the circumstances, the psychosis and collective social reaction. This includes facts²² which will luckily remain recorded in his exhaustive research on the so-called five riders of the apocalypse,

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²⁰ Leo Rafolt, *Virus in fabula*, Meandarmedia, Zagreb 2020, p.11.

²¹ Alain Badiou, *On the Epidemic Situation*, Verso, 23 March 2020 – cited in L.Rafolt, *Virus in fabula*, p. 11. (<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4608-on-the-epidemic-situation>).

²² One needs only keep in mind that Vili Beroš, the Minister of Health, who was at one moment celebrated as a hero by the media, said in conversation with *Sobodna Dalmacija* on 26 February 2020 that corona was a 'disease similar to the common flu'. This happened only two days before the WHO declared a 'high level of risk', not even two weeks before corona was recognized as a global pandemic... Velimir Šonje, *Korona ekonomika* (Corona Economics), Arhivaanalitika, 2020, p. 10.

that is, the five bad ideas that were 'catapulted to the surface of society' due to the spread of fear about the coronavirus.

He believes that bad ideas²³ include 'helicopter money' (giving money to citizens), then the fact that the European Union is compromised, and the striving for self-sufficiency in which global capitalism is replaced by national economy frameworks. There is also the idea of a state-mother as reaffirming state power and intervention and finally the inescapable suspension of democracy and civil rights. Šonje's point of view is that of an expert economist who warns about the disregarded effects of the pandemic on the economy, which provides a starting point for the five negative actions and ideas. These might seem like a gentle step or two backwards, from liberal capitalism to medieval and feudal 'sanctuaries' of body, spirit and soul.

Šonje notes that some experts and journalists in the Croatian media claimed that any questioning of the official doctrine of the Government and Crisis Headquarters on the corona situation, also included the possibility that 'the young and healthy, and the entrepreneurs sacrifice the old and infirm, for profit and to stimulate the economy...'²⁴ This of course wasn't true, but could be used by the media alongside similar statements for inflating someone's alleged Nazi-sociological or fascist tendencies towards methods of eliminating the older population. This simultaneously turns the attention away from mistakes made by the Government and its politically allegiant Crisis Headquarters in their inability to introduce and maintain protection measures. Certain sins and dilemmas of the government in dealing with the crisis may be understood and justified, but the refusal to admit to the mistakes and improve or change the measures, brought on new confusion and gradually decreasing trust of the public in the decisions and activities by the government and the Crisis Headquarters.

A particularly professional and humane comment by the CNN journalist Fareed Zakaria can be used as an example for analysis and interpretation on why and when people started to think pandemically alongside their thinking about the

23 V. Šonje, *Korona ekonomika*, p. 103.

24 Ibid, p. 12.

pandemic. This change additionally blocked the implementation of measures in global terms and in individual countries, depending on the importance given to the main goal – the health of citizens irrespective of interference by the political elite striving to keep its privileges and customs. Depending on the cooperation by some media (mostly social networks and online news services) the government accused ‘the others’ of its own selfish interests, those apparently not following the proscribed measures thus sabotaging all efforts by the healthcare system and good intentions of the government and the elite. This again could be used for excuses that the coronavirus cannot be controlled and new and more strict measures should be imposed, while part of the privileged classes and those aspiring to be like them again broke the rules. This happened again and again.

Zakaria’s work *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World* offers a range of interesting insights. He reveals good medical knowledge, but also the ability to include additional effects in his thinking, such as populism, limitations on travel and freedom of movement for people, goods and services, or the positive and negative sides of digital inventions during the challenges posed by corona. Zakaria notes that some topics such as equality, have been forgotten, and due to global lockdowns and breakdown of economies, this leads to the neglect of increasing global inequality and poverty. There is also a lack of empathy and real compassion for those most hit by the crisis, regardless of their continent, region, gender, age or state of health and health standard.

The people should listen to the experts – and the experts should listen to the people – Fareed Zakaria emphasizes, warning that numerous politicians and statesmen did not listen to the experts. Their approach was hypocritical and populist, as they claimed the experts can be calmly ignored.²⁵ This of course includes instances where the experts themselves, occupying the heights of their Mount Olympus, failed to listen to *vox populi* (already quite a *normal* approach taken by politicians) i.e. check up on their own statements, actions and theories in the feedback of everyday life and troubles of common folk.

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25 Zakaria, Fareed, *Deset lekcija za svijet poslje pandemije* (Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World), Fraktura, Zagreb 2020, p. 85. Zakaria notes that during his nomination at the 2016 election, Donald Trump claimed he talks ‘most with himself because he is very smart’, and later explained how he does not rely on experts because ‘experts are terrible people’. At the same time, Michael Grove, a British politician and advocate for Brexit, was asked to list economists who agree with his view that leaving the European Union would be good for business. He answered that ‘people in this country are sick of experts’... Trump and similar highly positioned politicians like the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson or Jairo Bolsonaro, President of Brazil and a plethora of others, expressed their contempt for expertise before the corona crisis as well, but their ‘stumbling’ and ‘imposed populism’ in manipulating the people in the name of that same people, has proved to be particularly fatal for hundreds of thousands of people during the corona crisis.

Lessons and messages from the past, for the future

This seems strange and absurd, since it would appear that at the beginning of 2021, after one year has passed since the first victims of the coronavirus, there are no hopes for the end, or the weakening of the pandemic and its consequences. At the same time this does not include the significant part of the world population living outside of Europe, and North and South America. Experiences from history can prove quite useful when we analyse the overarching consequences and changes that happened in a similar way, first medically and then according to rules we noted in the writings of Malcolm Gladwell.

For example, the Spanish flu in fact does not provide us with a good comparison since this was a misfortune that literally wiped out parts of the already suffering humanity, especially in Europe, right on the heels of the catastrophe of the Great/First World War. Since this could surely be a theme for a separate paper, here we limit the similarities to the contagiousness and drastic changes in the population, without the factor of a global audience like the one that witnessed the birth of corona.

The historian Nikola Anušić very precisely and meticulously analyses the Spanish flu pandemic in northern Croatia, from demographic to close statistical indicators of the situation and its consequences. As an introduction to the analysis of events in northern Croatia, an area that was hit in particular like the poorer parts of Europe, he talks about the new variant of the influenza A virus, of a mysterious origin, that spread over the world in three pandemic waves, infecting over half a billion people and killing 50 to 100 million across the world. 'No pestilence, war or any period of hunger in human history has ever before killed such a great number of people in such a short period of time. The great Spanish flu pandemic in 1918 was the strongest global demographic earthquake the world had ever experienced.'²⁶

We emphasize the apparently absurd circumstances, as Anušić notes, that such a great and dramatic watershed for a large proportion of humanity, was later almost forgotten?!

26 Nikola Anušić, *U sjeni velikog rata. Pandemija španjolske gripe 1918.-1919. u sjevernoj Hrvatskoj* (In the Shadow of the Great War. The Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918-1919 in Northern Croatia), Srednja Europa, Zagreb 2015, p. 1.

The scientific and historiographic interest for the greatest pandemic in history soon almost disappeared and overviews of world history rarely mentioned the Spanish flu pandemic, while some studies on World War I don't even mention it. Anušić is surprised by 'its swift and total disappearance from the collective memory of humanity. As noted by R. Collier, there are no songs, legends or works of art inspired by the great pandemic in the cultural history of the world and references to the Spanish flu in world literature, even among the famous contemporaries of the pandemic, are so slight they don't deserve to even be mentioned... we might say that today people on average know more on the Black Death of the 14th century than the Spanish flu at the end of World War I.'²⁷ In the period between the 1957/58 Asian flu pandemic and the 1968/69 Hong Kong flu pandemic there was some increasing interest in studying the Spanish flu.²⁸

Krastev also discusses this topic, noting that the Spanish flu might have killed more people than the First and Second World War in total – about 67 million people, as opposed to the approximation that the 'Spaniard' killed between 50 and 100 million (according to different sources). Laura Spinney points out that most answers to the question on the greatest misery of the 20th century fail to mention the Spanish flu.²⁹ Krastev notes that most scientists/historians have forgotten about this epidemic. In 2017, WorldCat, the largest catalogue of books in the world, listed about 80 thousand books (in over forty languages), of which only 400 (four hundred) were on the Spanish flu, in only five languages. The

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27 Ibid, p.2.

28 The work of the doctors Jeremić Rista and Jorja Tadić '*Prilozi za istoriju zdravstvene kulture starog Dubrovnika*' (Towards a History of the Health Culture in Old Dubrovnik) provide us with an interesting confirmation that after the Spanish flu epidemic calmed down, there is a lack of historical data, i.e. there are holes in the collective written memory, unlike for example, the data on the 14th century plague. The valuable historical heritage of Dubrovnik is a source of knowledge on numerous epidemics ranging back to 871, but it was in the 14th century that consequences of up to ten epidemics and the appearance of the plague are described in more detail. The archive also describes in detail numerous epidemics of the 15th and 16th century. See chapter Epidemics and Sanitation, pp. 65-111. What will happen with the official archives on Covid-19?

29 Laura Spinney, *Blijedi jahač: kako je španjolska gripa 1918. promijenila svijet* (Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World), vbz, Zagreb 2019.

question is – ‘why do we remember wars and revolutions, and forget about pandemics, although they also change our economies, politics, societies and city architecture just as thoroughly’.³⁰

It might seem somewhat strange or irrational to now take the work of a novelist, G.G. Marquez, and his *Love in the Time of Cholera* written in 1985, for the purposes of a broader and more creative analysis of the subject of pandemical thinking and its causes as well as the (long term) consequences. At first analysing a love story at the turn of the 20th century in the Caribbean may look like ‘missing the target’.

Marquez won the Nobel prize three years before this novel, and the silent questions on the reasons for this comparison may become clearer if we try to find the relation between a fictitious love during the cholera epidemic that actually happened, and the current real emotions and corona pandemic. This disease of the 21st century has already caused unforeseen changes and will in the future influence our emotions ranging from love to hatred.

The novel in fact focuses not on the medical aspects, but on the love relationships and triangles during emergencies. It would be more true to say that it focuses on a somewhat old-fashioned, but quite modern obsession with how things and emotions of fear, love, wonder and expectation, look during times of crisis, especially when we are not certain what is even happening. It should be said that the term cholera in Spanish (*cólera*), can also mean passion or anger, similar to the English adjective *choleric*.

However, why should we use a novel in a discussion like this and find similarities other than the six-letter words (cholera-corona) that give these infectious diseases their names? We do not mention this novel in terms of history (medicine) or historicity of the actors, locations and similarities between the main characters and our lives at the end of the second decade of the third millennium. The more important message is how today’s actors, individuals and the whole society (as well as the media), are facing and will face changes, that are entirely unexpected but at the same time not so surprising.

30 I. Krastev, *Pandemija nostalgije* (The Nostalgia Pandemic), p. 10. Laura Spinney also adds an interesting note that ‘it is easier to count those who have been killed by bullets than by the coronavirus.’ But there are numerous disagreements and doubts about recorded victims of the coronavirus and the mortality rate, presented in different media, ranging from traditional print press to online news. The criteria are sometimes unclear in media texts and there is a variety of comments and statements by experts, epidemiologists and politicians, who act as official interpreters of the consequences and current news on the coronavirus.

Will we (ever) forget about the pandemic?

What is the element in which we reinforce the memory and remembrance of the past in terms of the current 'passionate' character and background of modern media during the corona crisis? We can use the words of this famous novelist – 'From the time the cholera proclamation was issued, the local garrison shot a cannon from the fortress every quarter hour, day and night, in accordance with the local superstition that gunpowder purified the atmosphere. The cholera was much more devastating to the black population, which was larger and poorer, but in reality it had no regard for colour or background. It ended as suddenly as it had begun, and the extent of its ravages was never known, NOT BECAUSE THIS WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO ESTABLISH BUT BECAUSE ONE OF OUR MOST WIDESPREAD VIRTUES WAS A CERTAIN RETICENCE CONCERNING PERSONAL MISFORTUNE' (text capitalized by N.V.).³¹

The loves in this old novel and our everyday life do not need to be human in their depth or passion, and in their impact on our emotions and impulses for love, anticipation, hope, or dependence. In the historical novel these are human loves, and for us these are media loves, the evidence given by 'those in the media sphere' that oxymoronically love and hate us at the same time.

During the time of corona these are then 'media loves to be recognized, developed and revealed in the relationship between the *public* (made up from individuals) and the *state* of the media, that once served as correctives and mirrors while now they are constructors and active partners to social elites in shaping our mental capacities of (failing to) understand what is happening to us or what has happened to us.'³² Or, as noted by Marquez and the previously mentioned authors, if love and media can change our emotions and ways of thinking and behaviour, they also produce the oblivion of crisis and disasters, and warn indirectly that we should already start thinking about the future post-pandemic thought.

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31 Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Ljubav u doba kolere*, V.B.Z., Zagreb 2018, p.128; (Love in the Time of Cholera, translated by Edith Grossman; Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1988).

32 N. Vertovšek, *Drveno željezo medija*, p. 156.

As there have already been repeating periods of great epidemics and multilevel crises throughout history, we should start wondering – what next? We should not forget that we have been ‘warned’ multiple times, in the modern era also through the inescapable role of the media that participated in these chaotic phenomena. We should also learn from the reactions of individuals and the society in recent health crises that brought fear, vaccinations and the humiliating and necessary quarantines and intervention costs. As if following an experiment, media-political psychoses relating to world events appear cyclically – the Western Nile virus in 2002, SARS in 2004, bird flu the following year, swine flu five years later. After a short break, here comes 2014 and the Ebola virus, Zika virus in 2016 and finally Covid-19 which seems to be turning into Covid-21.

The role of rulers (whether by name or actual characteristics), elite groups and social classes during the corona crisis will probably need to be judged and evaluated in the years that follow. However, even now, alongside analyses from the period before the coronavirus, we should note the warnings and statements that served as (now particularly necessary) guidelines and frameworks for professional and ethical judgements on the actual role of some media or mainstream media in the global medical, physical and mental *lockdown* we are currently experiencing.

In a particularly insightful and uncommon way, Sead Alić exposes this role of media institutions alongside the technological development of the media, in his comment that centralized media houses for publishing books and newspapers ‘helped’ begin the First World War. The radio as a media had a similar role in World War II, while mass media enabled and developed totalitarian systems of the 20th century, as they encouraged the extermination of whole nations and fighting those who think differently.

In several instances Alić therefore emphasizes how philosophy of the media is necessary to truly uncover the hellish nature of the media body and spirit, as well as the vicious symbiosis and misuse of media and technology development. ‘Human responsibility for every uttered word is multiplied with each technical means that multiplies this word... the task of every serious opinion is then to question the influence of media

on the behaviour of individuals and groups, the influence of technologies on human experience and how the multiplication of messages impacts medio(demo)cracy. The manufacture of lowly passions in media consumers is a logical product of liberal capitalism. The consequence is a state of war waged on multiple levels in multiple forms and among different interest groups, organizations and institutions. Television likes wars and helps them, as *Bilwet* would say – survive. But not just the wars waged along different latitudes, but also those within our deep or shallow souls.³³

So if we wonder where we are now and where we are going at the beginning of 2021, it is better not to read and watch frantic forecasts or crazy clowns of modern mass media. We must steer clear of social networks psychopaths, as well as lower our dependence on 'serious', otherwise distinguished experts and politicians with some sense of responsibility. We must recognize those who have sensed like vultures that the coronavirus also brings fear and lack of knowledge – which is their favourite food. Existing hunger nudged into action comedic souls and dangerous couch-generals as well as mental masturbators, frustrated careerists and unrealised instigators of fear and stupidity.

Ivan Krastev already talked and wrote about the deep changes that would be introduced by Covid-19 in modern economy, politics, way of life and everyday relationships. He envisages the dwindling power of the U.S., and the need to transform the European Union if it wishes to keep its integrity after the corona crisis. He sees the past century as a century of separation, marked by the disintegration of globalization trends, and the coronavirus as a crisis and challenge in which one needs to act much faster and wiser than it has been achieved in certain countries, regions, continents or the world as a whole. 'I was certain that the world would change, but I did not think that the direction of these changes was predetermined. I also knew our predictions were less reliable even than those first tests for the virus during the early days of the pandemic.'³⁴

In analysing what might actually happen, Krastev offers a careful selection of seven lessons following the emergence of the coronavirus, and later (after lockdowns) he rephrases them as seven paradoxes. The analysis goes deeper but this short summary can provide an overview of the veils that obscure our

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33 S. Alić, *Masmediji – zatvori bez zidova*, p. 33.

34 I. Krastev, *Pandemija nostalgije*, p. 17. When he discusses the changes brought on by the coronavirus and those it might still introduce, Krastev brightly cites the novelist Stephen Leacock and his *Nonsense Novels*: 'Lord Ronald said nothing; he flung himself from the room, flung himself upon his horse and rode madly off in all directions.'

vision. The first paradox is the discovery of the dark side of globalization, to which the pandemic simultaneously acts as an 'agent'. The second one is the increased speed of deglobalisation trends but also the revealed limits of renationalization. The third paradox notes that in the early phase the fear of the virus encouraged a state of national unity in various countries, but in the long run it actually deepens existing social divisions.

In the fourth paradox, democracy has been put 'on hold' – in the beginning people gave all authority to their governments without question, but the suspension of civil rights will lead to a resistance when health problems are replaced by economic, social and psychological ones. The fifth paradox is the non-participation of the EU during the early stages of the pandemic and the way it almost ignored the problem, but the danger lies not only in new territorial *brexits* but in the fact that the Union itself might become irrelevant. The sixth paradox shows that the pandemic encompasses three earlier crises – the war on terrorism, the refugee crisis and the financial crisis, but at the same time it re-examines and makes possible different outcomes of the final story. The seventh paradox deals with the relative autonomy of individual countries and healthcare systems which led to a situation in which Brussels first represented a symbol of openness and autonomy, but then strict lockdowns and stronger integration became possible in some spheres.

Techno-feudalism and the repression of reality

All of this together reveals influences by several emergency aspects that encourage one another although this has mainly been seen as the process of deglobalization. The crisis of repression and impression of another reality both relate to the information, communication and production environment, the current economic situation as well as forecasts that appear grimmer and worse than the consequences of the pandemic. Maybe that is why mass media, especially those partners to autocrats and unrealized dictators, do not like to talk about this – although fears and anxieties are their sustenance, as they gently avoid the topic of economic disasters.

Is this the media-animalistic instinct through which they sense there is a greater cause for fear than the one they produce every day? However, this Fear might truly scare the media themselves, lulled by news websites and social networks with their heights of hypocrisy and fake news. Do they still think they are immortals of the media, capable of surviving anything? They seem to believe that mere mortals, especially users of social networks, will forever be blinded by their 'gifts', but once they wake up, this might lead to bigger changes in the relationship towards large technological and media companies.³⁵

What of the times after the pandemic? This is a question with certain 'traps'. The first one relates to how we have been soothed and distracted – especially by the media – with the notion that this is some 'new normal' which would one day in the bright future become the 'old normal'. This helped not so much in overcoming the fear and anxiety about corona, but in promoting the hope that all of this would end before the summer of 2020. But as it often happens in fairy tales, especially ones spiced with the predatory aspect of the media, the wait for the new tipping point was prolonged into the autumn and winter of that year, and the whole cycle practically began again at the beginning of 2021. Only now instead of endless discussions on mask-wearing and social distancing, we had the vaccines business, discussion on their form, country of origin etc., the more absurd the better.³⁶

It would be more correct to expect a 'new abnormal' instead of the old normal, if we even need such slogans and sayings. Expressions such as 'stay home' or 'be responsible', were compromised (regardless of

35 Jeffrey Tucker from the American Institute for Economic Research warns that WhatsApp users are choosing other services for encrypted messaging ever since the Facebook-owned app updated its Privacy Policy. He notes that some companies are losing the trust of their customers and 'this is actually an important moment on the technology market of social media.' <https://www.logicno.com/politika/zbogom-big-tech-ljudigube-povjerenje-u-platforme-drustvenih-medija-tvrdi-ekonomista-boom-bust.html> More time will be needed to evaluate the extent and reach of these trends, not only as a reaction to the blocking of Donald Trump.

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36 A whole separate paper might be developed on the lucid behaviours and statements by our most prominent experts, for example Krunoslav Capak, director of the Croatian Institute of Public Health. At a press conference of the Crisis Headquarters he said the coronavirus vaccines were not wasted because actually six doses could be extracted from one Pfizer vaccine bottle instead of five as noted by the manufacturer. 'Colleagues reported that they managed to get out six or seven doses. We asked for an explanation and Pfizer said this was possible because they had received complaints from other countries. Then they said we would now be charged for 6 doses per bottle' – Capak said. Asked by the journalists how it was possible that the manufacturer had been unaware of this fact before, he merely replied 'Ask Pfizer...' Available at: <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/capak-javili-smo-pfizeru-da-iz-jedne-bocice-mozemo-navuci-sest-doza-cjepiva-sad-nam-vice-naplacuju-1461210>

their good intentions) mostly due to rule violations or inconsistencies, especially in the case of the privileged classes who through violation of the rules during the corona crisis showed their power and special status. They held the power to act according to their own whims, different to what they publicly declared. This unfortunately is a custom inherited from the past, because times of crisis exist, we might say ironically, so that the quasi-elite might show its power and protected status.

And so, following the second wave, it seems that we (again?) ask ourselves, will this ever end? When will the strictest measures stop? Is there another tipping point in store for us – if not ‘something better’, then definitely ‘something different’? Some kind of ‘end’ of the pandemic seems possible with warmer days in the Northern Hemisphere, but it remains to be seen whether after the summer passes the old reflex will again crop up, moulding the opinion that an authoritarian approach (or should we say, dictatorship) is just the thing that the confused flock needs.

New social experiments may be next, probably until all the types and forms of vaccines are sold, and the second and/or third doses given, while ‘the best vaccine’ will be determined depending on the ideological and (geo)political situation. If there was a tipping point for pandemical thinking, what can be said of the tipping point at the end of the pandemic cycle, which is always welcome, given the appetites and wishes of the great controllers of our world? This role might be played by new variants of the virus, new viruses, new experiments, but without the detailed analyses and evaluations of what actually happened previously. There is a possibility that everything will be simply forgotten, like those lessons from epidemics of the past.³⁷

We showed how Malcolm Gladwell sees rules of emerging epidemics not only in the medical sense, but within the beginnings of new trends, movements and changes in behaviour, habits and thinking. Common rules for the coronavirus, or new trends in fashion in music, as well as important and key changes in psychosocial environment in general, are actually similar and comparable. They are influenced by global changes, but also by small social and economic details which may suddenly – and contagiously – spread to unexpected areas and aspects of life. ‘Epidemics are strongly influenced by their situation – by

37 Prime Minister Johnson said that the new UK variant of the virus was ‘70 percent more infectious than the original’ (?), which was immediately reported by the diligent media across the EU. This overshadowed difficulties with the first vaccine that was supposed to come from this country but was then stopped when sudden negative side-effects were discovered. Although the WHO said that these new variants were not as dangerous as reported and that vaccines would be effective against them as well, the new Pandora’s box was again opened, bringing in new levels of fear. <https://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/situacija-s-novim-sojem-eskaliraje-zemlje-jedna-po-jedna-ukidaju-letove-iz-britanije-svi-cekaju-potez-eu/>

the circumstances and conditions and particulars of the environments in which they operate. This much is obvious. What is interesting, though, is how far this principle can be extended. It isn't just prosaic factors like the weather that influence behaviour. Even the smallest and subtlest and most unexpected of factors can affect the way we act.³⁸

The special and specific combination of various circumstances, things and facts, may lead to great changes, not only in the health and economic sense, but within the system of thinking, ethical frameworks and seemingly small and unimportant details. Just as in other great epidemics and pandemics, the cause, in this case the Covid-19 virus, is very small, but in the end it very abruptly and dramatically changes the physical and mental capacities of numerous human beings. The return to something 'old' is practically impossible, as we are taught by history, and remains at most – a form of nostalgia.

Before Covid-19 the world only seemed to be better, freer and always promoting progress, although warnings already existed, and not only in terms of new epidemics (as we previously listed several different viruses of the early 21st century). This was something the media earnestly and continuously warned us about, and this included the more serious and mainstream media as well as news websites that sprung like mushrooms after an international rainfall. Fareed Zakaria notes that after the Cold War, the new international system was determined by three forces – the geopolitical, economic and technological, reflected in American power, the free market and IT revolution.

All this, aided by globalization, seemed to be leading towards a better and more successful world. But it was still a 'world filled with crises – some of which may spin out of our control. These include the Balkan Wars, the Asian financial crisis, 9/11 attacks, the global financial collapse, and now Covid-19. Although all of these constitute different crises, they all have a common key element. All of them appeared as *asymmetrical shocks* – something that begins small, but in the end sends seismic shockwaves across the world.³⁹

It should be noted that such asymmetrical shocks should be something we have already 'learnt' as a society and as individuals, at least those of us for whom history was at least a schoolmate if not a life's teacher. However, large parts of the masses and the general public, and even the elites – disregarding those

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38 M. Gladwell, *Točka preokreta*, pp. 25-26.

39 F. Zakaria, *Deset lekcija za svijet poslije pandemije*, pp. 18-19.

who need international shocks for their international businesses – will need to make the physical and mental effort to better understand media messages, consequences of the crisis, totalitarian appetites or technological visions of the future. At the same time they won't take into account that these are actually different sides of the same paradoxical coin. Sead Alić rightly notes – 'totalitarianism is no longer a matter of different parties. It is initiated by technologies that require it. In order to establish a totalitarian society, one needs only a lack of critical faculties. The media initiate everything else by themselves.'⁴⁰

40 S. Alić, *Masmediji – zatvori bez zidova*, p. 31.

Zakaria also establishes this well as a message for the future when he says – 'The post-pandemic world is going to be, in many aspects, a sped-up version of the world we knew. But when you put life on fast-forward, events no longer proceed naturally, and the consequences can be disruptive, even deadly... life after the pandemic may be different across different countries, companies, and especially individuals. Even if economics and politics return to normal, human beings will not. They will have been through an unusual, difficult trial and have a sense of newfound, hard-won opportunity.'⁴¹

41 F. Zakaria, *Deset lekcija za svijet poslije pandemije*, p. 13.

One needs to stay focused in this apparent possibility of choice – on the one hand, we will need to have a good long think in order to understand more deeply the unity and connection among different aspects of epidemics. On the other hand it remains to be seen if we will need to repeat all of this at some new tipping point – in terms of healthcare, economy, in the sociological aspect, technological, communication, philosophical, etc. It would appear that this time we almost do not have any other alternative.

Do we really see a possible new tipping point – a type of *techno-feudalism* which we have already tasted in fragments? Another lockdown within territorial borders, no quick travels and new knowledge from other parts of the world through the media and social networks engulfed in everything – fake news stories, word of mouth with no critical analysis, dangers to the body, mind and heart, through stories and fairy tales on huge amounts of money, about noblemen, kings and princesses, etc.

Will we really wish to return to a sort of Middle Ages and feudal limitations on freedom, the movement of people, goods and capital? With the high level of technological development and focus where one smartphone or android seems like a

special steel sword used for ending permanent depression, tension and anxiety, capable of striking the enemy before he strikes at you. What a tipping point for the future!

Merry Crisis and Happy New Fear!
Graffiti by an anonymous author on an unidentified wall, made during the corona crisis, photograph published on Facebook in December 2020.

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**The Tipping
Point – When,
How and Why
did We Start
Thinking
'Pandemically'?**

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What Is the Cost of Scientific Illiteracy in Time of Global Pandemic?

Key words SARS-CoV-2 pandemic; scientific literacy; communication of science; responsibility of different actors; media and political manipulation

Abstract This paper traces the course of the ongoing pandemic as it was reported in some of the established world media as well as in scientific journals. The author has been following the various sources since practically the beginning of the pandemic in Europe and here will try to assess the role and the actual practice of scientists, politicians and other actors throughout the pandemic, from its beginning in China at the close of 2019 till end of February 2021. The key questions addressed in this paper are: Why the events of the ongoing pandemic unfolded as they did, with so many misguided decisions by politicians (as well as experts at times), with so much misinformation and fake news and so many missed opportunities for decisive and life-changing action? What is the reason behind prolonged intervals of silence in the communication chain? And what cost the insufficient familiarity with science – its facts, methods or means of communication – in

Kolika je cijena znanstvene nepismenosti u vrijeme globalne pandemije?

Ključne riječi SARS-CoV-2 pandemija; znanstvena pismenost; komunikacija znanosti; odgovornost različitih aktera; medijske i političke manipulacije

Sažetak Rad prati razvoj i dalje prisutne pandemije kako je o njoj izvještavano u nekima od vodećih svjetskih medija kao i znanstvenih časopisa. Autor je pratio razne medije još od praktički početka pandemije u Europi i ovdje će pokušati vrednovati uloge i stvarnu praksu znanstvenika, političara i drugih aktera tijekom pandemije od njenih početaka u Kini krajem 2019. pa do potkraj veljače 2021. Ključna pitanja na koja je pokušano dati odgovore u ovom radu su: Zašto su se događaji koji su se zbili tijekom pandemije odigrali kako su se odigrali, uz toliko neodlučnih poteza političara (kao i, povremeno, nekih stručnjaka), uz toliko dezinformacija ili netočnih informacija i uz toliko propuštenih prilika za odlučnije poteze koji su ponekad mogli i spasiti živote? Koji je razlog pozadi produljenih razdoblja šutnje u komunikacijskom lancu? I koja je cijena nedovoljne upućenosti u

the time of global pandemic? The main thesis is that the insufficient level of scientific knowledge – and at times of basic scientific literacy – as witnessed from the highest places of political power to the so called conspiracy theorists, costed us all too many lives lost and an unforeseeable suffering to come. The responsibility is shared between virtually all actors and it must be given due consideration, in some cases even at the courts of justice, if we are to learn all the valuable lessons for the future of public health, world economy and, indeed, the survival of humanity.

znanost – njene činjenice, metode i načine komunikacije – u ovo vrijeme globalne pandemije? Osnovna je teza da je nedovoljno poznavanje znanosti – a ponekad, jednostavno, i znanstvena nepismenost – kako smo mogli vidjeti od onih na najvišim položajima vlasti pa do tzv. teoretičara zavjere, koštalo sve nas previše kako u izgubljenim ljudskim životima, tako i u nepredvidljivoj patnji koja tek slijedi. Odgovornost dijele gotovo svi akteri i ista se mora razmotriti, u nekim slučajevima i na sudovima pravde, ukoliko nam je naučiti sve vrijedne lekcije za budućnost javnog zdravstva, svjetskog gospodarstva i, doista, opstanka čovjeka.

Introduction: panic or understatement

Ever since the global pandemic of a new type of SARS virus (SARS-CoV-2) broke out, the public was flooded by halftruths, unwarranted information, or, simply, disinformation. In the period between the first month or two of the outbreak of the epidemic in China up to the first confirmed cases in Europe and other countries of the West, the public of the developed (!) countries (certainly of Europe and the US) suffered from incomplete and often even contradictory information upon which most people's health and income, and, for too many, even their lives, would depend. Only after the epidemic reached its peak in China and had spread in several other countries worldwide (by which time it should and could have been clear to everyone how serious the new disease is and what impact it could have on global societies and economies worldwide), the WHO declares the state of global pandemic, and only much later the general public comes to an understanding of what the true nature of the disease is. Why such a sequence of events¹? What is the reason behind so many delayed decisions and prolonged intervals of silence in the communication chain? Were the decisions or publicly expressed views of either politicians or the experts always prompt and appropriate?

The main thesis is that the insufficient level of scientific knowledge – and at times of basic scientific literacy – as witnessed from the highest places of political power to the so called *conspiracy theorists*, cost us all too many lives lost and an unforeseeable suffering to come. The responsibility is shared between virtually all actors and it must be given due consideration, in some cases even at the courts of justice, if we are to learn all the valuable lessons for the future of public health, world economy and, indeed, the survival of humanity.

First we assess the course of events as they happened from the beginning of the ongoing pandemic in China at the close of 2019 to almost the moment of finishing the manuscript (end of February 2021) and offer a description of not only events and some of the persons involved, but also of the general sentiment of the time. Then the main facts and methods of science required to understand the pandemic and better make decisions are espoused. Finally, some of the main ethical dilemmas, according to the author, are debated. All in hope to show the

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¹ One report of the sequence of some of the most important and most interesting events is found on *Nature's* website (22nd April 2020) starting from 21st of January up to 22nd of April 2020 and covering scientific and media resources worldwide almost day by day.

paramount importance of not only the (basic) familiarity with science, but also of prompt, reliable and adequate communication of science.

From the very beginning of the ongoing pandemic we have all been exposed to an unprecedented amount of disinformation and manipulation (perhaps comparable only to what was going on during the cold war, but subtracting for the absence of internet and social media networks in those decades of the 20th century). And the cacophony, as an early editorial in *The Lancet* expressed (Flahault, 2020), is continuing at all levels – from the social networks where different groups or individuals are promoting various (more or less credible conspiracy theories²) to leaders of respectable democracies promoting pseudo-science or simply deliberately misinforming the public to who-knows-what ends. One could think that, at least initially, everybody, including the experts, were stricken by the sudden emergence of a new and unfamiliar fiend from the world of the unseen and given its potential to spread (the so called *basic reproduction number*, or R_0) as well as the problem of asymptomatic spreaders, the world was indeed not prepared for this pandemic. Given, also, that panic is always best to be avoided, one could perhaps try to explicate the course of events that were to take place from the early outbreak in China of already at least November 2019 until today. The faults with this kind of general and forgiving account are, however, too many, and all too grievous.

To begin with, the Chinese were not communicating all their findings promptly to the rest of the world causing the general delay in dissemination of scientific information as well as in scientific research which followed. Given the subsequent scale of pandemic it is now evident that virtually every day was important for saving lives. Moreover, there were reports by Chinese scientists (*New York Post* 10th July 2020) to their own authorities about the possibility of human-to-human transmission as early as at least December 2019 and yet the director-general of WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, declares that: 'At this time there is no evidence of human-to-human transmission outside China,' as late as 23rd January 2020 (*Nature* 22nd April 2020). The now infamous case of Dr Li Wenliang (*Los Angeles Times* 6th February 2020), who was perhaps the first person to warn of the potential for

² The question of which conspiracy theory is more credible or, is any of them credible at all, can and should be assessed seriously since now – in the era of light speed communication technology – as well as back then – in the cold war era – certain conspiracies seem to be more plausible than others. The question of the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus is still a matter of an ongoing international investigation.. The question of the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus is still a matter of an ongoing international investigation.

human-to-human transmission and who was arrested for inciting panic (although he was trying to warn everybody of the upcoming catastrophe) and who subsequently died from Covid-19, is perhaps the most striking case of government manipulation which was unfortunately not endemic just to the Chinese authorities as we all could have witnessed on so many occasions worldwide.

Unfortunately the trend of misinformation, hiding vital and life saving information and manipulation of the public has continued long after the original outbreak and far away from China. In many countries in the West we heard all too often and from the highest places (for analysis cf. eg. *New Statesman* 23rd December 2020) that the public were not abiding by the anti-pandemic rules (the recommended or obligatory mask wearing, social distancing, personal hygiene etc.) as late as January 2021, whereas the real causes of continued outbreaks were quite different (*New Statesman* 14th January 2021). Namely, the relaxing of measures during summer, for example in the whole of Europe, or not instigating the quarantine in time to prevent the outbreak, but waiting till the ICU units become scarcely available (like in Italy in November 2020, or Britain in December 2020), or simply allowing for an increase of movement due to work or insisting on keeping the schools and universities open even though there is clear evidence that the contagion spreads (*New Statesman* 26th November; *The New York Times* 4th December 2020). On top of it all the new mutated³ virus strains appeared some of which (the British and the South African strains) are 30 % more virulent and up to 60 or 70 % more easily spread. Surely the decisions that, say, the British government was making at the time did not help to prevent the mutation to appear or to spread into population, as Professor Anthony Costello, a member of advisory committee to the government (SAGE), points out (*The Guardian* 22nd December 2020): 'The recent surge cannot be blamed on a mutant virus alone; in fact, government mismanagement of the pandemic meant that many more people became infected, creating the conditions for mutations to occur.' One, however, does not need to be a specialist virologist, or an epidemiologist, not even a biologist or a medical doctor in order to foresee the course of events if no further – and more stringent – measures are taken. One only needs to know the basic facts of genetics

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³ Viruses and microbes in general have a huge potential for mutations, some to their benefit, some harmful or lethal. SARS-CoV-1 disappeared from the world stage, among other reasons, perhaps because a mutation to its genotype attenuating its replication occurred during an early stage of the then ongoing pandemic (Muth et al. 2018). Unfortunately, the mutations of the SARS-CoV-2 took it to another path.

and evolutionary biology: that viruses, and microorganisms in general, mutate fast and that some of the mutations might be in the direction of increased virality or fatality for the host, the probability for which increases with natural selection acting in an accelerated way given the number of hosts in a situation of a pandemic.

In fact the delays of decisions which would mean the difference between life and death and resulting from the noise in the communication channel arising either randomly or by deliberate choice of certain agents, was one of the few permanent features of the current pandemic. Beginning with the WHO delaying to declare the state of pandemic till as late as 11th March 2020 (*Nature* 22nd April 2020, under 11th March), followed by the delayed responses of the Western governments to instigate nationwide quarantines and cancel at least international flights which later proved to be of major importance for curbing the contagion in China, Australia and elsewhere, finally, even after the quarantines were announced, in many European countries relaxation periods followed from summer onwards presumably called for by different lobbies from the business sector⁴. What these lobbyists, and all who call for relaxation of measures, do not seem to take into account is that the longer the proper quarantine is delayed, when all the statistics point to the necessity of introducing it, the longer will the outbreak last and the worse the consequences will be, and, consequentially, the longer the period of recovery of either public health system or economy. It appears that shortsighted interests had been in many occasions put in front long term gains in both human or other forms of capital as was clearly stated by the then head of the OECD José Ángel Gurría (*El País* 2nd November 2020): 'The dilemma between health and the economy is absolutely false: we should not waste any more time with this.' Again, it should be quite obvious that the economy cannot properly function in the time of global pandemic and that extraordinary measures are required, such as state interventions and simply a higher degree of solidarity in all layers of society.

But perhaps the most appalling is the absence of empathy throughout the pandemic and witnessed at all levels of societal hierarchy, from political leaders to common people and, most disturbingly, in some of the scientists and experts. There are many dangers and harms of a prolonged period of pandemic

⁴ How this kind of lobbying could be detrimental to not only wellbeing (public health), but also, in the long run, economy itself was well articulated by Russell (1935/2004, Ch. 1) already in the thirties as will be further discussed in Conclusion.

and not least are the psychological (Rajkumar, 2020). Most dangerous of all is to underestimate the potential risks. For example, by saying, as so many have been saying, including some well-known intellectuals (cf. e.g. the text by Italian philosopher Agamben (2020)), that since the rate of mortality in general is not that high and given that mostly elderly people develop more severe symptoms, there is no real reason to introduce lockdowns and paralyse economy. The problems with this statement are many and all could be related to insufficient familiarity with science. For, it was known from early on (Bi et al., 2020) that children are as likely to get infected as any adult group, it is just that on average a child's immune system is more rapidly fighting the virus even before the onset of symptoms (Weisberg et al. 2021). Actually, the most recent study (Hippich et al. 2021) written after the results of an extensive public health antibody screening was conducted in Germany shows that children are infected at a rate six times higher than previously thought.

It most definitely does not do any good in declaring in public that the pandemic is at peak and it would be a matter of weeks or a month or two before everything turns to normal – and doing so before the new winter season has even begun. Such statements were not infrequent (*New Statesman* 27th January 2021) on several television networks in different countries and by various experts, e.g. by a reputable oncologist Professor Karol Sikora in Britain (*The Guardian* 1st January 2021). And in a recent interview for the Croatian television network (N1 20th January 2021) a renowned Croatian-French geneticist and microbiologist Professor Miroslav Radman exclaimed that the people who have died from COVID-19 and also had comorbidities would have died anyway and that these are mostly elderly people. When confronted with the fact that perfectly healthy young people die too, he was quick to reply that in every age group there is bound to be a percentage of fatalities. Just that week there was a report on Croatian national television that a young boy age ten died from multiple organ failure related to SARS-CoV-2 infection. Such seemingly positive personalities are actually doing great harm to society. Firstly, giving false hope in time of increasing anxiety (Cullen et al., 2020) and ravaging pandemic is mildly put cynical and can have dire consequences such as an increased scepticism towards experts after such

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hopes are dispersed, as so many a time we have already witnessed throughout this pandemic. It can also provoke scepticism towards science itself and its methods and discoveries, such as vaccines. Is it then surprising that the anti-vaccination mood is growing stronger as is the so called *anti-vaccination movement*? Furthermore, reducing human lives to the margins of a statistical error is inducing apathy and can lead to depression (Cullen et al., 2020) and even suicide (Gunnell et al., 2020) on one side, or to escalation of selfish tendencies and further disintegration of already much compromised society on the other.

The science behind the pandemic: what and how it should have been communicated

A) Matters of taxonomy, or science begins with naming

It is a well-known fact of biology that microscopic organisms are more difficult to classify than the macroscopic plants or animals and that the classification of viruses is one of the underdeveloped parts of taxonomy (Mavrodiev et al., 2020)⁵. Therefore, it was to be expected that there would be issues regarding the classification of the novel type of coronavirus as it appeared at the close of 2019. What was more surprising and hardly to be expected from the scientific community, if perhaps expected from the lay media reporters, is that the name of the virus, or rather relating it to the proper genus, took so long to be communicated to the public, or to catch the ear of the public. But true science, as any serious work, begins by naming the thing or the phenomenon, or the concept under investigation. So one wonders (as indeed the author asked himself in February 2020 when the pandemic already spread to several European countries) which germ (which virus) is causing all the havoc and if it is related to any of the germs which previously caused outbreaks of infection on a larger scale. For it is not the

5 The true, scientific, name of the new SARS-CoV virus, according to Mavrodiev et al. (2020, p. 15), would then be: *Sarbecovirus* sp. SARS-CoV-2, belonging to the subgenus *Sarbecovirus*, sp. standing for *species* (in both Latin and English), the trivial name SARS-CoV-2 standing for *severe acute respiratory syndrome related coronavirus 2*, genus being *Betacoronavirus*, family *Coronaviridae* (subfamily *Orthocoronavirinae*), order *Nidovirales*, realm *Riboviria*.

same if the virus is related to the influenza, or flu-viruses, or to the now well known (but before the appearance of SARS-CoV-2 virus causing the current pandemic, not so familiar to the public) coronavirus family.

The problem which all the health authorities and therefore all the governments confronted from the day the new virus with a pandemic potential was discovered in Wuhan was to estimate its rate of spreading (R_0 factor) and the mortality it could cause. These, however, are very difficult to determine until more testing and tracking are performed, which also means until more people contracted it and so the governments decided to wait and see and to understate the danger rather than cause panic. Especially given that one must weigh in not only public health risks, but all sorts of other hazards, not least the risk to economy. It might appear the more cautious approach until one discovers that the virus is closely related to the SARS virus which was known to the Chinese from early on, already in 2019 (the speculations for about a year now have been that it in fact originated in the laboratory in Wuhan where there was ongoing research on bio-weapons), and the genome of which was sequenced and published by end of January 2020. It was found that the genome of the novel coronavirus was 79,6 % sequence identical to the previous SARS-CoV which caused a large scale epidemic in 2002/03 and 96 % identical at the whole genome level to a bat coronavirus (Zhou 2020, p. 270).

Now, the very fact that a new (sub)species of a SARS virus was discovered should (and we may as well believe would) have caused reason for great concern, especially before the detailed studies of its potential for spreading and causing death to people are undertaken. For it is known (Chu 2004, p. 1349) that the first SARS-CoV virus had fatality of anywhere between 7 and 17 % and the reasons for such variation were manifold and not all well understood, at least at the time of outbreak. So the question suggests itself: is it more prudent to wait and *not panic* or to inform the public immediately as the genome of the novel virus was sequenced and start devising schemes for fighting the potential pandemic outbreak nationally and internationally calling for a global collaboration at all levels and among all professions? Most importantly, planning ahead for an unforeseeable future – until the vaccines are manufactured and the

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significant portion of global population vaccinated – delegating funding and calling for public support and solidarity with those who will be most affected (such as the elderly, the front line workers etc.). But none of this was to be, or at least not as organized as reason would demand it.

Moreover, and as was already discussed in the Introduction, the important decisions kept being delayed, beginning with the declaring of the state of pandemic by the WHO. And the experts, unfortunately, were not altogether blameless. Especially concerning were the public statements from certain Chinese scientists, e.g. Guo Deyin, a virologist from the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou: ‘That name can cause panic to people, and may cause gross economic loss to the affected countries when the virus is circulating,’ speaking more like an economist, or a lobbyist rather than a virologist (*Nature* 22nd April 2020, under 13th February). Now, is it more sensible to battle the virus, not hesitating from regional or even nationwide lockdowns (as indeed was the case first in China and then elsewhere and on multiple occasions) rather than letting the virus into circulation and causing a long term damage to health of not only those who contracted the virus, but also those who have to care for them, those who suffer from chronic illnesses for not having readily available care due to overcrowded hospitals from COVID-19 patients, those who are mentally more fragile and will not cope well with the long term or multiple lockdowns etc. Not to mention the overall cost for economy after the pandemic becomes global and long term. Indeed, some of the Chinese scientists, working presumably under pressure, exerted detrimental influence in the various institutions, most prominently the WHO, when the decision to name the virus was delayed and multiple names were offered, but all with the view of hiding the fact that IT IS the new type of the SARS virus which would entail declaring the state of global pandemic given the nature of the previous type of the virus and the percentage of genetic likeness. For example some of the names proposed were: TARS-CoV, CARS-CoV, RARS-CoV (*Nature* 22nd April 2020, under 13th February),⁶ so practically anything but SARS. Indeed, the Latin saying *Nomen est omen* applies here as well.

⁶ The meanings are, respectively: *transmissible acute respiratory syndrome, clustered acute respiratory syndrome and rapid spread respiratory syndrome coronavirus.*

B) Basics of chemistry and mathematics required to understand the spreading of virus and fake news

Further question we could ask as soon as we have understood what kind of virus we are dealing with is: whether the concentration of the viral particles to which a person is exposed matters for getting infected? The rationale behind this question is actually some basic chemical kinetics, namely, that as with other small particles of micro- and smaller size, it might be the case that the reactivity will depend on their concentration, say, in air. This is learnt already at high school level in almost any Science course (definitely in Europe and the English speaking world). For some viruses or microorganisms already a small quantity of pathogen could be enough to get infected, but with SARS viruses this is not the case, the more particles one is exposed to, the more likely it is that one will get infected. The number of particles found in the patients' nasopharyngeal swabs and sputum (so called *viral load*) either initially or later was related since the earliest studies (Chu 2004) to more severe outcomes of the disease caused by either SARS-CoV-1 or SARS-CoV-2 (Liu, 2020). Unfortunately, this simple fact to appreciate and, in fact, to understand was not always communicated and not always related to the various risks of exposure and the measures to mitigate these. With the knowledge of the risk for contracting the virus increasing with the number of particles, it becomes immediately clear why the social distancing or frequent ventilation of closed spaces is a must, and why the number of people should be generally reduced in all circumstances. So much of the (unreasonable) public outcry in so many countries ought to have been easily averted if only everybody from the various experts to media and the politicians tried to get the basic facts of science across more straightforwardly and more rapidly.

As far as the spreading of the new virus is concerned, again some very basic knowledge of mathematics together with the fact or two from epidemiology will suffice to stay alert in all situations and not to underestimate the risks. The problem is that given the protean nature of COVID-19 disease (Christakis, 2020), the fact that while it can cause most severe symptoms

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such as acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) or multiple organ failure and even death, most of the infected get through the illness with just a mild cold or flu like symptoms, there is a tendency for both the public and the politicians to minimize the risks and hence not to react timely to a new outbreak. Over and over again we witnessed how different groups tried to understate the severity of the outbreak in a certain country just because they were not aware of the long period during which the virus is latent or that the curve of the number of fatalities will generally be lagging behind the curve of infected. Therefore, one must take this fact into account when devising policies or anti-pandemic measures, that these are not to be set on daily or weekly basis, but with a view of long term prospects. Finally, that the exponential nature of the spreading of a pandemic means that, by definition, we will at first not see so large increase in numbers, but in a matter of weeks or months we might experience a public health system collapsing if nothing is done early on.

But SARS-CoV-2 brought another sinister surprise with it which, indeed, is not so obvious or easy to appreciate. Namely that there is a so called *mismatch period* for the virus between the *latent period* (from the time one is infected to the time one is able to spread the virus) and the *incubation period* (from time one is infected to the time one develops symptoms). For SARS-CoV-2 the incubation period is longer leaving so many asymptomatic carriers to spread the virus without notice (Christakis, 2020). It takes about seven days to show symptoms, but the disease will start spreading 2-4 days before the infected are symptomatic. From the manner the pandemic was being handled world over and in spite of the new – and more dangerous – mutants emerging, it would appear that still many governments or employers did not really appreciate or calculate with this fact.

C) Immunity, detection and vaccination

All of the above discussed questions affect decisions of policy makers and in the remaining section on the science behind the pandemic we shall consider the three questions which are the most discussed if not the best understood or researched.

Let us begin with the often debated question of immunity, especially the so called *herd immunity*. In order for a certain population to acquire immunity against the new germ there either has to be a significant number of people who have already had a disease and recovered or a large percentage of general population vaccinated. The second option is obviously preferable especially if the pathogen is causing severe symptoms in significant proportion of the cases. It is, however, important to emphasize that a large percentage of *general* population must be vaccinated – above at least 60 or 70 % in the case of SARS-CoV-2 (Heywood and Macintyre, 2020) – and for the disease to be eradicated it will not suffice to merely vaccinate certain vulnerable groups and hope for the best in the case of everybody else. Eradication of a disease refers to reducing the number of cases of infection to zero worldwide whereas disease elimination only means no re-current community transmission in a country or a large geographical region.

It should have therefore come as a shock, as it indeed did for most of the scientific community but, alas, not for all the involved, what was attempted in early stages of the pandemic in Britain or Sweden. Both countries have in the meantime retracted those policies with much harm done, not only in terms of loss of lives, but also in terms of forging a rift between politics and science in an age which already has witnessed rise of pseudo-science from flat-earthers to climate-change-deniers. The long term reverberations of such policies not really informed by science or sometimes in stark opposition to the accepted scientific truth can be devastating for achieving greater degree of cohesion or solidarity in a society as well as for protecting the society, especially the most vulnerable. Most disturbingly, certain politicians tried to twist the meaning of scientific terms as in the example of herd immunity which could, according to those politicians, be acquired just by letting the virus into the population, but which has no scientific foundation whatever (Heywood and Macintyre, 2020), and which is actually acquired only after a significant percentage of general population is vaccinated. A worthy initiative (The John Snow Memorandum) has been taken on by concerned scientists, doctors and health care professionals to warn against the risks of not having ready and readily communicated scientifically informed anti-pandemic policies especially given the

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past un-scientific or pseudo-scientific, or simply wrongheaded approaches by various governments or authorities. The memorandum was originally published in *The Lancet* (Alwan et al., 2020).

Given especially the problem of asymptomatic carriers and the fact that as with any pandemic, or epidemic, it is difficult to estimate the right number of infected or the right fatality rate, there was a lot of suspicion about the numbers reported and the appropriate testing and detection strategies in practically every country of the world. However troublesome the matters might have been and perhaps in certain respects still are (especially in underdeveloped countries where testing kits were not always available in required numbers), one could have from start assumed, regardless of who it might be, that the reported numbers are not correct and that they are presumably (much?) higher in all categories. This follows simply from the basic knowledge of statistics and if one was following the evening news on any network, one would notice various problems reported almost on daily basis. At first, problems with developing and acquiring the testing kits; further, with achieving the consensus on how many people and on which principle should be tested or how to regiment the actual testing process given different and often conflicting interests (say, for reasons of privacy), or problems with estimating the total numbers from the reported ones. But all too often we heard from many sides, either the corona-virus-sceptics or the politicians if it suited their, usually short term, agendas, how the numbers are not so alarming or perhaps are inflated. Finally, the problem can be said to be resolved after the study which used reliable statistical methods was published last summer (Böhning et al., 2020) which proves that the numbers are indeed higher in all the countries for which they were analysed (and presumably for all the countries in general) and by a factor of 2.3.

The most hotly debated topic, of course, from the moment first hopes were raised in the possibility of obtaining it, was the vaccine. The world needed the vaccine as soon as the true nature of the disease and the potential of the virus to spread was appreciated, but the process of making and testing vaccines is multistage and usually takes years if not decades. However, given the severity of the coming crisis national or pan-national health authorities enabled the so called *emergency use*

authorization (EUA) which allows the vaccine to be approved for restricted use even before the third or fourth stage of testing is completed. Now, once the vaccine is approved under EUA, the manufacturer would be under pressure due to ethical considerations to report this to the trial participants of, both, the group which received the vaccine as well as the group which received placebo, which might make some of the participants from the reference group decide to move to the vaccinated group. The justified fear the health authorities, as well as companies and experts, expressed was that this will jeopardize the whole process of testing as the statistics will be compromised especially in judging the long term effects such as safety, the duration of the immunization and whether the vaccine protects against the infection or just against the development of the disease (Cyranoski, 2020). The questions that now arise are whether this is safe enough a procedure and why this is not always communicated to the public who definitely has the right to know all the relevant details before receiving the vaccine or the new drug? One cannot put all the disputable details in the fine print and then be surprised when the anti-vaccinationists start rallying the public under their agenda. All the relevant data regarding a scientific research should always be communicated as well as the accompanying difficulties and ethical conundrums together with the possible scientific and well thought through ethical solutions. Only this way science will always win its campaigns. In the end, the statistics can be somewhat adapted to even accommodate for the crossing over of participants of vaccine trials (Cyranoski 2020, p. 19), but it should perhaps be noted that not equally convincingly for every type of vaccine.

At the moment (end of February 2021) there are 26 vaccines which are in phase three clinical trials and have been approved under emergency regime in one or more countries or are under contract for one of the international projects of vaccination, such as COVAX (Wouters 2021, p. 2). From the comprehensive table published in the same paper (p. 2) which contains entries on efficacies, temperatures of storage, whether the vaccine was approved by a major health authority or WHO, one can see that only a handful can be said to be sound candidates for achieving global vaccination targets, namely: the American Pfizer-Biontech (with efficacy of 95 % when administered in two doses) and Moderna (with efficacy of 94 % when administered

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in two doses), the Chinese Sinopharm with Beijing Institute (with efficacy of 79 % when administered in two doses) and the Russian Gamaleya (with efficacy of 92 % when administered in two doses). Of interest, and perhaps affecting even the efficacy or relevant for developing the side effects, or for long term benefits, is the method of preparation of the vaccine. So far all the vaccines were prepared by using the microbial particle in an attenuated or dead form, but in the case of some of the above vaccines, only a part of the virus RNA molecule is used, and particularly in the case of the Pfizer-BIONTECH vaccine a new and revolutionary technology was developed which is utilizing only a part of the mRNA molecule and so presumably poses minimal risk for human health. The pioneer behind this new approach to creation of vaccines and medicaments in general is the Hungarian-American biochemist Katalin Karikó whose is a heroic biography of a lifetime spent in dedication to her science. 'I always wanted to help people, to try and get something into the clinic, that was the motivation for me, and I was always optimistic. But to help that many people, I never imagined that. It makes me very happy to know that I've played a part in this success story,' Karikó exclaimed (Cox, 2020).

Concluding remarks: solidarity, responsibility and manipulation

The ongoing pandemic is not leaving the whole world with just millions of dead or dying and who-knows-how-many suffering from long term effects from COVID-19, it is also affecting almost every other aspect of wellbeing and organization of society as was recently exposed with great clarity in a book, one of the first of its kind, by Christakis (2020). From the world of work which is changing from day to day, with many professions being affected, to online schooling, from the new traveling routines to new ways of socializing which would involve social distancing and mask wearing, from providing care for the chronically ill or elderly to protecting the front line workers such as doctors, nurses, medical staff in general or teachers. In all the above mentioned areas undergoing major transformations, as well as many more, there are multiple issues which

could be debated, and many of these issues are appearing more and more in the media and even scientific journals (as can be seen from the references cited) as the pandemic persists relentlessly on its course. Here we will focus on just a few in which perhaps the notions of responsibility, solidarity and manipulation are most obviously in need of review especially as founded on sound scientific reasoning.

The problem of how to organize work under the conditions of a global pandemic is, alongside the matters related to public health, perhaps the most important, and yet in too many situations we have been witnessing neglect for the wellbeing of the workers, from factory workers who had to continue the manufacturing process in giant halls with too many people inside and not enough space in between to teachers and support staff in schools and universities who in many countries worked in presence and in some cases without basic protection such as masks for them or the students. We heard many a time the voice of protest throughout the Western world of the small business owners, or bars and restaurants owners that they would not survive if the restrictions to their establishments staying open lasted. But too few, it would appear from daily media coverage in almost any of the developed countries, seem to think that they should actually be demanding their right to work online, if that is a possibility, or to ask for additional emergency funding from the local or national government. The public is told the same narrative over again, that everybody needs to remain in work unless the contagion is already spread throughout a working community or unless their nature of work is such that it doesn't really matter whether they are working online or in person. To this is usually added that the country's GDP will otherwise fall too much causing the economic recovery to last longer and cost more. This rests on at least several tacit assumptions, none of which is actually warranted by any of the sciences. Namely, first, that there is only one way of performing a certain type of work and that this cannot change under any circumstances. Second, that it is still possible to do any type of work under the conditions of a global pandemic regardless of the cost in human health or lives. Third, that it is more profitable (at least to the employer) to pay (if that!) a certain number of days of sick leave per employee rather than properly protect all the employees which

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sometimes might mandate quarantine for all of them and work from home. That, fourth, in the case of products or services which are to be delivered within a certain time framework, the customers cannot display more patience than they would have otherwise shown, under normal circumstances. Finally, that economic interests are confronted with the interests of public health and precede the latter in importance. The motivation behind all the above seems to be that short term profits of certain interest groups or, worse, individuals, come before the long term gains for the whole of society.

The quick responses to each of the above tenets would be: to first, performing any type of work can and is, moreover, expected to change under changed working conditions. After all, is not this what the much praised quality of flexibility at work place is all about? To second, it should be obvious and self-understood by all the involved that certain types of work might need to temporarily cease and while the work is disrupted or happening with lower capacity, the owners should be compensated from some emergency type of funding (such as the grants or loans given by the EU to the member states). In answer to third tenet, it should be realised by all the employers that the highly skilled or highly educated and competent work force is the one constant they could rely on and, therefore, they should take all the necessary measures to keep it in good condition and with the company. How many factories or companies, or small businesses will be facing loss of human capital during or in the wake of this pandemic? How many will be forced to expand their recruitment pool to include workers with not as reliable degree certificates or not so skilled as the original workers in whose training the owner already invested? And so will be faced with not only the losses in workforce, the money already invested, the money which will need to be invested into training of the newly recruited workers as well as the potential earnings if the product or service is not as expected or the production falls, all due to unskilled labour. To fourth it might be replied that it goes without saying that more patience as well as solidarity in general would be required in time of any crisis and there is no particular reason not to expect those from the public. Actually, not expecting so and not encouraging noble virtues will inevitably result in the opposite sentiments growing within the body of people. Finally, and as was already

quoted in the Introduction, even the former head of the OECD, José Ángel Gurría, denounced the dilemma between health and economics as the false dilemma.

But there is yet another supposition which seems to be haunting many employers around the globe, which is that their employees will not be working equally productively if they work from their homes (for which there is no evidence at face value, rather it is more likely that by staying healthy, avoiding stressful morning and evening rush hour etc., their productivity will increase). Unless productivity usually means working longer hours and actually pretending to be more productive. This is an old theme, that just working longer hours will lead to an increase of productivity or at least will keep the people away from vices of idleness and so promote the building of a better society⁷. It was, first of all, shown not to be scientifically or, simply, rationally justified by an argument put forward by Russell (1935/2004, pp. 5-6) and then the whole of such ethic of work was denounced by him as follows:

'Modern technique has made it possible to diminish enormously the amount of labour required to secure the necessities of life for everyone. This was made obvious during the war. At that time all the men in the armed forces, all the men and women engaged in the production of munitions, all the men and women engaged in spying, war propaganda, or Government offices connected with the war, were withdrawn from productive occupations. In spite of this, the general level of physical well-being among unskilled wage-earners on the side of the Allies was higher than before or since. The significance of this fact was concealed by finance: borrowing made it appear as if the future was nourishing the present. But that, of course, would have been impossible; a man cannot eat a loaf of bread that does not yet exist. The war showed conclusively that, by the scientific organisation of production, it is possible to keep modern populations in fair comfort on a small part of the working capacity of the modern world. If, at the end of the war, the scientific organisation, which had been created in order to liberate men for fighting and munition work, had been preserved, and the hours of work had been cut down to four, all would have been well. Instead of that the old chaos was restored, those whose work was demanded were made to work long hours, and the rest were left to starve as unemployed.

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7 Recently Heyward made use of Russell's arguments against working longer hours in *New Statesman* (2020) in a similar way, but not focusing so much on the current situation caused by the pandemic.

Why? because work is a duty, and a man should not receive wages in proportion to what he has produced, but in proportion to his virtue as exemplified by his industry. This is the morality of the Slave State, applied in circumstances totally unlike those in which it arose. No wonder the result has been disastrous.'

And the results of applying such ethics of seeming virtues could be a much bigger disaster waiting to happen in the wake of the pandemic, after the industries world over will have been through the period of deflated production anyway, loss of capital as well as loss in human resources and no lessons learnt. Instead of fostering the spirit of solidarity throughout the societal hierarchy during the crisis and so coping better at all levels, both, during and after the pandemic – avoiding the sharp edge of the austerity blade – also paving the way for the future enterprises, thinking in particular about keeping the older workforce to educate the young as well as thinking of education and new ways of teaching and learning imposed on us all by the pandemic and using them to make ourselves better rather than allowing them to bring the worst out of us. One could always preach the all-important GDP rise in connection with unemployment rate and wages cuts etc., but one could, with not too much effort, try to appreciate Russell's argument. First, that even in the darkest hour of humanity, the first (and later second) world war period, the populations on the side of the Allies enjoyed relative prosperity; further, that modern science does not seem to cease bringing about technological innovation which can be and was successfully used to combat food and other shortages, unemployment and hardship; next, that technology (inspired by science) can ultimately lead to improvement of lives of many (if not all) and not just a few privileged business owners, but in order for this radical change to happen there also needs to be political will and social cohesion to instigate it. In a nutshell, when the hardship comes upon us, one should learn to live on less and procure for as many as possible and be patient, for the good times are sure to return if a little solidarity is shown when most needed.

The profession whose practitioners have from the very beginning suffered most is, of course, medicine, and there is no end in sight to the pains and sorrows the doctors, nurses

and medical staff will have to witness before the pandemic is finally behind us. Put aside their Hippocratic oath, the noble motivation or the undisputed bravery in the face of a global catastrophe, no one should be asked to work overnight for who-knows-how-many days, to be deprived of sleep, of seeing their family or of living a decent life. It is self-understood that all the medical staff have more responsibility in the face of a medical crisis and, indeed, will without saying have to endure more, face more difficult challenges and risk more. But we should, after having witnessed, if not always in person, but more through media coverage, all the horrors this pandemic brought with it, ask whether all that was asked from men and women dedicated to medicine by the politicians in the line with bravery or does some of it border on absurd and even criminal? Today, world over, the medically trained professionals are in high demand even in developed countries. Not going into the manifold reasons for this dire situation, we could ask ourselves, can we risk – under such conditions – losing one doctor or one nurse more than is absolutely unavoidable in the face of a new danger? Tens of thousands of doctors, nurses and medical technicians have already lost their lives, how many will still have to risk it all? The useful metaphor could be the one with chopping the large oak tree because of someone's will of the whim, not thinking how long it takes for another to grow and produce acorns or to give shade. How long does it take to train a doctor? How long to train an experienced nurse? These are the questions everyone should have been asking themselves from the very beginning, and one wonders how many among the politicians as well as the ordinary people did. It is highly commendable to read (Gallagher et al., 2020) how enthusiastically and in what numbers the young doctors and not yet graduated students of medicine volunteered to fight the pandemic. However, the question remains: Was the society promoting sacrifice on one side and profiteering on the other. Profiteering from other people's sweat and blood and other people's misery, all with a view of saving a dollar or two more by some business owner who went on lobbying the politician who was then reluctant to introduce proper anti-pandemic measures when and where needed as the world witnessed so many a time in the past year.

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How many among the medical staff will experience long term effects detrimental to their health and the health and wellbeing of their families (Galbraith et al., 2020) in health systems which usually do not take this into account, especially if the problems are related to the mental wellbeing? Furthermore, can anyone with a sound mind claim that an overworked and underslept doctor or a nurse is fully competent to do his or her duty as under normal conditions? Finally, does the society have the right – through the shortsighted decisions made by politicians – to put so much responsibility on just people from the medical profession? The ethical dilemmas medical staff was facing and is continuing to face in virtually every country of the world were many, sometimes quite intricate and too often unbearable (Robert et al., 2020). Ranging from decisions on family visits to the hospitalized patients, some of who would never see their families again, to – literally (as in the case of one of the most famous such battlegrounds of Bergamo in Italy) – deciding who lives and who dies, given the availability of the ICU units or the infamous respirators.

The issue with availability of the ICU units or respirators is an especially interesting one, but not only for the reason of saving lives, also for the ramifications – some of which potentially touching on the constitutional rights or the rule of law as such – which ensue from the issue. Take, for instance, the fact that in many countries it happened on several occasions or through prolonged periods of time (weeks if not months!) that all the ICU capacities were full nation-wide and so if another person is in desperate need of intensive care, there is a real danger that it will not be provided to him or her. Indeed, such cases were happening routinely⁸, especially in the early days of the pandemic, where it was left to the doctor in charge to flip a coin or appeal to higher power in order to decide which patient lives and which dies. But consider now the issue from the point of view of the patient being guaranteed the place in intensive care, not to mention a patient who was contributing to the healthcare system regularly from his or her salary throughout his or her working life, this right is surely guaranteed by the constitution of the state itself, not to mention the international laws and conventions. So it would appear that the situation brought about by the inept or insufficiently scientifically informed politicians, or simply politicians who

⁸ Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation from Seattle, Washington, is maintaining a website of all the requisite statistical data presented in easily accessible charts (IHME 2021).

did not have the best interests of their nation at heart, implied that the constitutional rights are not always guaranteed, even though the country is perfectly able to guarantee them by employing better organization and by enforcing the application of science into daily political decision making processes. Can anyone of sound mind and rational outlook deny there were gross oversights and mispractices happening in almost every country around the world when the people of those countries needed their leaders most? Is it not a time for a team of clever legal experts to evaluate all those mispractices and embark on preparing law suits with potentially massive compensation sums claimed?

With those worries and proposals we come to our final question, surely the most significant one, if not the first to answer: wherein the responsibility lies? Who is to be blamed, which groups or individuals? Unfortunately, and before we find out for sure that the virus was not manmade or spread as a result of a human error, the responsibility, generally speaking, is shared by virtually everybody. It would be easy to point a finger to this or that government or this or that political leader or party, even the lobbyists from the business sector are not to be blamed for all. No, the person next door is responsible too, responsible that the government of his or her country was allowed so many obviously avoidable mistakes which led to treating human lives as numbers; responsible for not having informed him- or herself on the latest scientific development concerning the new virus or the course of the pandemic; responsible for allowing the fake news to spread; responsible for underestimating the power of knowledge – the power of, simply, correct information promptly communicated. Responsible for having allowed oneself to be so easily manipulated: from the protests against obligatory mask wearing to anti-vaccination movements, to not holding your government responsible for delivering on the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the constitution or the international law. Unfortunately, all too often one can hear about thinking positively, staying grateful – counting your blessings – which would make sense if there was anything to stay positive about and if those were the real blessings and not pretexts to avoiding to confront the true nature of the latest enemy or the dire reality which we find ourselves living. In the times of pandemic of global proportions

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and consequences not seen for a long while even in the most developed countries, there is a darker side to practicing plain gratitude and positive outlook (both proven tools of modern day psychology) as was so sharply recognized in a recent article from *New Statesman* (26th January 2021). It may provide us with a period of a reasonable peace of mind, but it may also be a deterrent from political and true moral action, from insisting on truth to be communicated to all; from demanding basic human rights – including the rights to stay informed and stay alive – to be upheld and from demanding justice for all who deserve it.

Finally, we should not live under now an obviously false impression that somehow human lives are above all at least in reputable democracies (how then to justify half a million lives lost to COVID-19 just in the United States of America?!) and that the average citizen does not need to worry much when the catastrophe strikes, and therefore does not need to learn anything new that might potentially save his or her life, so long as they live with the belief that the government knows best. But, for what he or she knows, this belief might merely be a necessary illusion fostered by the government for ends different than those immediately thought of by an average voter. This was perhaps never emphasized with more conviction than in a passage from Chomsky (1989, Preface, p. 7-8):

‘The issues that arise are rooted in the nature of Western industrial societies and have been debated since their origins. In capitalist democracies there is a certain tension with regard to the locus of power. In a democracy the people rule, in principle. But decision-making power over central areas of life resides in private hands, with large-scale effects throughout the social order. One way to resolve the tension would be to extend the democratic system to investment, the organization of work, and so on. That would constitute a major social revolution, which, in my view at least, would consummate the political revolutions of an earlier era and realize some of the libertarian principles on which they were partly based. [...] My personal feeling is that citizens of the democratic societies should undertake a course of intellectual self-defense to protect themselves from manipulation and control, and to lay the basis for more meaningful democracy.’

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Media Frames of COVID-19 Pandemic

Key words pandemic, infodemia, journalism, media frameworks, media literacy

Abstract It has long been noticed that the problem of public information provision has shifted from collecting and selling information to protecting the public from disinformation, and to inability to follow all the information published about any topic. Media coverage in times of crisis, such as the pandemic, has revealed and heightened the extent of the problem of public information provision. In this paper, we present our belief that professional journalists have not responded well to their basic task — providing accurate, impartial, reliable and important information to the public. Instead, the media has often published information based on assumptions, emotions and views of interest to certain social groups, rather than the general public. The banning of large gatherings and events that are a common source of information, limited movement of people and journalists, focus on official sources with limited ability for data verification, extensive use of social media and general disruption of daily editorial routines, have led to the non-compliance with the core

Medijski okviri Covid 19 pandemije

Ključne riječi pandemija, infodemija, novinarstvo, medijski okviri, medijska pismenost

Sažetak Odavno je uočeno da je problem javnog informisanja sa polja prikupljanja i prodaje informacija, preusmeren na problem zaštite od dezinformacija, kao i na poteškoće da se prate sve informacije objavljene o nekoj temi. Medijsko izveštavanje u doba krize kao što je pandemija, izoštrilo je i još snažnije markiralo razmere problema javnog informisanja. U radu iznosimo uverenje da novinarski profesionalci nisu dobro odgovorili svom osnovnom zadatku – da obezbede tačne, nepristrasne, pouzdane i za javnost važne informacije. Umesto toga objavljivane su informacije zasnovane na pretpostavkama, emocijama i stavovima u interesu određenih društvenih grupa, a ne od koristi za građane. Zabrana velikih skupova i događaja koji su uobičajeni izvori informacija, ograničenje kretanja ljudi i novinara, usmerenost na zvanične izvore sa ograničenim mogućnostima provere informacija, velika upotreba društvenih mreža, kao i opšta odstupanja od svakodnevnih redakcijskih rutina, uticali su na izostanak poštovanja osnovnih novinarskih načela. Umesto činjenica u medijima su dominirale interpretacije i emocije,

principles of journalism. Instead of facts, the media were dominated by interpretations and emotions, which, in combination with poor general media literacy, has led to the spread of fear and distrust in media and institutions. In this paper, we advocate adherence to the Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on protecting freedom of expression and information in times of crisis (adopted in 2007), and improvement in general media literacy in society, so that the media can effectively perform their social role, and the citizens can critically evaluate information available in times of crisis.

što je u situaciji skromne opšte medijske pismenosti doprinelo širenju straha i nepoverenja u medije i institucije sistema. U radu se zalažemo za poštovanje Smernica Komiteta ministara Saveta Evrope o zaštiti slobode izražavanja i informisanja u vreme kriza (iz 2007. godine) i za opšte medijsko opismenjavanje, kako bi mediji efikasno obavljali svoju društvenu ulogu, a građani kritički procenjivali informacije koje su im dostupne, naročito u vreme kriza.

Introduction

The year 2020, besides the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, will be remembered by an unprecedented noise in the media sphere, overwhelmed and infected by theories, opinions, expertise, exclusives and sensations in which 'actuality, importance, relevance and attractiveness' (Todorović, 2002: 64) – as the most important characteristics of news – have assumed new meaning, and the public, it is now clear, has gotten a new perimeter for navigating through the media. In the first couple of months of the COVID-19 pandemic, serious, analytical and investigative approaches, based on facts and best journalistic practice, which are relied upon for 'independent, reliable, correct and comprehensive information' (Kovach, Rozenstil, 2006), seemed unable to keep up with amateurish, unverified, de-contextualised and thus clouded opinions, that were placed in the media, counting on, and succeeding in making attractiveness or exclusivity the most important criterion for publishing. The media industry confirmed its enormous power and strength, showing genuine responsibility in providing timely and truthful information to the public about the pandemic, but at the same time unveiling the other side of that strength by creating mass hysteria and panic. In both cases, the influence of journalists and journalism, and their power to intensify the impact and legitimacy of something they report about is very visible (Schudson, 2003).

Journalists and journalism have demonstrated their knowledge and skills, their impact, and the power of tools at their disposal. However, as it is always the case with a crisis, a range of weaknesses of the profession have become visible. The most visible weakness is the one symbolised by problems brought to traditional journalism by digital agenda, and we could observe in real time 'how capitalism is turning the internet against democracy' (McChesney, 2015). Old weaknesses, invigorated by the new context, such as divergence between politics and facts, and submissiveness of the media towards the centres of power, additionally point to a serious problem in journalistic practice during the pandemic, when a journalist remains loyal to an

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impression or belief, or when subjective judgements take precedence over verification and facts (Chomsky 2002; Herman and Chomsky, 1988). All the contradictions of our time are intensified and heightened, and the rules and conditions of post-truth have revealed 'information disorder' (Wardle, 2019) as a kind of a framework in which a media user is torn between verification and facts on one side, and disinformation, misinformation and false news on the other (Wardle, 2017). The phenomenon of post-truth regains importance in the time of pandemic and its reframing of reality. The pluralism of interpretations of diverse 'truths', justified by personal objectivity based primarily on emotional engagement, poses a serious threat to verification and facts by giving precedence to alternative sources of information. 'The weapon of context – the use of original content in a distorted and redefined form' (Wardle, 2019) becomes one of the dominant tools of 'information disorder', and of all the journalist's roles, two become important: 'interpreter' and 'populist mobiliser' (Weaver, Wilnat, Wilhoit, 2018).

In such an environment and framework, the first infodemic¹ in the history of human civilisation was announced, giving birth to probably one of the most quoted statements in the first half of 2020: 'We're not just fighting an epidemic, we're fighting an infodemic.'² The media gave support to the WHO when it invited technological companies, like Facebook, to help in the prevention of infodemic by globally imposing stricter measures in controlling placed information.³ The WHO has formed its teams in Geneva and six regional offices: Africa, North and South America, South-east Asia, Eastern Mediterranean and Western Pacific, with the task of identifying fake and unreliable information that can harm public health. When they find false or incorrect information, rumours, fake news, etc., their task is to refute them by information based on facts and evidence, and to publish, on the official website and through their social media network, all the news on the epidemic and all the information on identified rumours⁴.

1 Blend of the words information and epidemic, referring to a rapid and far-reaching spread of both accurate and inaccurate information about something, Merriam-Webster <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/words-were-watching-infodemic-meaning> Accessed: 02 August 2020

2 Ghebreyesus, Tedros Adhanom. Munich Security Conference, 15 February 2020 <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/munich-security-conference> Accessed: 02 August 2020

3 See: Thomas Z., WHO says fake coronavirus claims causing 'infodemic', available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-51497800> Accessed: 02 August 2020

4 World Health Organization. Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Situation Report – 13 (02 February 2020) https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200202-sitrep-13-ncov-v3.pdf?sfvrsn=195f4010_6 Accessed: 02 August 2020

Infodemic and the pandemic psychology- a new challenge for journalism

The term infodemic is not new, the flood of information is being talked about for decades, ever since the ICT showed the speed, might and power that they add to information. Infodemic as a phenomenon, and as a consequence of epidemic, appeared in 2003: 'SARS is the story of not one epidemic but two, and the second epidemic, the one that has largely escaped the headlines, has implications that are far greater than the disease itself. That is because it is not the viral epidemic but rather an 'information epidemic' that has transformed SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome, from a bungled Chinese regional health crisis into a global economic and social debacle.'⁵

The scale of the 'economic and social debacle', generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying infodemic will be examined comprehensively and in detail in the years after the pandemic. It is too early for drawing any conclusions, although it is clear that consequences in all areas are far reaching. A number of research projects that examine a wide spectre of phenomena, and the influence of the pandemic on a range of spheres of life and work, corroborate this claim (Liu, Q, Zheng, Z, Zheng, J. at all, 2020; Milutinović, I, 2020; Roser M, Ritchie H, Ortiz-Ospina E, Hasell J, 2020; Motta, M, Stecula, D, Farhart, Ch, 2020; Pennycook G, McPhetres J, Zhang Y, Rand G.D, 2020; La, Viet-Phuong; Pham, Thanh-Hang; Ho, Manh-Toan; Nguyen, Minh-Hoang; P. Nguyen, Khanh-Linh; Vuong, Thu-Trang; Nguyen, Hong-Kong T.; Tran, Trung; Khuc, Quy; Ho, Manh-Tung; Vuong, Quan-Hoang. 2020; Gallotti, R, Valle, F, Castaldo, N, Sacco, P, De Domenico, M, 2020).

Additionally, the emotional aspect, with all the social and economic interaction, suggests an insight into another segment of the pandemic framework, which influences life, and subsequently media as well. In the 1990-ies, British sociologist Filip Strong developed a theory and a model of a comprehensive epidemic psychology. In his model, Strong identified and

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⁵ David J. Rothkopf, article
in the Washington Post,
May 11, 2003

described clear frames and provided explanations, always observing his model in the context of psycho-social relations during and towards the pandemics. He based his epidemic psychology on the examination of a deep contrast between surface rationality of everyday life, and the raw emotions that lurk beneath (Strong, 1990). We believe that the pandemic psychology, as an important frame that strongly determines psycho-social relations and interactions in life during the pandemic, is also a frame within which the media and journalists also operate, and to which they respond by reflecting the reality. Reactions and behaviours are characteristic and very specific, relying on 'primitive and irrational emotions that are buried within every human being' (Strong, 1990), practically they are kinds of epidemics within an epidemic (Strong, 1990).

- fear and panic; personal fear has no boundaries and collective fear becomes the norm of behaviour, and the norm of democracy;
- explanation and moralisation; they often lead to stigmatisation of those with the disease or those who belong to potential carrier groups;
- action and often action at all costs, good or excessive and ill-conceived, which puts the individual back into the fear zone;
- everyone who wishes or needs to say something – now has an excellent opportunity to do so.

In a way, Strong summarizes his theory using the following words: 'When the conditions are right, epidemics can potentially create a medical version of the Hobbesian nightmare – the war of all against all, followed by fear, panic, suspicion and stigma, by mass outbreaks of moral controversy, and potential solutions. This distinctive collective social psychology is rooted in the fundamental properties of language and human interaction' (Strong, 1990).

Each of the described characteristics of epidemic psychology, apart from having a deep psychological meaning and specific nature, is also a firm framework that media or individual journalists cannot escape. Neither individuals, nor any segments of society are immune to them, especially when an epidemic is new, such as COVID-19. For a long time it was a kind of taboo, even today, after 10 months since its appearance,

it surprises, bewilders, scares and paralyses. 'The distinctive social psychology produced by large-scale epidemic disease can potentially result in a fundamental, if short-term, collapse of conventional social order. All kinds of disparate but corrosive effects may occur... For a moment at least, the world may be turned upside down' (Strong, 1990).

Indeed – by living in a permanent state of emergency, more or less officially declared, the world has transformed itself to the extent that questions such as: What have we sacrificed for safety? Freedom? Trust in institutions? Truth? – have largely replaced the initial questions related to the safety and finding the cure for the new infection: 'A society that lives in a permanent state of emergency cannot be a free one. We live in a society that has sacrificed freedom for so-called 'security reasons' and has hence condemned itself to living in a perpetual state of fear and insecurity' (Agamben, 2020).

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Information policy in a crisis

It has happened that the right to accurate and timely information, which public likes to see as 'the right to the truth' – has remained overshadowed by a range of so called emergency measures and decrees, overshadowed by natural fear for life's essentials, and the life itself, even overshadowed by the new everyday life in which reality constructed by the media has to face competition. In other words, the crisis was managed by politicians and medical experts, and the media followed them, mostly trying to keep up, and rarely succeeding in being one step ahead. Bearing in mind that 'crisis management consists of five key activities: identification, decision making, explanation, termination and learning' (Gaćinović, 2011:313), the role of the media is seen as a part of the crisis management, because the media have the greatest responsibility for communicating every stage of these activities. In a crisis, information policy is comprised of 'laws, regulations, and doctrinal positions – and other decision making and practices with society-wide constitutive effects – involving information creation, processing, flows, access and use' (Braman, 2011:3).

By definition, 'Crisis appears when the key values (safety, security, health, integrity, justice, wealth or production, etc.)

and/or survival of a community are threatened. The greater the nature and scope of the threat, the bigger the crisis. Crisis is a state in which society ceases to function following the principles of democratic organisation. It represents a set of legal norms that are in the given circumstances conflicted, and thus slow down or speed up the chain of events, i.e. the process of crisis escalation or the process of crisis management' (Gaćinović, 2011:306). Of course, in the times of crisis, media and communication in general are bound by crisis norms and rules that restrict freedoms, and the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, allows that guaranteed human right to freedom of expression can be conditioned and restricted: 'in the interest of national security, public safety, ... for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health.' The most important elements in managing crisis situations such as pandemics are a sound communication plan and a good media strategy. 'The perception of a crisis is followed by a high level of insecurity related to the nature and potential consequences of the threat' (Gaćinović, 2011:307).

In the times of COVID-19 pandemic, the extent of the need for well-defined communication that will not suppress the truth, and the right to accurate and timely information, is evident from a range of actions undertaken around the world (some have already been mentioned), such as the address by an international team of experts from the UN, OSCE, and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. They have warned that: 'Human health...also depends on access to accurate information about the nature of the threats and the means to protect oneself, one's family, and one's community. The right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, through any media, applies to everyone, everywhere, and may only be subject to narrow restrictions'⁶ (Kaye, 2020). This group of experts urges the world's governments to follow these five steps:

1. It is essential that governments provide truthful information about the nature of the threat posed by the coronavirus;
2. Internet access is critical at a time of crisis. It is essential that governments refrain from blocking internet access;

⁶ The experts: Mr David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Mr Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and Mr Edison Lanza, IACHR Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, 19 March 2020; available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25729>

3. The right of access to information means that governments must be making exceptional efforts to protect the work of journalists. Journalism serves a crucial function at a moment of public health emergency. We urge all governments to robustly implement their freedom of information laws to ensure that all individuals, especially journalists, have access to information.
4. False information about the pandemic could lead to health concerns, panic and disorder. In this connection, it is essential that governments and internet companies address disinformation in the first instance by themselves providing reliable information. Resorting to other measures, such as content take-downs and censorship should only be undertaken where they meet the standards of necessity and proportionality. Any attempts to criminalise information relating to the pandemic may create distrust in institutional information, delay access to reliable information and have a chilling effect on freedom of expression;
5. Individual rights to privacy, and non-discrimination, the protection of journalistic sources and other freedoms should be rigorously protected; States must also protect the personal information of patients. We strongly urge that any use of such technology abide by the strictest protections and only be available according to domestic law that is consistent with international human rights standards.

Disinformation is an old story, fuelled by new technology⁷

It is probably an exaggeration that journalism based on verified facts and working in public interest has lost the race with disinformation⁸ and unverified information, but it is not an exaggeration that it remained in their shadow. Moreover, we were witnesses to unwelcome situations in which journalism became a channel for the transmission of disinformation (one of the more frequently mentioned is media conference in which the citizens of Serbia were recommended to go shopping to Trieste⁹, when it was already known that 80 countries in the world are struggling with an unknown virus). The examples of

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⁷ Title taken from: *Journalism, 'Fake news' & Disinformation: Handbook for Journalism Education and Training*, UNESCO, 2020, p. 9; available at: <http://www.unesco.org/open-access/terms-use-ccbysa-en>

⁸ Terms 'false information' and 'disinformation' are used in the paper in opposition to verifiable information which are in the interest of the public, and are the result of the work of professional journalists, as suggested by the UNESCO manual quoted in the paper.

⁹ Quote of the day: Doktor za humor (*Humour Doctor*), <https://www.bizlife.rs/izjava-dana-doktor-za-humor-video/> (Accessed: 20 August 2020).

myths, disinformation, manipulation, irresponsible statements by various greater or lesser authorities, satire and parody, *clickbait* headlines, deceptive descriptions, decontextualized content published under a false name¹⁰ – in general, everything than falls into the category of disinformation, abounds in all corners of the world. From the statement that the virus is a ‘media trick’¹¹, that it is ‘not a virus but a bacteria’¹², that ‘corona will be fried by sunlight’¹³, that ‘5G networks spread the virus’¹⁴, to Bill Gates who ‘planned it all in order to enlarge his wealth’¹⁵, and so on, as so forth. All such content added strength to the infodemic, and spurred disinformation into uncontrolled spreading over social networking sites, practically reaching every individual. Media have mostly been additional channels for spreading disinformation, whereas the task of verification and ‘the struggle to identify the truth and facts in the times of pandemic in Serbia has been assumed by small independent investigative media services, such as Krik, Cenzolovka, CINS, BIRN, predominantly present only on the Internet’ (Marjanović, 2020). Therefore, the infodemic managed to cloud journalists’ view, and further diminish already feeble trust in the media. The same narratives abounded in the news and in disinformation, and social media have really shown their power to ‘amplify human intent’ (Chakrabarti, 2018) in both senses – entrepreneurial and disinformational.

The news industry is going through a transformation which is fatal for the profession, according to ones, or the second chance for journalism, according to others. The former claim: ‘Digital technology, social platforms and the spread of false information and disinformation – have transformed the news industry, creating a new crisis for journalism, with increasingly evident consequences for journalists, the media and the society’ (Posetti, Ireton, Wardle, Derakhshan, Matthews, Abu-Fadil, Trewinnard, Bell, Mantzarlis, 2020:18). The latter say that false news have given journalism a new chance: ‘Quality journalism is given an opportunity to show its value based on expertise, ethics, engagement and experience. It is a wake-up call to be more transparent, relevant and to add value to people’s lives. It can develop a new business model of fact checking, myth busting and generally getting its act together as a better alternative to fakery’ (Beckett, 2017).

10 The typology of false news, based on 34 research papers dealing with this phenomenon is suggested by: Tandoc C. E., Wei Lim Z. and Ling R. (2017). Defining ‘Fake News’: A typology of scholarly definitions, *Digital Journalism*, pages 137-153. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>

11 Bolsonaro protiv korona virusa: trikovi i fantazije, (*Bolsonaro against the corona virus: tricks and phantasies*), <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/30509324.html> (Accessed: 20 August 2020).

12 RASKRIKAVANJE.RS/Live blog o dezinformacijama o koronavirusu, projekt portala KRIK, (UNMASKING.RS/ Live blog on disinformation and the coronavirus, project by KRIK Portal), <https://www.raskrikavanje.rs/covid19/?vrsta=dezinformacije> (Accessed: 20 August 2020).

13 Ibd. 11

14 Ibd. 11

15 Ibd. 11

How much have television and the traditional media in Serbia, and in the region, truly developed new fact-checking services – we do not know, no one has publicly reported that information. However, they have been the most trusted media, and it can be said that they have taken their second chance. The survey, 'Media outlook of the region, before and during the COVID-19 crisis', done by IPSOS in Serbia, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia and Albania, confirms this claim: 'If it was true for the pre-COVID period that considering informative programme, television as a medium dominated in the region, it is also true that its influence during the COVID crisis has increased. Television as a source of information on the corona virus, and the subsequent social, economic and global crisis, has simply become irreplaceable' (IPSOS, 2020).

Journalists and journalism are facing a challenge that has not been given sufficient attention, neither by editorial boards, nor by the society in general: 'Disinformation online, and exploitation and manipulation with our information environment are real, complex problems that affect global societies. Making the term 'fake news' omnipresent and confusing, we have lost a battle in the real war against completely false information' (Silverman, 2018). The only shield are the core professional values, referred to by the journalist of the subsequently published (verified) news on the working conditions of staff in one of the clinical centres in Serbia¹⁶, facing herself and the public with the harsh truth that 'the trust in reporting that is accurate, responsible and independent' (Bulatović, Bulatović, 2009) is not always a guarantee of the public trust. The most important journalistic values: 'accurate news, opposition to government, pressure groups, police that threatens or intimidates, opposition to censors, ...balance between individual right to privacy and the public interest, transparency of sources' (Bell, 2015), have been overshadowed by fear and panic, imposed by frames dictated by the pandemic and the Crisis headquarters, which was promoted as the sole relevant source of information, i. e. the spokesperson of the dominant centre of power in the country.¹⁷

Regardless of the fact that journalists have been pointing to covert censorship and circumstances that discourage professional reporting, crisis management has not recognized this.

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¹⁶ <http://rs.ninfo.com/Vesti/a584860/Ana-Lalic-o-privodjenju-i-tekstu-o-kcv.html>

¹⁷ Sve krize Kriznog štaba, (*All the crises of crisis headquarters*) <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-53257800> (Accessed: 30 August 2020).

The public has shown some sporadic recognition, among other things, because of: the banning of large gatherings and events that are a common source of information; limited movement of people and journalists; focus on official sources with limited ability for data verification; extensive use of social media and general disruption of daily editorial routines, that have led to the establishment of an institutional framework which unequivocally suggested that only what is official is accurate.¹⁸ Any form of pluralism was out of question. The Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on protecting freedom of expression and information in times of crisis as the guarantee of a 'truly democratic society' have remained below the general public's radar, since neither media nor institutions contributed in any way to ensure that media professionals and the public are 'encouraged, directly or through their representative organisations, to engage in a constructive dialogue with the authorities in situations of crisis.' (CoE, Guidelines: 28-29).

The five core journalistic principles: truthfulness, accuracy, independence, fairness, humanity/confidentiality, accountability, to which UNESCO adds integrity and transparency (Posetti, Ireton, Wardle, Derakhshan, Matthews, Abu-Fadil, Trewinnard, Bell, Mantzarlis, 2020:26) are a shield from a newly imposed framework dominated by populist discourse which, as the reporting in the first months of the pandemic showed, makes it difficult for journalists to give media content necessary clarity that would give credence to that content. Of course, the trust in media and journalism is not exclusively the result of the framework imposed by the pandemic and institutions. The crisis of trust and constant doubt towards the media have been present for many years, and this is not characteristic of our region only. In one of the latest international surveys, up to 57% of respondents say that media they turn to for information are contaminated by unreliable information (Elderman Trust Barometer, 2020). Moreover, World Press Freedom Index 2020 compiled by Reporters without borders (RSF), which evaluates the situation for journalists each year in 180 countries of the world, besides suggesting that the next ten years will be pivotal for press freedom, warns that Covid-19 pandemic highlights and amplifies the many crises that threaten the right to freely reported, independent, diverse and reliable information (RSF, 2020).

18 Informacije o Korona virusu ubuduće samo od Kriznog štaba – novinari ukazuju na cenzuru , (Information on the coronavirus in the future only from the crisis headquarters – journalists warn about censorship), <https://www.juznevesti.com/Drushtvo/Informacije-o-korona-virusu-ubuduće-samo-od-Kriznog-staba-novinari-ukazuju-na-prikrivenu-cenzuru.sr.html> (Accessed: 30 August 2020).

Media literacy versus infodemic and disinformation

Media and information literacy, as an overarching concept used by UNESCO (2015) to highlight the importance of developing media and information competences, is actually a key life-long skill needed for navigating through the world of (dis)information. Pandemic and infodemic, each in its way, have framed the social space, not only through psycho-social interaction, but also through the actions of the media and their overall practice. Media and the accompanying digital literacy are necessary for safer and smarter navigation by users through the world of information. Pandemic and infodemic have shown that knowledge of news literacy, which includes journalistic standards and ethics, is essential for navigation in a space contaminated by crisis and saturated by information and (dis)information. When a user masters the skills of media and information literacy, he/she will strengthen his/her attitude towards the news and its inbuilt narrative, understand that news is a construct that (Bulatović, Bulatović, 2013) by definition should be free of opinion and viewpoint (Kovach, Rozenstil, 2007), that journalists adhere to professional methods, criteria and ethical norms that protect them from mistakes, and serve as a shield from disinformation that dominates social media, precisely because information there is not created by professional journalists.

Additionally, by understanding news as a construct based on certain rules, they will strengthen their attitude towards journalists, and become aware that everyone, the user and the author alike, have cognitive biases that can get in the way of factual understanding, since everyone understands information according to their previous knowledge, attitudes and prejudice (Potter, 2015). The time of post-truth and the dominance of the so-called alternative facts, combined with emotional tension, empowers populist rhetoric that encourages the spread of disinformation and the dominance of unverified information. The recognition, evaluation, and deconstruction of such information, by professionals in the first place, and by media users in the second, are important steps towards safe navigation in the world saturated with information. 'Equipping

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people with the skills needed to decode various messages is an ongoing struggle that media educators and journalists are all asked to join. Media literacy helps people to find an equilibrium between trust of news sources and the necessary suspicion to question them' (Posetti, Ireton, Wardle, Derakhshan, Matthews, Abu-Fadil, Trewinnard, Bell, Mantzarlis, 2020:78). Critical analysis skills are therefore irreplaceable, because they will enable, first basic, and then, with time, wider understanding of cognitive biases that can get in the way of factual understanding. They improve capacity to distinguish fact-checkable claims from opinions and alternative facts, enable users to ask key questions about the media and media content, and provide them with the tools to strengthen their position as users in relation to the media. Journalists will obtain tools that will help them navigate through enormous quantity of information in order to reach appropriate sources. Critical analysis skills may help media industry to face the challenges brought about by the digital agenda, and give it a chance for a fairer game in an environment in which everyone can create and publish content and draw audience.

The pandemic and infodemic have enabled disinformation to seriously undermine professional and accountable journalism. Media and information literacy, combined with consistent compliance with generally accepted guidelines on reporting in times of crisis, and education of users in basic literacy related to news, information and disinformation – are valuable tools for the preservation of trust in media, especially the traditional ones, but also for safe navigation in digitally networked world in which information replace one another at the speed of light, often leaving an indelible mark behind them.

Conclusion

In April 2020, an advisory group for public policy, Balkans in Europe (BiEPAG), issued a publication *Western Balkans in times of global pandemic*, saying that: 'COVID-19 pandemic represents a crisis of such proportions that could, without doubt, change the course of history.' To some extent, it has already accelerated the existing trends, such as the crisis of democracy and the

rise of nationalism. Additionally, in only a couple of weeks, it has changed the world, Western Balkans included, through the rise of the national state and intense de-globalisation (BiEPAG, 2020). The publication highlights nine areas (the role of the state, hijacking democracy, geopolitical changes, new nationalisms, social resilience, the impact on the living environment, migrations and healthcare, health and social welfare and their impact on the economy) in which, the authors claim, 'it is the most likely that the pandemics and the government measures have the greatest impact.' Although media were not allocated 'their own' chapter, their importance and role is clearly pointed out: 'The fight against false news can be led by open and transparent communication of the government bodies, with expert leadership. Repressive measures do not threaten false media, but the independent and more critical ones. Securitisation and restriction measures should be applied with care, in combination with education and communication, and not instead of them' (BiEPAG, 2020).

New frames elaborated in this paper, within which the media operate in times of the pandemic, require new answers to multiple challenges we all witness. Besides the most urgent need – to stop the COVID-19 pandemic, good support to navigation through infodemic is also urgently needed, since it is impossible to prevent its spreading. The key to every successful relation, including the one between institutions and citizens, is trust. 'In times of global pandemic, it is based on three core components: accurate information, immediate protection (public health and services) and the prevention of negative economic consequences for the benefit of longer-term stability' (BiEPAG, 2020).

Economic, social and psychological changes caused by the pandemic are a new frame for media functioning, in which heightened emotions, fear and panic, action at all costs and moralizing – act as incentives to some media that thrive in such environments (e.g. tabloids), while putting others on an unequal footing (clickbait) because they stick to core professional norms. Quality information provision, based on accuracy and adherence to journalistic standards, in new pandemic circumstances evidently requires several steps:

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- new media literacy for the strengthening of every individual against infodemic, by developing skills needed for understanding news as a construct, and public awareness raising of the fact that verifiable news created by professionals, are of essential importance for individuals, for democracy and for the development of free and accurate informing in general;
- new definition of the term public interest, no longer in the context of post-truth, but in the framework imposed by the pandemic, when hidden political, economic or similar agenda openly ‘undermines public trust and confidence in journalism as a public watchdog, and may mislead the public by blurring the lines between disinformation and media products containing independently verifiable facts’ (Posetti, Ireton, 2020:9);
- codify, through self-regulation in media companies, an alternative to global and local technological surveillance of false news, so that journalists themselves could master appropriate tools and contribute to the development of their own skills needed in a digitalised world (‘internal fact checking has to an extent led to the function now being assumed by the ‘fifth estate’ of bloggers and other external actors who call out mistakes made by journalists’ (Posetti, Ireton, 2020:9);
- public awareness raising of the role and importance of professional journalism, and the awareness raising of journalist on the importance of the inclusion of the public in their work, and the work of government bodies;
- additional regulation of the media in term of greater self-regulation in the traditional media, and the control and regulation of the modern media;
- the inclusion of the academic community in the creation of public policies on media, and education of journalists in the light of the new circumstances in which they now work and create.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on all the segments of society are impossible to grasp. Public policies are facing an enormous challenge to adapt to new reality caused by

the pandemic. Regaining trust in the whole public sector is a serious task. The media sphere will inevitably be a part of that process. Professional journalism has got a new chance.

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Key words media, health, pandemic, infodemic, COVID-19

Abstract All media have been flooded with news related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Top scientists have been addressing the public more frequently than ever before. In addition to positive attitudes, there have also been negative ones. In the midst of the pandemic, information about health systems that cannot respond adequately, a large number of deaths, and the lack of vaccines provoked a number of unwanted reactions, such as fear and associated disorders. Bad news kept coming. They were followed by conspiracy theories. Certain groups set out to find information they wanted to accept as true on various social networks.

Should the media be allowed to inform about health without check, should they be allowed to pass on 'fake news' in the domain of illness and health, or even manipulate information?

They shouldn't? In order to minimize the negative impacts, there should be mutual responsibility of experts and the media in presenting health-related topics and in disseminating useful and credible information, whereby the media literacy of the end users is indispensable.

Mediji i zdravlje „Anđeo i vrag'

Ključne riječi mediji, zdravlje, pandemija, infodemija, COVID-19

Sažetak Sve medije preplavile su vijesti vezane za COVID-19 pandemiju. Kao nikada do sada javnosti su se obratili vrhunski znanstvenici. Uz pozitivne stavove javili su se i negativni. Informacije o zdravstvenim sustavima koji ne mogu dati odgovarajući odgovor, veliki broj umrlih, nepostojanje cjepiva pobudili su niz neželjenih odgovora, kao što je strah i posljedični poremećaji. Loše vijesti su se nizale. Pratile su ih teorije zavjere. Određene grupe na društvenim mrežama krenule su za pronalaženjem informacija koje žele prihvatiti istinitima.

Smiju li mediji prezentirati o zdravlju bez provjera, smiju li propustiti „lažne vijesti' u području bolesti i zdravlja, smiju li manipulirati informacijama?

Ne bi smjeli?! No, kako bi minimalizirali negativne utjecaje, obostrana je odgovornost stručnjaka i medija u iznošenju tema vezanih uz zdravlje, praćena neizostavnom medijskom pismenosti krajnjih korisnika.

Introduction

'Informing people is more important than the law'..

... was one of the ten principles of Andrija Štampar, the father of the school of public health that sought to achieve 'Health for All.' The results of his work, accomplished within less than ten years during the period between the two world wars, are magnificent, especially if we take into account that there was only one health institution south of the Sava at the time, that the country had a predominantly rural population, uneducated and for the most part illiterate, that 60 out of 100 children were dying, and that both acute and chronic diseases were ravaging the country.¹ The media in various forms, such as posters, leaflets, brochures, or films, also contributed to Štampar's success and the results he was achieving.

Today, the media, in addition to their educational function, play a major role in informing the public regarding all spheres of human activity. With the development of technologies, they have become ubiquitous, and their easy availability has made them one of the most important sources of information on any topic. We live in a world in which we can use modern technologies through the smartphone, which is owned by a large number of people. It is actually a computer that grants us access to expert information, here at our fingertips, in our pocket.

In addition, the media today have a new dimension. Instead of being mere providers of information to the passive user, communication has become two-way and this is where the use of social networks comes to the fore. It is estimated that nowadays some 2.47 billion people use Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, or Messenger on a daily basis, and more than 3.14 billion use at least one Facebook service per month on the average.² Furthermore, the number of users is growing every day. According to research conducted by the Pew Research Center in the United States, the number of social network users increased from less than 20% to almost 80% in the period from 2005 to 2019.³

The use of social networks is present in all age groups, including persons over 65, although their use is often mistakenly associated exclusively with younger age groups. There is a trend of increase in all age groups, and the frequency of use

1 Andrija Štampar, *Pet godina socijalno-medicinskog rada u Kraljevini Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1920-1925* [Five years of social-medical work in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, 1920-1925]. Institut za socijalnu medicinu, Zagreb, 1926.

2 Zephoria Digital Marketing, 'The Top Valuable Facebook Statistics,' <https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/> (last accessed on November 9, 2020).

3 Pew Research Center, 'Social Media Fact Sheet,' <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/> (last accessed on August 27, 2020).

grows as well. Behavioural patterns are similar in the countries of Western civilization as in developed Eastern civilizations, regardless of which social networks are observed.

All of the above shows that social networks have imposed themselves as one of the dominant factors in the media space.

Therefore, it has become important to use this potential related to health information: through targeted messages, through the ability to interact with the public and the two-way communication, which is why an increasing number of health organizations are turning to social networks, especially in health interventions.

Opportunities for discussion (social cohesion) are considered 14 times greater on social networks compared to the written word, i.e. information shared through the social networks has been proven to result in a higher assessment of knowledge than when shared through info-brochures.⁴ This is the potential of social networks as a space for action offering the possibility of changing health behaviour. And yet, the question of the exact mechanism by which the social networks raise awareness and influence behavioural change remains open.

‘What makes a social media campaign successful? Does sharing content or liking imply a change in behaviour?’

In the field of marketing, it is clear what it means to increase the number of clicks or sales, but in the field of public health, such questions remain unanswered.⁵

The situation becomes even more complex in crisis situations related to all segments of human activity, when negative echoes in all fields receive special emphasis, including the media.

Pandemic and the media

Undoubtedly, the media are a powerful means of fostering health education. They play a fundamental role in the public response to a pandemic, as they serve as a portal for communication between governments, health facilities, and people. The ‘invisible’ nature of pandemics imposes an important role on the media as the ‘eye’ of the public. Media channels become windows through which people seek accurate information,

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4 Nick Milton, ‘Why Knowledge Transfer through Discussion Is 14 Times More Effective than Writing,’ <http://www.nickmilton.com/2014/10/why-knowledge-transfer-through.html> (last accessed on October 10, 2020).

5 Gough Aisling et al., ‘Tweet for Behavior Change: Using Social Media for the Dissemination of Public Health Messages,’ *JMIR Public Health Surveillance* 3 (1/2017), e14.

scientific and sensational facts, government decisions, as well as reactions from the general public.⁶

The COVID epidemic broke out in December in Wuhan, China. Shortly after spreading across China, health authorities around the world confirmed cases from Southeast Asia, America, Europe, the eastern Mediterranean, Africa, and the western Pacific. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared on March 11, 2020 that the viral disease had become a pandemic. In countries around the world, measures were taken that our generation had never seen before. Schools and workplaces went into a lockdown, borders between countries were closed, and travel restricted, and these were just some of the precautions to limit the spread of the virus. In such difficult circumstances, the public sought information and evidence-based guidance to help them respond in a system that worked to limit viral transmission. The media, in various forms, became the primary source of information.

Top scientists were addressing the public more frequently than ever before. In addition to positive attitudes, there were also negative ones. Information about health systems that cannot respond adequately, a large number of deaths, and the lack of vaccines provoked a number of unwanted reactions, such as fear and associated disorders. Bad news kept coming. They were followed by conspiracy theories. Certain groups set out to find information they wanted to accept as 'true' on various social networks.

What can be noticed is the striking peculiarity of this crisis in the coincidence of virology and virality. Not only did the virus itself spread very quickly, but also information – and misinformation – about the outbreak, and thus the panic it created in the public. This resulted in an 'infodemic', with waves of misinformation and rumours on the pandemic that prevented its alleviation.

Addressing the audience at the Munich Security Conference on February 15, 2020, Director-General of WHO, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said:

'We're not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic.'

The ease with which inaccuracies and conspiracies can be perpetuated and eternalized through the social media and other common outlets, puts public health at a disadvantage. The

6 Nour Mheidly and Jawad Fares, 'Leveraging Media and Health Communication Strategies to Overcome the COVID-19 Infodemic,' *Journal of Public Health Policy* 41 (2020), pp. 410-420.

most popular global web searches related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) have been rated as 'high' or 'extreme' on the scale of infodemic and the related events.⁷

Scientifically based evidence is vital to ensure that the public is well informed and can respond effectively to a pandemic. An infodemic clearly interferes with such action as it delivers misleading messages about the disease and promotes ineffective precaution measures.

Infodemic and its impact on health

'Measure what is measurable and make measurable what is not so.'

... said Galileo Galilei. In order to be able to talk about a problem, it is necessary to quantify it. Our overview of the magnitude of this problem, the impact of infodemic on human health, includes insights from research conducted by Md. Saiful Islam and his colleagues.⁸ Their research included Facebook, Twitter, and online newspaper editions because these were considered the most representative platforms for monitoring misinformation in the general populace. In the period from December 31, 2019 until April 5, 2020, they analysed 2,311 reports in 87 countries published in 25 languages. Most reports (almost 90%) were classified as rumours, about 8% were conspiracy theories, and about 4% stigma. The rumours were dominated by news about COVID-19: the disease, transmission, and treatment. There were allegations that you could cure yourself by gargling saltwater or even by drinking bleach. The latter seems to be very popular, and just as dangerous, as it has sadly also been used to treat autism, likewise popularized through various media. Also, there was information that the virus had escaped from a laboratory, as well as conspiracy theories about 5G networks that cause and/or contribute to the spread of COVID-19. The consequences were serious, to the point that some transmitters were set on fire in Birmingham and Merseyside, including one at the Nightingale Hospital in Birmingham.⁹ It was a particularly unfortunate damage at a time when hospitals needed to have maximum efficiency.

In addition, rumours, stigma, and conspiracy theories have the potential to reduce the community confidence in governments and international health agencies. Rumours can be

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7 Alessandro Rovetta and Akshaya Srikanth Bhagavathula, 'Global Infodemiology of COVID-19: Analysis of Google Web Searches and Instagram Hashtags,' *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 22 (8/2020), e20673.

8 Md. Saiful Islam et al., 'COVID-19-Related Infodemic and Its Impact on Public Health: A Global Social Media Analysis,' *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 103 (4/2020), pp. 1621-1629.

9 Ahmed Siddiqui my et al., 'Social Media Mis-Information: An Epidemic within the COVID-19 Pandemic,' *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 103 (2020), pp. 920-921.

disguised as credible infection prevention and control strategies, and potentially have serious implications if given priority over proven guidelines. For example, the popular myth of consuming highly concentrated alcohol to disinfect the body and thus kill the virus circulated in different parts of the world.¹⁰ Following this misinformation, approximately 800 persons died, while 5,876 were hospitalized. 60 persons developed complete blindness after drinking methanol as an anti-coronavirus drug.¹¹ In addition to individuals following misinformation, cases have been documented where some religious organizations give inappropriate and erroneous advice. Thus, a church in South Korea used a spray bottle to spray consecrated water among believers, which resulted in more than 100 infections among those present.¹² Similar practices have been observed in some other churches around the world, and even in Croatia Masses have been held despite bans on gatherings.¹³

Stigma and fear of discrimination have also contributed to healthcare-related infections, as observed in some South Asian countries where certain healthcare workers have used deficient protective equipment.¹⁴

Because of the fear of stigma, people may avoid screening/testing and further spread the deadly disease.¹⁵ Additional reasons may be financial, e.g. if they receive insufficient salary compensation.¹⁶ During this pandemic, there have been repeated reports of verbal and physical abuse aimed at persons of Asian descent.¹⁷ Other stigmatized persons include those suffering from COVID, which is primarily associated with fear of infection. In African countries, such situations culminate to the point that they lead to denials of hospital admission.¹⁸

10 World Health Organization, 2020. Alcohol Does Not Protect against COVID-19; Access Should Be Restricted during Lock-down. Alcohol Use. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO, Regional Office for Europe.

11 Aljazeera, 2020. Iran: Over 700 Dead after Drinking Alcohol to Cure Coronavirus. Aljazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/iran-700-dead-drinking-alcohol-cure-coronavirus-200427163529629.html> (last accessed on June 4, 2020).

12 Chan-Kyong P, 2020. Coronavirus: Saltwater Spray Infects 46 Church-Goers in South Korea. South China Morning Post. Causeway Bay, Hong Kong: South China Morning Post.

13 Goran Borković, 'Napadačima na novinarke kraj crkve u Splitu prijeli do pet godina zatvora' [Attackers on Journalists near church in Split risk up to five years in prison], *Novosti. Vijesti/Hrvatska* (April 12, 2020), <https://www.portalnovosti.com/unatoc-zabrani-u-splitu-odrzana-misa-vjernici-napali-novinarke-i-snimateljicu> (last accessed on August 31, 2020).

14 Tawsia Tajmim, 'Coronavirus: 41 Doctors, 10 Nurses Infected,' <https://tbsnews.net/coronavirus-chronicle/covid-19-bangladesh/coronavirus-41-doctors-10-nurses-infected-68689> (last accessed on September 1, 2020).

15 National Herald, 'Social Stigma Forcing Corona Patients to Avoid Screening in India,' <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/social-stigma-forcing-corona-patients-to-avoid-screening-in-india> (last accessed on October 27, 2020).

16 HZZO, 'Obavijest osiguraničima – koronavirus (COVID-19)' [Information for healthcare users – Coronavirus (COVID-19)], <https://www.hzzo.hr/obavijest-osiguraničima-koronavirus/> (last accessed on September 15, 2020).

17 Editorial, 'Stop the Coronavirus Stigma Now,' *Nature* 580 (2020), pp. 165, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01009-0> (last accessed on August 25, 2020).

18 Barry S. Hewlett and Richard P. Amola, 'Cultural Contexts of Ebola in Northern Uganda,' *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 9 (10/2003), pp. 1242-1248.

Rumours, stigma, and conspiracy theories in health crisis situations are not a novelty. During the onset of the HIV epidemic, rumours that HIV did not exist (similar to those in present-day media that COVID does not exist)¹⁹ and that its treatment was harmful to humans resulted in the rejection of antiretroviral therapy in South Africa. Furthermore, their government promoted traditional medicines that encouraged vertical HIV transmission in the community and unfortunately took more than 300,000 lives.²⁰

The spread of rumours, stigma, and conspiracy theories not only affect the health of individuals, but can also have consequences at the societal level, including the healthcare system. After the lockdown, rumours that spread across several countries caused panicked purchases. This in turn led to the rise in prices and a shortage of basic goods such as protective masks, hand sanitizers, and toilet paper, which were out of reach for many. It has been described how the extreme deficiency of some of these items has contributed to the transmission of COVID-19 in hospitals and homes in several cases in some countries.²¹

SHOULD THE MEDIA BE ALLOWED TO INFORM ABOUT HEALTH WITHOUT CHECKS OR PASS ON 'FAKE NEWS' IN THE DOMAIN OF DISEASE AND HEALTH, OR EVEN MANIPULATE INFORMATION? WHY ARE THEY DOING THAT?

False news, misinformation, and conspiracy theories have been a known fact in human history, but in the age of social media they have become extremely important due to the exponential growth of information dissemination, and since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic they have skyrocketed. This situation is extremely worrying, because it undermines trust in health institutions and programmes. The pandemic has raised many questions to which the scientific community is still seeking answers. But the authorities rarely make decisions based on empirical evidence alone: the political interest is key. Governments want to point out that the situation is under control and are too quickly providing false beliefs. Consequently, disagreement between government messages and reversals in recommendations based on emerging evidence (e.g. on the use of masks and their usefulness in protecting against infection) can be misinterpreted as incompetence. Such miscommunication is further given a negative note by the mass media because

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19 Teklic.hr.svaki dan (September 5, 2020), 'Anti-korona prosvjed u Zagrebu: 'Covid je laž, nismo svi covidioti'' [Anti-corona protests in Zagreb: 'COVID is a lie, not all of us are covidioti'], <https://www.teklic.hr/lifestyle/anti-korona-prosvjed-u-zagrebu-covid-je-laz-nismo-svi-covidioti/172506/> (last accessed on October 10, 2020).

20 Chris Bateman, 'Paying the Price for AIDS Denialism,' *South African Medical Journal* 97 (10/2007), pp. 912-914.

21 World Health Organization, 'Home Care for Patients with COVID-19 Presenting with Mild Symptoms and Management of Their Contacts,' [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts) (last accessed on April 17, 2020).

they often favour fast, sensationalist reporting rather than carefully worded scientific messages with a balanced interpretation. The outcome is an erosion of public trust and a sense of helplessness, which are the perfect preconditions for spreading harmful misinformation that makes up a vicious circle.²²

There is another crucial question: 'Who benefits from this information?' According to Claire Wardle, co-founder and director of *First Draft*, there are three aspects of benefit: financial gain, political gain, and experimental manipulation. An example of financial gain is companies that have direct profits from anti-vaccination campaigns. The anti-vaxxer movement has 58 million Internet followers, and the giants of social networks are deliberately keeping them as they generate cumulative revenue of one billion us dollars from advertising. Political gain from launching untruths in order to affirm or challenge a certain policy has long been a proven method. It includes control of words and their meanings, and control of people who have to use those words, especially in times of uncertainty and anxiety, and especially if such times last longer.

22 The Lancet, August 2020: 'The COVID-19 Infodemic,' <https://www.thelancet.com/infection> (last accessed on September 1, 2020).

How can one solve/mitigate the problem?

In addition to personal, professional and moral responsibility, immediate, coordinated action by the global political, corporate, and scientific community is certainly needed to maintain the integrity and credibility of professional expertise and to restore public confidence.

An example could be the efforts of the WHO platform EPI-WIN to reduce misinformation. Its goal is to share verified information, because it is not only about informing people, but also about making sure that they are properly informed.²³

Undoubtedly, social media can and should be used to support the public healthcare response with the development of increasingly adequate tools. In addition, digital technologies can overcome the limitations of social distancing during quarantine and be a resource to support mental health and solidarity with people in isolation.

It must not be forgotten that, at times like this, the literacy of end users is indispensable. In this case, it is especially health

23 John Zarocostas, 'How to Fight an Infodemic,' [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30461-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30461-X/fulltext) (last accessed on September 1, 2020).

literacy, i.e. e-health literacy. From a public healthcare perspective, health literacy is considered a personal skill that develops over a lifetime and promotes empowerment in health-related decision-making,²⁴ while e-health literacy is based on the concepts of both healthcare and media literacy, and refers to an individual's ability to search, understand, and evaluate health data from electronic sources, and to make informed health decisions to address a health-related problem in daily activities.²⁵ In the context of COVID-19, an individual's health literacy supports his or her decisions about washing hands, maintaining physical distance, adopting protective behaviours, visiting a physician, and adhering to quarantine policies, thus contributing to a more likely successful public healthcare strategy.²⁶ Health literacy is even more challenging when knowledge of the topic is incomplete, changing, and context-dependent. Yet, at times like this, e-health literacy is needed around the world to resist the infodemic and to empower individuals to believe and act based on reliable information, recommendations, and advice. This includes people who apply a range of skills to understand health information and the available services even in rapidly changing situations and contexts. Reliable sources must provide accurate and timely information that is relevant to the context, easy to access, easy to understand, easy to implement, and easy to use. Providing reliable, easy-to-understand information in response to these basic, urgent inquiries is crucial.

Crises such as the current COVID-19 pandemic remind us that investing in education and health literacy throughout our lives is a global resource and an asset of any community.

Concluding remarks

The media play an important role in promoting health. But in addition to their positive effects, there are also negative ones (infodemic). In order to minimize these negative impacts, there should be mutual responsibility of experts and the media in presenting health-related topics and in disseminating useful and credible information, whereby the media literacy of the end users is indispensable.

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24 Okan Orkan, 'The Importance of Early Childhood in Addressing Equity and Health Literacy Development in the Life-Course,' *Public Health Panorama* 5 (2019), pp. 170-176.

25 Norman D Cameron and Harvey A Skinner, 'e-Health Literacy: Essential Skills for Consumer Health in a Networked World,' *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 8 (2006/2), e9.

26 Tetine Sentell et al., 'Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Health Literacy Research Around the World: More Important Than Ever in a Time of COVID-19,' *Internet Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17 (9/2020), p. 3010.



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Media Framing of the Coronavirus in Croatia

Key words media framing, storytelling, master narrative, corona crisis, propaganda

Abstract Media framing is a method through which the media frame news into familiar narratives which correspond to the unconscious layers of our psyche. The media tend to overemphasize certain aspects of events, all the while in a Procrustean fashion ignoring those aspects that do not fit into the selected narrative frame (Kunczik and Zipfel, 1998: 103). Media framing relies on storytelling, and theorists note that master narratives selected from myths, fairy tales and dreams, largely reinforce the manipulative effects of media framing (Kent, 2015). This paper examines how Croatian print media framed the news on the coronavirus in the period between the first introduction of social distancing measures (19 March 2020) and relaxation of the measures (27 April 2020). Preliminary research points to the use of the following master narratives: overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, tragedy as punishment for egoism and arrogance, rebirth. In addition, prominent members of the National Crisis Headquarters were framed within the hero archetype. The use of these master narratives in media framing of the corona crisis during the so-called first wave of the epidemic, clearly indicates the intention of propaganda and manipulation.

Medijsko uokvirivanje korona virusa u Hrvatskoj

Ključne riječi medijsko uokvirivanje, pričanje priča, master narativ, korona kriza, propaganda

Sažetak Medijsko uokvirivanje je tehnika kojom mediji uokviruju vijesti u prepoznatljive narative koji korespondiraju s nesvjesnim slojevima psihe. Mediji prenaplašavaju određene aspekte događaja dok, s druge strane, po metodi Prokrustove postelje ignoriraju one aspekte koji se ne uklapaju u odabrani narativ (Kunczik i Zipfel, 1998: 103). Medijsko uokvirivanje se oslanja na vještinu pričanja priča, odnosno storytelling, a teoretičari naglašavaju kako master narativi selektirani iz mitova, bajki i snova u velikoj mjeri osnažuju manipulativne učinke medijskog uokvirivanja (Kent, 2015). Rad istražuje na koji su način hrvatski mediji uokvirivali vijesti o korona virusu u razdoblju od uvođenja mjera društvenog distanciranja (19.03.2020.) do puštanja mjera (27.04.2020.). Preliminarno istraživanje upućuje na korištenje sljedećih master narativa: pobjeda nad čudovištem, od siromaha do bogataša, potraga, tragedija kao kazna za egoizam i oholost, preporod, a istaknuti članovi Nacionalnog stožera uokvireni su u arhetip heroja. Korištenje ovih master narativa u medijskom uokvirivanju korona krize u tzv. prvom valu epidemije, ukazuje na jasnu propagandističku, odnosno manipulativnu namjeru.

Introduction

In 2020 the world was for the most part affected by the pandemic caused by a new virus in the coronavirus family, known officially as SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19), shortened in everyday communication to COVID-19. Scientific research so far reveals that SARS-CoV-2 relates to a zoonosis, i.e. an infectious disease common to humans and certain animal species, that can be transferred from animals to humans and vice versa. Both domestic and wild animals may be sources for the spread of zoonoses. The phenomenon known as a 'spillover event' is the transmission of a virus from one species of host to another, and it is believed that this transfer may have been the starting point for the new SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus.¹ Scientists believe that the new virus is similar to coronaviruses present in some species of bats in the Rhinolophus family which act as possible natural reservoirs of infection. These bats are common in South China and all over Asia, in the Middle East, Africa and Europe. Bats are often viral reservoirs since they tend to gather in great numbers in one place to rest or hibernate. However, due to the different receptors the viruses use to enter cells, scientists note there is a possibility that before it 'spilled over' to humans, the virus was transferred to bats through another intermediary, perhaps, it is supposed, through a wild animal traded on the Wuhan wet markets. This practice increases the risk of pandemics with health, social and economic effects on all the communities involved.² The possibility that the source of the new virus is a bat, an animal which has quite negative cultural and religious connotations in the western cultural sphere (unlike the eastern sphere)³ has caused a media hysteria which spilled over to real life, that is, into the mass killing of bats. Given the fact that bats are quite useful animals, extremely important for the preservation of biodiversity (they help in the natural regeneration of tropical forests, pollinate a range of night blooming plants, control the number of insects active during the night and serve as indicators for the health of the environment), and that many bat species are included on the lists of endangered species,⁴ after a couple of months governments of numerous countries did react and launched awareness-raising campaigns with the aim of stopping various

1 Barney Jeffries, 'The Loss of Nature and the Rise of Pandemics', https://dzouvy59podg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/the_loss_of_nature_and_rise_of_pandemics___protecting_human_and_planetary_health.pdf; Accessed: 9 December 2020.

2 Ibid.

3 Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Rječnik simbola* (Dictionary of Symbols), Nakladni zavod Matice Hrvatske, Zagreb 1989, pp. 677-679

4 State Institute for Nature Protection, Bats, <http://www.haop.hr/hr/tematska-podrucja/prirodne-vrijednosti-stanje-i-ocuvanje/bioraznolikost/sismisi>; Accessed: 9 December 2020.

misconceptions about bats. Even before this pandemic that drastically changed people's lives, bats were among the animals that were often hounded which is why the shifting of responsibility onto someone else through propaganda, in this case, onto another animal species, found fertile ground. This efficiently turned the attention away from the real problems related to this crisis, in other words, the systematic destruction of the environment perpetrated by humans. Bats were not the cause of this crisis, but rather the destruction of ecosystems by the human race. Natural ecosystems play a fundamental role in regulating the transmission and spread of infectious diseases such as zoonoses, which means they are vital in maintaining and nurturing life on Earth, including the life of the human species. Scientists are aware that important factors such as the loss of habitat, creation of artificial environments, wildlife trade and the destruction of biodiversity in general, contribute to the spread of viral diseases.⁵ People however, rarely like to change their habits and way of life, so it is much easier to put the responsibility on someone else. This is a very effective propaganda method of *labelling* the enemy which aims to stimulate prejudice of the general public towards a group or individual, exploiting fear, hatred, contempt or any other negative feeling. In the labelling technique, the compliance of the public to a certain idea is implemented through exploiting the appeal of fear. The devastating effects of exploiting this propaganda technique are familiar from Nazi propaganda which identified the Jews as enemies and sources of all problems in 1930s Germany.⁶ This propaganda technique successfully turns the attention of the public away from important social problems and issues, so that those in charge do not have to deal with addressing them. Propagandists find it much easier to wipe out a whole species than to change the types of behaviour that led to the crisis. In addition to labelling bats as the main enemy, a quite common narrative in the media (new media in particular) during the first half of 2020 and the first wave of the pandemic, was the narrative of the 'dirty Chinese' as enemies who would 'eat anything that flies, crawls, walks, slithers or swims', and this narrative was also sometimes communicated by Donald Trump, the U.S. president during this period⁷. In the first wave of the pandemic as he failed to manage the crisis, he found it

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5 Barney Jeffries, 'The Loss of Nature and the Rise of Pandemics'.

6 Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion, Fifth Edition*, SAGE, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC 2012, p. 240.

7 Donald Trump Tweets Describing Coronavirus As 'A Very Bad 'Gift' From China', <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/trump-tweets-describing-coronavirus-as-a-very-bad-gift-from-china-2236813>; Accessed: 9 December 2020.

politically opportune to turn the attention of the American public away from the inadequacy of the administration to the 'real culprit' – the Chinese enemy.

However, labelling, also known as *name-calling*⁸, is not the only propaganda method used in foreign and local media by representatives of the government in order to shift the attention of the public and use the crisis for gaining political points. A great number of propaganda techniques dating to the period before World War II has also been used, such as *glittering generalities* through which individuals (for e.g., representatives of the National Crisis Headquarters) were linked to universal human values thus creating the framework for the acceptance and support for their statements without examination of the evidence. The so-called *transfer* technique was also often used, in which positive attributes of some universal and national symbols are transferred to individuals, as well as *testimonials*, where statements by individuals holding a position of authority in the public or even by innocent children, are purposefully shared with the public, in order to ensure the uncritical acceptance of all ideas, measures and attitudes by representatives of the Crisis Headquarters. The technique known as *plain folks* was also used, a method in which the speaker tries to convince the audience that his/her ideas are good because they are rooted in common sense, are self-explanatory, close to the common people, and the speaker is also one of the people. During the first wave of the corona crisis, the Crisis Headquarters and members of the Government made wide use of the *card stacking* technique which included offering selective information that support the proposed measures and ideas. The *bandwagon* technique was also used, manipulating the conformism of people who like to belong to socially accepted groups under the banner 'everybody's doing it!' thus convincing citizens to follow the Headquarters' measures and hop on this 'bandwagon', so that the 'parade' would not leave the station without them.⁹ Given the fact that media framing entails the creation of quite a selective interpretation frame for presenting very complex information and social phenomena, it is manipulative in itself and corresponds to propaganda intentions related to hidden, often ideological, interests.

This paper deals with media framing of the coronavirus in Croatia, and the work consists of four parts: Introduction,

8 Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion, Fifth Edition*, p. 237.

9 Alfred M. Lee and Elizabeth B. Lee, *The fine art of propaganda*. International Society for General Semantics, San Francisco 1979.

The theory of media framing and propaganda, Analysis of media framing of the coronavirus in Croatia and finally, the Conclusion. Following the introductory section in which the subject matter is placed within a situational frame, the second part presents the media framing phenomenon and how it relates to propaganda. Given the fact that media framing largely relies on stories and storytelling, the first section also presents manipulation with so-called master myths in media framing and research results on media manipulation of the pandemic theme from other countries. The third part presents a case study of media framing of the coronavirus in Croatia using examples of master narratives used for presenting this subject in Croatian media. This paper explores the way in which Croatian print media have framed the news on the coronavirus in the period from first introducing social distancing measures (19 March 2020) to relaxing the measures (27 April 2020). The unit of analysis are thematically selected media articles which illustrate master narratives (overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, tragedy as punishment for egoism and arrogance, rebirth, the hero archetype) used for media framing of the coronavirus. The articles have been analysed using the qualitative research method of narrative analysis according to the matrix created by Gillespie and Toynbee. The final part of the paper offers research conclusions and recommendations.

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The theory of media framing and propaganda

According to Sproule, propaganda 'represents the work of large organizations or groups to win over the public for special interests through a massive orchestration of attractive conclusions packaged to conceal both their persuasive purpose and lack of sound supporting reasons'.¹⁰ Jowett and O'Donnell emphasize that the use of propaganda includes purposefulness, which is why it is related to control and considered to be an intentional effort to change or maintain the balance of power useful to the propagandist. In their view, the purposeful effort by propagandists is usually related to a clear institutional ideology and goal since the purpose of propaganda is to share a particular

¹⁰ J. Michael Sproule, *Channels of Propaganda*. Edinfo, Bloomington 1994, p. 8.

ideology with the public.¹¹ The aim of using propaganda methods through mass media is the 'systematic and conscious promotion of a set of ideas and actions developed by those advocating for such a doctrine and having use of it'.¹² Although propaganda from opposing groups is perceived as negative and is easily identified as propaganda, the ideology of one's own group is not perceived as either good or bad.¹³ Propagandists promote the manufacture of consent in the public through 'appealing to feelings, using insecurities, capitalizing on the ambiguities of language and inverting the rules of logic'.¹⁴ Herman and Chomsky see a strong link between propaganda and media framing since the purpose of media is to serve the needs and interests of the elite which to a large extent benefits from policies related to neoliberal economy. According to Herman and Chomsky, the media fulfil this purpose precisely by framing the news.¹⁵ Car emphasizes the particular importance of how journalists select their information because 'if the media do not report about it – it might as well not have happened', and 'what they do report about – continues to be retold and shared in relation to the media discourse which has imposed an appropriate perspective onto this event or issue, as well as the frame within which we as the general public should understand the event or issue, continue discussing it, or merely accept it as fact', which happens, 'regardless of whether this is relevant, verified or true'.¹⁶

Tankard warns that the media frame may eliminate certain voices or weaken arguments because the media may frame some questions and phenomena in a way that is beneficial only to one side, without explicitly showing bias. According to Tankard, the process of defining rules of debate to a large extent supports the manufacture of consent for a chosen ideological position.¹⁷ Hackett noted that analysing media framing may reveal background interests which impact the way in which the media address a certain topic or phenomenon. Framing is a more sophisticated concept than the concept of media bias, it goes beyond the 'for or against' approach or the distinction between positive and negative, as it enables much more complex emotional as well as cognitive responses by determining the horizon of a particular media debate. Media framing is an important instrument of propaganda because it can influence the media public, even to the point

11 Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion, Fifth Edition*, p. 3.

12 Eileen Gambrill and Amanda Reiman, 'A Propaganda Index for Reviewing Problem Framing in Articles and Manuscripts: An Exploratory Study', *Plus One* 6 (5/2011), p. 7.

13 Deepa Kumar, 'Media, War, and Propaganda: Strategies of Information Management during the 2003 Iraq War', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3 (1/2012), pp. 48-69.

14 Eileen Gambrill and Amanda Reiman, 'A Propaganda Index for Reviewing Problem Framing in Articles and Manuscripts: An Exploratory Study', p. 8.

15 Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon Books. New York 1988.

16 Viktorija Car, *Mi i oni kroz medijske naočale. (Us and Them Through the Media Lens)* ACT Printlab. Zagreb-Belgrade-Sarajevo 2015, p. 7.

17 James W. Tankard, 'The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing', in: Stephen D. Reese, O. Gandy, and A. E. Grant, *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, Routledge, New York 2001, p. 95.

of completely turning public opinion by changing the media frame within which a certain phenomenon is presented.¹⁸ The theory of media framing approaches the media text through its interpretative frame as 'the central idea that organizes news content by providing it with context' through shaping, editing and presenting news that consciously or unconsciously put information within a certain interpretation frame.¹⁹ According to media framing theory, the journalistic choice of news items uses an interpretation frame in order to select and process information, anchoring it in already memorized data/experiences and in interpretations of new events on the basis of these categorized, organized and interpreted life experiences with additional meaning. Framing selects, processes and interprets in such a way that it emphasizes certain aspects of reality, while ignoring or neglecting other aspects. This process may happen consciously or unconsciously, and does not relate only to the way journalists choose the news, but also how they impact the public, since the public uses existing interpretation frames and develops new ones. In framing, journalists emphasize those aspects of a phenomenon that support the crucial building blocks of interpretation frames.²⁰ Early developments of media framing theory were mainly influenced by Goffman's metaphorical concept of frame as a part of the picture (*strip*) which means narrowing down an event or phenomenon to one strip around which a framework can then be built, i.e., the dominant narrative which largely impacts the way in which the phenomenon is to be interpreted as a whole. This concept is followed by the concept of *setting the tone* which guides the total impression of a phenomenon, while the third frame concept emphasizes the frame as the main idea around which the media narrative is built as a whole.²¹ Within media framing, Gamson and Modigliani developed the theory of media packaging. A media package can be recognized through key words and the use of phrases that point to a particular media frame. In addition to this approach, the media framing theory also developed the idea of framing as a multidimensional concept according to which a media frame is impacted by a whole range of factors including the journalist's gender, the publication source, the choice of words in presenting opposing views etc.²² Shoemaker and Reese note that the dominant, elite and journalistic ideology may all influence how the news is framed. The

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18 Ibid, p. 96.

19 Viktorija Car, *Mi i oni kroz medijske naočale*. ACT Printlab. Zagreb-Beograd-Sarajevo 2015, p. 7.

20 Michael Kunczik and Astrid Zipfel, *Uvod u znanost o medijima i komunikologiju* (Introduction to Media Science and Communicology), Zaklada Friedrich Ebert, Zagreb 2006, pp. 147-149.

21 James W. Tankard, 'The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing', p. 98.

22 Ibid, p. 99.

dominant ideology is the one that takes for granted the majority worldview of a particular society. Elite ideology is the ideology of the ruling political elite and it usually corresponds to the dominant ideology. Shoemaker and Reese emphasize that elite ideology is the main factor in media framing. Journalistic ideology is related to media routine and values of professional journalism.²³

It should be noted that there is no agreement in communication theory on media framing theory/theories. Some theorists do not see media framing theories as empirically confirmed²⁴ but it is extremely difficult to implement principles of empirical evidence within social sciences in the same way they are implemented in natural and technical sciences. The media frame theory developed through observation and analyses of a corpus of media texts as well as through searching for certain correspondences and rules, that is, more or less stable patterns within existing media narratives. It should also be noted that according to some theorists, media frames are not eternal or universal, but change in line with changes in ideologies and value systems. Brosius and Eps for instance believe that new frameworks are used for extraordinary situations or new topics, thus replacing the old ones. This is particularly evident in reports on crises. After the initial information on a new crisis, the media pile up data on similar crises although this information needn't have the same level of gravity or complexity. In this way the media influence how we perceive the gravity of the crisis even though reality and facts are largely different from the reality presented in the media.²⁵

Research in communication trends shows that storytelling is one of the most important skills for anyone working in communications professionally.²⁶ Storytelling is defined as the normative, discursive and political process of creating a story, through which a problem or source of difficulties is articulated, as well as possible solutions and way of convincing the public to agree, unite and join the process of collective action.²⁷ It entails creating a situation in a planned and selective manner so that the audience may be prepared for the future. This process takes into account the existence of multiple and potentially opposed perspectives of reality, depending on the different ambitions, interests and opinions of the general public. Storytelling is here then considered to be a promising tool in designing

23 Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, S. *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Media Content*. Longman. New York 1996, p. 234.

24 Michael Kunczik and Astrid Zipfel, *Uvod u znanost o medijima i komunikologiju*, Zaklada Friedrich Ebert, Zagreb 2006, pp. 147-148.

25 Hans-Bernd Brosius and Peter Eps, 'Verändern Schlüsselereignisse journalistische Selektionskriterien? Framing am Beispiel der Berichterstattung über Anschläge gegen Ausländer und Asylanten', in: *Rundfunk und Fernsehen* (41/1993), pp. 512-530.

26 'usc Annenberg's 2017 Global Communications Report predicts convergence of marketing and public relations', <https://annenberg.usc.edu/research/center-public-relations/news/usc-annenberg-2017-global-communications-report-predicts>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

27 Teun A. Van Dijk, 'Imagining future places: How designs co-constitute what is, and thus influence what will be'. *Planning Theory* 10 (2/2011), pp. 124-143.

meaning and encouraging collective action towards a specific direction.²⁸ Media framing relies on the skill of storytelling, and theorists like Goffmann,²⁹ Tobias,³⁰ Booker,³¹ Burke,³² Kent³³ and Lule³⁴ emphasize that master narratives (or master myths as they are called by some theorists), selected from myths, fairy tales and dreams, to a large extent strengthen the manipulative effects of media framing. Lule defines a master myth as a role model or pattern, the total invisible root of consciousness.³⁵ According to Bordwell and Thompson, a narrative is any selection of causally linked events happening within a certain time and space.³⁶ Media framing is therefore a technique through which the media frames the news into narratives that correspond to universally recognizable patterns at the deepest, unconscious levels of the psyche, which can influence how the public reacts, as can be evidenced by examples of Nazi, Soviet and other totalitarian propaganda, but also modern democratic propaganda. The manipulation of such narratives however, is not guaranteed or absolute. In spite of the growing domination of global media conglomerates in the modern global media ecosystem, which has been facilitated by the increasing deregulation of rules on media monopolies,³⁷ media literacy of the public as well as the existence of different media interpretations and views in different media, to a large extent limits the propaganda effect of manipulating master narratives in media framing. The qualitative research method for analysing narratives by Gillespie and Toynbee includes the descriptive phase identifying parts of the narrative in order to examine the way in which the media text is organized, and the interpretative phase in which the

28 Stefan Hartman, Constanza Parra i Gert de Roo, 'Framing strategic storytelling in the context of transition management to stimulate tourism destination development', *Tourism Management* 75 (2019), p. 90.

29 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Northeastern University Press, Boston 1986.

30 Ronald Tobias, *20 Master Plots (And How to Build Them)*. Writer's Digest Books, Cincinnati 1993.

31 Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*, Continuum, London New York 2006.

32 Kenneth Burke, *Counter-statement*. University of California Press. Berkeley 1968.

33 Michael L. Kent, The Power of Storytelling in Public Relations: Understanding the 20 Master Plots. *Public Relations Review* 41 (2015), pp. 480–489.

34 Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories. The Mythological Role of Journalism*, The Guilford Press, New York 2001.

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35 Ibid.

36 David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Minding Movies: Observations on the Art, Craft, and Business of Filmmaking*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago London 2011.

37 Joseph Turow, *Mediji danas: Uvod u masovne komunikacije* (Media Today: Mass Communication in a Converging World), Clio, Belgrade 2013, pp. 346–347.

meaning of narrative elements is interpreted. The focus is on analysing the ways of providing information (Information with the aim of garnering support; Positive appraisal of us; Negative appraisal of them; Emphasizing community/common participation in the topic of the statement; Emphasizing a certain perspective and/or concept of the statement (problem, solution, guilt etc.).³⁸

The corona crisis which has been the main theme of this year, definitely constitutes a large global crisis, and according to Brosius and Eps³⁹, it is precisely new extraordinary situations like these that use new media frames to change the old ones. Researchers of manipulative communication styles have meticulously analysed the way in which the topic of the corona crisis has been presented in the media, as well as the way in which it corresponds to previous media presentations of epidemics. For example, Ali Haif Abbas uses Van Dijk's discourse analysis in his research to show how *The New York Times* in the U.S. and the *Global Times* in China have framed the news on the coronavirus pandemic for political and ideological purposes. The *New York Times* focused on propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party, its inability to control the spread of the epidemic, weaknesses in controlling the virus and providing medical equipment as well as the totalitarian treatment of people and healthcare workers. The Chinese *Global Times* also focused on negative stories relating to COVID-19 in the U.S., particularly the inability of the American administration led by President Trump in fighting the new virus.⁴⁰ It is significant that neither of these media questioned the way in which the pandemic was managed within one's own country which confirms the thesis that framing news is mainly influenced by ideology of the elite, which is usually in line with dominant ideology. Tiffany Karalis Noel is one of the rare researchers to focus on analysing the way in which American media have encouraged xenophobia through media framing of people of Asian descent during the global COVID-19 pandemic. She notes it is necessary to question the different aspects of intercultural communication regarding public health issues.⁴¹ This approach unfortunately is not the dominant model in narratives of research articles addressing the subject of media manipulation during the corona crisis, so it seems that variants of elite and dominant ideologies can

38 Marie Gillespie and Jason Toynbee, *Analysing media texts*, Open University Press / Open University, Maidenhead New York 2006.

39 Hans-Bernd Brosius and Peter Eps, 'Verändern Schlüsselereignisse journalistische Selektionskriterien? Framing am Beispiel der Berichterstattung über Anschläge gegen Ausländer und Asylanten'.

40 Ali Haif Abbas, 'Politicizing the Pandemic: A Schemata Analysis of COVID-19 News in Two Selected Newspapers', *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law - Revue internationale de Sémiotique juridique*, 2020, DOI: 10.1007/s11196-020-09745-2.

41 Tiffany Karalis Noel, 'Conflating culture with COVID-19: Xenophobic repercussions of a global pandemic', *Social Sciences & Humanities Open 2* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaoh.2020.100044>.

be seen not only in articles for the general public but also in scientific articles dealing with this subject.

Jacob for example researched how the COVID-19 pandemic damaged the image of China as an efficient one-party communist state due to obfuscation and late reporting on the viral epidemic. He says that China failed to adjust its communication to new circumstances, i.e. it followed traditional interests of foreign affairs and security, focusing on its power struggle with the U.S. The author believes that the Chinese Communist Party reacted with such authoritarian and restrictive responses to the pandemic in order to confirm its legitimacy.⁴² At the same time, Jacob fails to notice the manipulative media communication on the pandemic shared by the U.S. administration. Similar conclusions are offered by Vanessa Molter and Renee DiResta who analysed English language posts on Facebook by Chinese state media regarding the coronavirus pandemic in order to gain insight into the way Chinese authorities communicate this topic to the rest of the world through using state media. They noticed these repeating frames: sharing positive stories and promoting responses to the pandemic by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), rewriting recent history in a way beneficial for the CCP during the progress of the coronavirus pandemic and using targeted adverts for sharing intended messages. They concluded this was problematic propaganda content containing misinformation and conspiracy theories. Therefore they suggest social networks should not publish paid advertisements of such harmful content.⁴³ It is a pity that this type of analysis has a clear ideological bias.

Other researchers used a somewhat more objective analytical perspective to focus on communication on social networks, with particular focus on Twitter, since traditional media often report information precisely from this social network which has been confirmed as the most common source of fake news.⁴⁴ They concluded that sharing misinformation on social media spreads faster than the spread of COVID-19 and that misinformation can have extremely harmful consequences for people's health.⁴⁵

This short review of some scientific articles examining the manipulative media communication on the pandemic, reveals the existence of very selective, ideologically biased media

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42 Jabin T. Jacob, 'To Tell China's Story Well': China's International Messaging during the COVID-19 Pandemic', *China Report* 56, (3/2020), pp. 374-392.

43 Vanessa Molter and Renee DiResta, 'Pandemics & Propaganda: How Chinese State Media Creates and Propagates CCP Coronavirus Narratives', *The Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* 1 (1/2020), Special Issue on Covid-19 and Misinformation.

44 Robinson Meyer, 'The Grim Conclusions of the Largest-Ever Study of Fake News', *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/03/largest-study-ever-fake-news-mit-twitter/555104/> Accessed: 20 December 2020.

45 Zapan Barua, Sajib Barua, Salma Aktar, Najma Kabir and Mingze Li, 'Effects of misinformation on COVID-19 individual responses and recommendations for resilience of disastrous consequences of misinformation', *Progress in Disaster Science* 8 (2020), pp. 100-119. Kris Hartley and Vu Minh Khuong, 'Fighting fake news in the COVID-19 era: policy insights from an equilibrium model', *Policy Sciences* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-020-09405-z>.

frameworks not only in news articles, but also in scientific texts. The use of the analytical matrix suggested by Gillespie and Toynbee reveals all the crucial elements of manipulating master narratives within the framing process:

- Providing information with the aim of gaining support;
- Positive appraisal of us;
- Negative appraisal of them;
- Emphasizing community/common participation in the pandemic theme; and
- Emphasizing a certain perspective and/or thematic concept (problem, solution, guilt etc.).

Analysis of media framing of the coronavirus in Croatia

Ever since the beginning of the corona crisis, the media in Croatia have closely followed this topic. Most mainstream media in Croatia put it on their agenda (*agenda setting*) and this already makes clear how largely they influenced what the citizens of Croatia should think about, or even in what manner.⁴⁶ In terms of agenda setting i.e. the media agenda, this topic combines several characteristic agendas:⁴⁷ the media, public and political agenda, and in the autumn wave of the pandemic and the increased communication on COVID-19 vaccines, a corporate agenda also came to the fore. This intermingling of interests by different stakeholders who hold the power to set the media agenda, makes this topic particularly interesting for media analysis. However, agenda setting in the context of combined interests by different stakeholders who hold the power to set an agenda (the media, public interest, politics, corporations), merely provide the first manipulative layer in media presentation. Given the fact that this topic dominated the media agenda during the whole period since social distancing measures were introduced (19 March 2020) up to when they were relaxed (27 April 2020), and that it was strongly contextualized with the coming parliamentary elections, the way in which the media framed the topic in this period, points to their strong ambition to convince the citizens of Croatia how they should be thinking about this crisis, i.e. that the Government of Croatia and the

46 M. McCombs and D. Shaw, The agenda-setting function of the mass media, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (2/1976), pp. 176-187.

47 Everett M. Rogers and James W. Dearing, 'Agenda-setting research: Where has it been, where is it going?', *Annals of the International Communication Association* 11 (1/1988), pp. 555-594.

National Crisis Headquarters appointed by the Government (hereinafter referred to as: Crisis Headquarters) are extremely successful in managing this extremely difficult crisis which makes Croatia one of the most successful countries in managing the pandemic – due to heroic efforts and capabilities of the Government and its satellite as represented by the Crisis Headquarters. From the beginning of the crisis, the Croatian Government was particularly aware of the fact that the way in which managing of the corona crisis is perceived in the public will be the crucial factor determining the winner of the parliamentary election. In March 2020, and without a public competition, the Government employed the company Media Val, a PR agency. In March this agency bought the domain *Koronavirus.hr* and started with the provision of its services to the Government. Asked by *Faktograf*, the only fact checking portal in Croatia, how this cooperation worth several hundred thousands kunas was actually organized, the Government stated: 'The Ministry of Health organized the emergency establishment of the official website *koronavirus.hr* and related webpages and accounts on social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, as well as corresponding topics on *forum.hr*, in order to provide regularly updated and correct information related to the COVID-19 epidemic, with the aim of protecting the lives and health of citizens of the Republic of Croatia and other persons as well as to provide them with timely information, which is considered to be among the security interests of the Republic of Croatia.'⁴⁸ Given this extraordinary short response by the Government, it was impossible to conclude whether these services included sharing information based on which the media framed the Government during the lockdown period, and especially select members of the Crisis Headquarters by the mentioned agency, or whether this was a consequence of activities by the Government's i.e. institutional public relations which also points to the use of state resources for party interests. However, the fact that these were created and not spontaneous narratives is clear from the great similarity of various content published in different media during this period.

In accordance with the thesis by Brosius and Eps that emergency situations use new frameworks which supplant the old ones, it should be noted that in the beginning of the corona

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48 Ana Brakus, 'Vlada skriva tko je odlučio zaobići javnu nabavu i platiti PR agenciji pola milijuna kuna za stranicu *Koronavirus.hr*' (The Government is hiding who bypassed public procurement procedures and paid half a million kuna for the *Koronavirus.hr* webpage), <https://faktograf.hr/2020/05/19/media-val-vlada-koronavirus-stranica/>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

crisis, the media in Croatia made comparisons to previous crises caused by viruses. The webpage telegram.hr for example explains in an article dated 20 April,⁴⁹ why the world had to stop due to COVID-19, and not in the case of SARS, MERS or Ebola virus. The author of the article finds the explanation in epidemiological reasons because 'SARS and MERS did not cause the same level of harm like COVID-19 as they do not spread so easily. SARS and MERS spread through much closer contact, among members of families or healthcare workers and their patients. Most importantly, those infected do not spread the disease while they don't have the symptoms. After they are taken ill, people usually remain at home or are hospitalized which makes it harder for the virus to spread.' The author goes on to explain that although swine flu spreads easily, it is not as deadly, because in 2009 it killed more than half a million people and it is estimated that more than a billion people were infected by the end of 2010, while Ebola which is much deadlier than Covid-19, can be isolated more easily. According to Lule's master myth matrix, this article frames the coronavirus within the flood narrative which in newspaper articles as a rule relates to large natural disaster events, dangers related to inexplicable and wild forces of nature faced with which man is often helpless. This narrative of the coronavirus was present in almost all media content during the lockdown period, the purpose of which was to convince the public that suspension of human rights guaranteed under the Constitution is justified, even though this was not the case in similar situations from previous crises. A new narrative was created which strongly took hold in the media reality even after the lockdown period, and according to this frame, human rights to the freedom of movement, socializing and work were less important than the necessary fight against an invisible enemy through which a change in ideology and value systems is created. During the lockdown period, media content often demanded that the public accept the narrative of a victimized hero. The 'victim' adds a human element to the tragedy in most news items, and the victim master myth offers examples of bravery and heroics in directly facing death: plans, careers, dreams and lives shatter in an instant due to the virus as a force of nature, the message being that life should be lived alongside the constant presence of death. On 26 March 2020 in an article and segment "These

49 Eva Benedik, 'Zašto je svijet morao stati zbog COVIDA-19, ali zbog SARS-a, MERS-a i Ebole nije?' (Why the world had to stand still for COVID-19, but not for SARS, MERS or Ebola?), <https://www.telegram.hr/zivot/zasto-je-svijet-morao-stati-zbog-covid-19-ali-zbog-sars-a-mers-a-i-ebole-nije/>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

are the heroes fighting the invisible enemy: You find it difficult to stay at home? Look at them and think again'⁵⁰ RTL Television celebrates doctors, salesclerks, delivery workers and others who bravely work every day and endanger their own lives so that citizens for whom the epidemic has limited the right to move, socialize and work, would find life in isolation more pleasant. The victim narrative is in the frame. A similar framework is obvious in the messages: *Be responsible, stay at home*, appealing to the public to accept the role of the victimized hero in order to overcome an invisible, powerful enemy. Media discourse perpetuates victory narratives like David vs. Goliath, or the common man against the unrelenting forces of nature, salvation, the fall and sacrifice that leads to victory and a painful transformation promising a new, better world. In opposition to the responsible heroes, the media space was in this period also filled with punishment narratives on irresponsible individuals who do not listen to epidemiologists due to their stupidity or arrogance. For example, an article on Net.hr published on 21 March 2020 under the title 'Incredible arrogance: Man from the Virovitica area in self-isolation invited his friends and had a party, now he is facing a hefty fine'⁵¹ warns of an arrogant individual fined with 8000 HRK. In line with this narrative, the Croatian media also reported on the American basketball player who joked about the virus and was later infected,⁵² and an American youth who went to a corona party where he caught the virus and died a horrible death.⁵³ Punishments vary from financial ones, to public shaming and deaths. At the same time, individuals from the Crisis Headquarters, primarily Davor Božinović,

50 Danka Derifaj, 'Dok ste vi doma, oni rade za vas! Direkt donosi priču o herojima u doba koronavirusa' (While you stay in, they work for you! Direkt presents the story on heroes during the corona crisis), <https://www.rtl.hr/vijesti-hr/korona/3671445/dok-ste-vi-doma-oni-rade-za-vas-direkt-donosi-pricu-o-herojima-u-doba-koronavirusa/>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

51 'Nevjerojatna bahatost: Muškarac s područja Virovitice u samoizolaciji pozvao ekipu i napravio tulum, platit će masnu kaznu', <https://net.hr/danas/crna-kronika/nevjerovatna-bahatost-muskarac-s-podrucja-virovitice-u-samoizolaciji-pozvao-ekipu-i-napravio-tulum-platit-ce-masnu-kaznu/>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

52 'Prije dva dana sprdao se s koronavirusom, a sada je prvi zaraženi košarkaš u NBA ligi' (Two days ago he joked about the coronavirus, now he is the first infected basketball player in the NBA League), <https://gol.dnevnik.hr/clanak/rubrika/kosarka/rudy-gobert-sprdao-se-s-koronavirusom-prije-dva-dana---597205.html>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

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53 'Muškarac otišao na 'korona party' kako bi dokazao da je virus prevara. Zarazio se i umro!' (Man goes to a 'corona party' to prove the virus is a hoax. He got infected and died!), <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/muskarac-otisao-na-korona-party-kako-bi-dokazao-da-je-virus-prevara-zarazio-se-i-umro-15007927>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

Krunoslav Capak and Alemka Markotić, were transformed almost overnight into media heroes during the analysed period and the media worked hard to build their personality cults. Ranging from panegyrics to Alemka Markotić⁵⁴ and Minister Vili Beroš⁵⁵ in lifestyle magazines such as *Gloria*, to media inflating the news on children drawing corona heroes,⁵⁶ or their accessibility and everyday qualities,⁵⁷ in addition to the constant tension of press conferences held every day, when these archetypal heroes present to the public their successful heroic fight against the powerful enemy. Their characteristics during the lockdown period were bravery, professionalism, wisdom, empathy, strictness, a serious approach, unquestionable authority, and they were often compared to epidemiologists from other countries in order to stress their superiority in finding the most appropriate response to the crisis, which confirms the quest narrative.

Analysing the previously mentioned articles through using the analytical matrix suggested by Gillespie and Toynbee, all key elements for manipulating master narratives in the media framing process are visible here:

- Providing information with the aim of gaining public consent for suspending fundamental constitutional rights (limiting freedom,⁵⁸ freedom of movement,⁵⁹ the right to public assembly,⁶⁰ commerce freedoms,⁶¹ etc.) which is visible in media content explaining why the world needed to stand still for COVID-19;
- Positive appraisal of us, the responsible, obedient, those aboard the acceptable train so skilfully managed by the Government of the Republic of Croatia and its lobbyists in the Crisis

54 'Heroina nacije: prof. Alemka Markotić otkriva kada će nam biti bolje: 'vidim svjetlo na kraju tunela'', (National heroine: Professor Alemka Markotić reveals when things will get better: 'I can see the light at the end of the tunnel') <https://www.gloria.hr/gl/magazin/heroina-nacije-prof-alemka-markotic-otkriva-kada-ce-nam-biti-bolje-vidim-svjetlo-na-kraju-tunela-10184098>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

55 'Ekskluzivno: supruga junaka nacije otkriva čime ju je ministar osvojio i što najviše kod njega voli' (Exclusive: wife of national hero reveals how the Minister swept her off her feet and what she loves most about him'), <https://www.gloria.hr/gl/magazin/ekskluzivno-supruga-junaka-nacije-otkriva-cime-ju-je-ministar-osvojio-i-sto-najvise-kod-njega-voli-10106017>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

56 Martina Petrović, 'Djeca crtežima pokazuju da su članovi stožera njihovi junaci - Berošev i Božinovićev odgovor je nevjerojatno dirljiv' (Children draw members of the headquarters as their heroes and the touching response by Beroš and Božinović), <https://miss7.24sata.hr/lifestyle/djeca-crtezima-pokazuju-da-su-clanovi-stozera-njihovi-junaci-berosev-i-bozinovicev-odgovor-je-nevjerojatno-dirljiv-29839>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

57 'Šimun o pozivu ministra: 'On još stigne i mene nazvati, sad je definitivno heroj'' (Šimun on the Minister's invitation: He can still call me, he is definitely a hero now), <https://novosti.hr/simun-o-pozivu-ministra-on-jos-stigne-i-mene-nazvati-sad-je-definitivno-heroj/>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

58 The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, Article 22: 'No one shall be deprived of liberty, nor may such liberty be restricted, except when specified by law, upon which a court shall decide', <https://www.sabor.hr/en/constitution-republic-croatia-consolidated-text>; Accessed: 13 May 2021.

59 The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, Article 32: 'Anyone lawfully within the territory of the Republic of Croatia shall enjoy freedom of movement and freedom to choose his/her residence. All citizens of the Republic shall be entitled to leave the state territory at any time and permanently or temporarily settle abroad, and to return at any time. The right to movement within the territory of the Republic of Croatia and the right to depart may be exceptionally curtailed by law, if necessary to protect the legal order, or the health, rights and liberties of others', <https://www.sabor.hr/en/constitution-republic-croatia-consolidated-text>; Accessed: 13 May 2021.

- Headquarters which is visible in media content celebrating heroes in the war against the invisible enemy;
- Negative appraisal of those not aboard the Government train and not obeying the prescribed epidemiological measures who then need to be punished with fines, public shaming, disease, and the worst among them, with death;
 - Emphasizing community/shared participation in the pandemic theme visible through continued reiteration of messages 'Be responsible, stay at home' appealing to the acceptance of the victimized hero role in order to together overcome the invisible, powerful enemy;
 - Emphasizing a certain perspective and/or concept of the pandemic theme is visible in creating a whole new narrative that deeply took hold in the media reality even after the lockdown period, and according to this frame, human rights are not as important as the fight against the virus which paves the way to a change in ideology and value systems.

IN CONCLUSION

The presented analysis makes clear that in Croatia during the lockdown, media narratives were extremely influenced by elite ideology i.e. ideology of the ruling party, which had the consequence of creating very recognizable, mythical and even banal media frames. Research of media narratives in Croatia during the lockdown period points to an extremely frequent use of master narratives of the flood, overcoming the monster, the quest, tragedy as punishment for egoism and arrogance, rebirth, while members of the Crisis Headquarters were framed within the hero archetype. In terms of frequently used propaganda techniques, name calling was used against all of those who did not unquestioningly give consent to the suspension of fundamental human rights without constitutionally prescribed processes. These individuals were likened to anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theory believers. The glittering generality technique was also used, by which individuals such as Alemka Markotić, Vili Beroš and Krunoslav Capak were linked to universal virtues like responsibility, bravery, wisdom, empathy, firmness, which created the frame for the acceptance and approval of their statements without examining the

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60 The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, Article 42: 'Everyone shall be guaranteed the right to public assembly and peaceful protest, in compliance with law', <https://www.sabor.hr/en/constitution-republic-croatia-consolidated-text>; Accessed: 13 May 2021.

61 The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, Article 49: 'Free enterprise and free markets shall form the foundation of the economic system of the Republic of Croatia', <https://www.sabor.hr/en/constitution-republic-croatia-consolidated-text>; Accessed: 13 May 2021.

evidence. The technique of transfer was also frequently used, whereby positive attributes of national symbols were transferred onto individuals, like for example the telling illustration of a 'children's' drawing for an imaginary 30 kuna note bearing the image of Alemka Markotić and a whole range of testimonials by innocent children celebrating the COVID heroes Alemka Markotić and Vili Beroš, with the purpose of ensuring uncritical acceptance of all ideas, measures and views by representatives of the Crisis Headquarters.⁶² The technique known as plain folks was also used, which presented to the public the accessibility of COVID heroes and heroines who regardless of their numerous responsibilities found the time to respond to children who drew pictures of them. The Crisis Headquarters and the Government often used the card stacking technique and meticulously selected information that painted suggested measures in good light even when they had no epidemiological foundation such as the ones relating to the Catholic Church and veterans as important elective bodies for the Croatian Democratic Party. The conformity of the people was continuously manipulated when the bandwagon technique was used, which is obvious in the constant pleas for responsibility and community. All of this points to the conclusion that during the spring lockdown, communication was a planned activity by the Government aimed towards rallying the public for its particular political interests, that is, winning the parliamentary election, with the help of mass orchestration of attractively packaged media messages whose actual purpose and lack of real reasons for support were hidden under the cover of the global crisis.

Unfortunately, analysis of foreign media and scientific narratives also points to similar conclusions, that is, the non-existence of a real critical approach which would be the necessary precondition for achieving citizen media literacy. Despite frequent messages that crisis is an opportunity, and that this global crisis might pave the way to establishing a better and just world, this ambition is not visible in media or scientific frameworks. The main features are old divisions, shifting responsibilities to others and unwillingness and inability to accept one's responsibility as a species for the climate crisis

62 <https://miss7.24sata.hr/lifestyle/djeca-crtezima-pokazuju-da-su-clanovistožera-njihovi-junaci-berosev-i-bozinovicev-odgovor-je-nevjerojatno-dirljiv-29839>; Accessed: 20 December 2020.

we are facing and the degraded environment which are related to the current pandemic. It is still easier to label the enemy in bats, the Chinese people, or people who don't think like us, than to take responsibility and work at solving the real issues, instead of the ones created through political interests.

The worrying aspect is that the comparison of this crisis to previous ones reveals the ambition to establish a new, but not necessarily a better or more just ideological and value system. In this system it is not problematic to use media manipulation in order to manufacture consent for the suspension of fundamental human rights, by several individuals who have been purposefully framed as heroes in order to provide them with an almost godlike status. The global lockdown phenomenon can in this sense be defined as a very successful experiment of pacifying people through using media framing methods.

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Framing of the
Coronavirus in
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Humor in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Key words Covid-19, coronavirus, reception of humor, content characteristics of humorous messages

Abstract The research is focused on the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Croatia – March 2020. The subject of the research are humorous messages related to the pandemic. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, this research showed how the interviewed respondents experienced the received humorous content related to the coronavirus and what content characteristics of the humorous messages were detected through the content analysis.

Humor u doba COVID-19 pandemije

Ključne riječi Covid-19, korona, recepcija humora, sadržajne karakteristike humorističnih poruka

Sažetak Istraživanje je usmjereno na sam početak pandemije COVID-19 u Hrvatskoj – ožujak 2020. Predmet istraživanja su humoristične poruke povezane s pandemijom. Kombinacijom kvantitativne i kvalitativne metode, ovo istraživanje je pokazalo kako su ispitanici intervjuja doživjeli primljeni humoristični sadržaj vezan uz korona virus te kakve su sadržajne karakteristike humorističnih poruka detektirane kroz analizu sadržaja.

Introduction

We are truly lucky to be living in a society (and time) that is capable of laughing in the face of adversities. A historical review of the theory of humor, up to the 18th century, describes humor and laughter as a mostly negative and socially unacceptable phenomenon (Morreall and Raskin).

We are also lucky that our reality is such that the emergence of just one highly contagious, deadly disease that has no cure or vaccine is something extraordinary.¹

On 5 January, the World Health Organization announced on its website that several cases of pneumonia of unknown cause had occurred in Wuhan². At the time of writing this paper, the number of detected cases has surpassed 28 million cases worldwide³. During the observed period (March 2020) this number ranged between 91,086 and 941,042 recorded cases worldwide⁴ and between 7 and 867 patients in Croatia in the same period⁵.

March 2020 proved to be an extraordinary month in recent history. Countries entered lockdown⁶ one by one. The first European country to declare lockdown was Italy, on 9 March 2020, which sent a strong message to Croatia that the same scenario was at its door, and this became a reality two weeks later, on 19 March 2020.⁷

Torres et al. (2020) concluded 'Indeed, humor has the ability to capture and narrate what has transpired peoples' lives during a particular period, such as the COVID-19 pandemic,' and this is exactly what the authors tried to show in this research in Croatian circumstances.

Given that this paper deals with humor, it is necessary to first define 'humor'. Philosophers, psychologists, lexicologists, scientists and other thinkers have been studying humor since the time of Plato, but have not yet reached a consensus on its definition. One of the problems in defining humor is certainly the fact that the term 'humor' changes meaning over the centuries (Morreall and Raskin, 2008, p. 211). Looking only at the last century or two, the notion of humor has taken on the forms and meanings as we know and describe today. However, there are too many definitions to list them all here, so for the purposes of this research, we decided to pick one, the general

¹ This paper primarily refers to the period of March 2020. In the meantime, the vaccine has been tested and released, while the medicine is not yet available

² <https://www.who.int/csr/don/05-january-2020-pneumonia-of-unknown-cause-china/en/> - accessed 10.09.2020

³ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#daily-cases> - accessed 10.09.2020

⁴ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#daily-cases> - accessed 10.09.2020

⁵ <https://civilna-zastita.gov.hr/vijesti/8> - accessed 10.09.2020

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_responses_to_the_COVID-19_pandemic - accessed 10.09.2020

⁷ https://civilna-zastita.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/CIVILNA%20ZA%20TITA/PDF_ZA%20WEB/Odluka%20-%20mjere%20ograni%20-%20davanja%20dru%20-%20atvenih%20okupljanja,%20orada%20trgovina.pdf - accessed 10.09.2020

definition from the online Encyclopaedia. Humor is the '...common name for written, graphic and verbally presented content that evokes laughter and joy, but also for a personality trait that is manifested in humor and wittiness.'⁸ Also, we should take into account that there is a difference between humorous and funny, as stated by Tkalac (2008, p.11); neither is the consequence of humor always laughter, nor is the cause of laughter always humor.

There is a lot of research on the positive effects of humor, so Yovetich, Dale, and Hudak (1990) showed in their research that humor has a beneficial effect on reducing stress in anticipation of pain. Bizi, Keinan, and Beit-Hallahmi (1987) have shown a connection between an assessment of a soldier's humor by comrades-in-arms and an assessment by superiors about who responds better in situations of increased stress. Berk (2010) also cites psychological and physiological benefits: 'Humor produces psychological and physiological effects on our body that are similar to the health benefits of aerobic exercise.' Kertcher and Turin (2020) suggest 'Humor provided a tool for coping with stress and comfort in the shadow of isolation, unemployment, and the horrors of death.'

Torres et al. (2020) note: 'Humor is shaped by culture, is subjective and requires cognition.' And that 'Indeed, humor has the ability to capture and narrate what has transpired peoples' lives during a particular period, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.' The references on humor in the age of dramatic/key/catastrophic events speak of two approaches, one of which says that humor is a way of coping with unpleasant events, advocated by Morrow (1987) and Dundees (1987), while Oring (1987, p. 276) offers a theory that the emergence of disaster humor is associated with media coverage of a catastrophic event in the mass media, and that jokes are only a form of rebellion against the 'discourse of disaster.' Gubanov, Gubanov and Rokotyanskaya (2018) conclude: 'Thus, 'disaster humor' can be seen as a revolt against tragedy escalation, as well as against the way journalists cover events, looking for the slightest 'delicious' details.' On the other hand, Kuipers (2002) wrote about how humor appears even in the first days of catastrophic events, which corresponds to both the first and second approaches to humor in dramatic events. Kuipers (2002) also

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8 humor. Croatian Encyclopedia, online edition. Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2020. Accessed 24. 11. 2020 <<http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=26678>>.

states that 'In the new Internet jokes, this connection with media culture is even stronger than in oral jokes. Not only do they refer to media culture, but Internet jokes are visual collages assembled from phrases and pictures taken from popular media.' Semmel (2020, p.94) concludes, 'In the face of pivotal events, coping humor responds to audience's needs in real-time by creating a distraction, a bonding opportunity, and a space in which people who want to hold onto the elicited emotions for a little can do so in a less harmful way.' While Tkalac (2008, p. 98) noted, 'It is believed that the event thus becomes less real, and as such less frightening.' Henman (2001) supports this theory when he talks about prisoners of war in Vietnam in the 1970s and states that 'These men relied on humor not in spite of the crisis but because of it.' In the same paper, Henman (2001), talking about how prisoners lost control of the situation, states, 'But they did have control over one thing, and that was their humor perspective.'

Several humor-related studies were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic: Kercher and Turin (2020) who studied memes in Israel; Oduor and Kodak (2020) who studied humor as a means of dealing with the crisis event in Kenya and Torres et al. (2020) who made a discursive analysis of humor in the Philippines.

What this indicative research aims to achieve is to investigate what was on the minds of Croatian citizens at the time of the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, in March 2020. Through the prism of humorous content, shared by interpersonal and group online communication, we will analyse all the ways in which everyday life has changed, how citizens' perception of certain phenomena/characteristics has changed, what mood prevailed and what emotions prevailed. As Chimunya and Ajiboye (2016) wrote, even beyond the humorous benefit itself, the messages that humor carries can speak about social problems and help solve them.

All of the above formed the problem of the research – how humorous content related to COVID-19 was experienced at the very beginning of the pandemic in Croatia and what the substantive characteristics of that humorous content are.

Research goals

The goal of the research is to find out what was being communicated through humor in March 2020 and how this was received. This goal can be divided into two complementary main research goals:

- 1) What is communicated through humor?
 - Find rules and categories of humorous content
 - Explore types of humorous content
 - Extract themes of humor
 - Identify the audience of the humor – groups and/or individuals
 - Record the presence of irony, sarcasm and dark humor
 - Record the presence of an educational note of humorous messages

- 2) How did the recipients of the humorous content experience the humor related to COVID-19?
 - Detect whether humor had a positive or negative impact on them
 - How do respondents assess the effect of humor?
 - To connect respondents' affinity to use humor in stressful situations with their impression of the impact humor has had on them

Methodology

Two research methods were used in the paper: content analysis and interview.

a) Content analysis

The studied corpus consists of humorous messages sent through digital channels in interpersonal and/or group communication. Why interpersonal and group communication, and not mass media communication or public communication on social networks (one that has no known recipients)? Mass media communication and communication that has no known

recipients have a kind of self-censorship of content because the sender does not know (personally) all the recipients and is wary of the possible offensiveness of the message. The communication between recipients and senders who know each other personally is not so much burdened with socially responsible and politically correct expression, rather, a certain amount of understanding and tolerance is expected and implied, whereas personal acquaintance provides a framework for auto-selection of offensive and unacceptable content based on the knowledge of preferences, attitudes, opinions and other characteristics of the recipient. In addition, personal acquaintance provides broader limits of tolerance towards marginally acceptable content because the recipient is expected to cushion the controversial content elements based on the acquaintance. For these reasons, the materials used in the research are richer than the materials that would be available through the use of public communication. The researchers first tried to analyse the collected corpus of public communication, i.e. open profiles on social networks. The content that is at the same time humorous AND refers to COVID-19 proved to be rather scant, which is another reason to direct research towards interpersonal and group communication.

The researchers focused the research on communication through communication services and social networks, in which the sender of the message knows the recipient or group of recipients and not one in which recipients were unknown.

Researchers recognize the problem of representativeness of the sample of analysed humorous messages, and the conclusions obtained by this research have no weight or the possibility of generalisation to the population.

It is true that communication platforms that serve as channels for transmitting interpersonal and group communication have all the messages, images, audio and video content sent by users stored in some place, but this data was not available to researchers. It is also necessary to note all legal restrictions, primarily related to privacy rules, which also represent a significant problem in obtaining population data for the study.

The observed period refers to March 2020.

The unit of analysis is a single post (or message) that can be in the form of text, image, a combination of text and image, GIF or video. The analysis includes textual, audio and visual

elements of messages. The unit of analysis also includes accompanying content, mostly text, added to the post submitted by the sender, because a review of humorous posts showed that sometimes humor is manifested in a combination of accompanying and shared content.

The categories of analysis are

- Type of post
- Time of receiving and sending a message
- Tags or keywords
- Reach of humor (international or local)
- Appearance of public persons, institutions or groups (entities)
- Target of humor
- Existence of sarcasm, irony or dark humor
- Humor messages
- Emotions contained in a humorous message
- Prior knowledge required to understand humor
- Humor topics

b) Interview

In order to supplement findings and gain better insight, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview. Because conversation works like magic.

The main goal of conducting a semi-structured interview was to find out how the respondents experienced humorous content related to COVID-19 following the onset of the pandemic in Croatia, during March 2020. Almost all respondents were from Zagreb and the surrounding area. A total of 22 interviews were conducted, in January 2021.

Given the epidemiological restrictions that have been in place since the onset of the pandemic, the interviews were conducted via video conference.

As control questions, respondents were asked to describe what they remember from March 2020 and how they experienced those events.

The specific objectives were to:

- Investigate whether respondents noticed changes in the number and content of humorous posts they received and/or sent in March 2020,

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- Investigate the ways in which humorous content has influenced them,
- Investigate to what they attribute the impact the humorous content had on them.

In addition to the interview, each respondent completed a short 'coping humor scale' survey to examine the relationship between questionnaire results and responses and the explanations given by respondents about the manner and impact of humor on them personally. Coping humor scale is taken from 'Humor, the psychology of living buoyantly' by Hubert M. Lefcourt, 2001, page 173. Coping humor scale is a questionnaire composed of 7 questions with answers on 4 levels of the Likert scale, which serves to assess how much an individual is prone to use humor when dealing with stressful situations.

At first, the views and opinions of the researchers seemed universal and true for all. However, as has already been said, 'People see what they want to see' (O'Toole, 2013, p.3), so this research also revealed differences in opinions and attitudes through the interview.

The semi-structured interview has thirteen items, as follows:

1. Remember March 2020. Please describe, in your own words, what happened then.
2. How did you feel?
3. Would you say that these feelings are weaker, stronger, or of the same level as before (say in February or January 2020)?
4. Were positive or negative feelings prevailing?
5. What would you attribute those feelings to?
6. Do you remember receiving and/or sending humorous content in March 2020?
7. Did those humorous messages have any effect on you? Describe and explain.
8. Have you noticed (in March 2020) a change in the total volume of humorous content received compared to the previous period (e.g. in January or February 2020)?
9. Did you notice a change in the content of the humorous posts (what was it about/what were you laughing about)?

10. Have you noticed the educational function of humorous content, that is, have these humorous messages influenced people to behave in accordance with the recommendations?
11. Do you still find these humorous posts funny?
12. List the top five posts from that period.

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Results or what can be learned from humor?

Every communication, even a false one, contains at least a grain of truth. It may be an exaggeration to claim that humor is a lie, but humor can be (and often is) a distortion of reality. Therefore, starting from the fact that every communication is a message, the aim of this research is to notice which changes in everyday life were the subjects of humorous messages and how the topics of humor are treated.

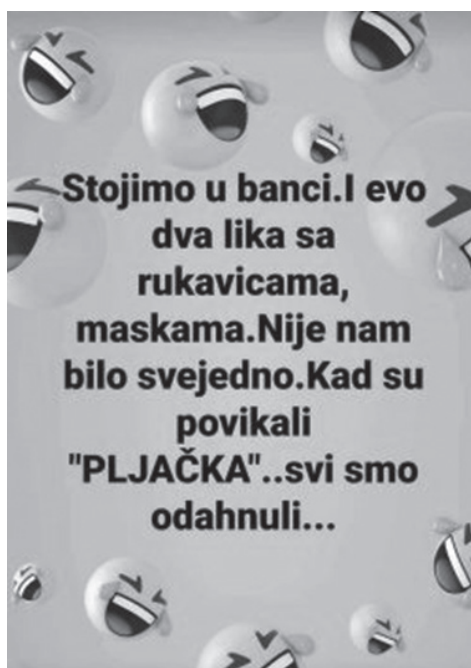
What underlined almost all analysed messages is the fear of a new invisible threat.

a) Content analysis

Change in perception

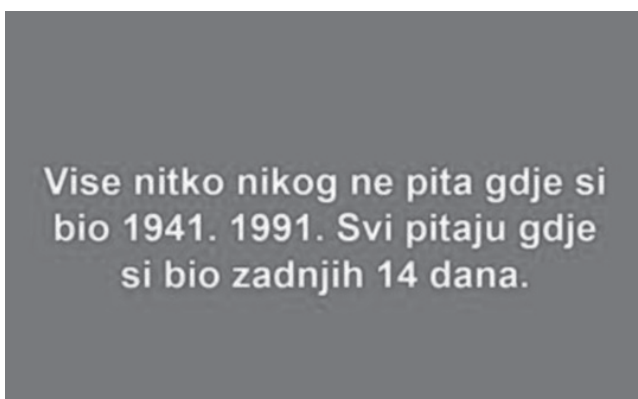
The newly-promoted rules of conduct have led to a shift in perception in such a way that new circumstances have made something that is otherwise unacceptable or inappropriate, acceptable and commendable; the essential has become irrelevant in the light of a new, 'invisible' threat. In light of this new fear, humor is a response that puts into perspective the diminished value of what is otherwise frightening.

So, for example, bank robbers have become less scary than possibly contagious people wearing masks in public, the political question of where someone was during the war is no longer as important as the question of whether you are contagious and have spent 14 days on a skiing trip, and a person drinking alone in their house used to be considered a lonely person and a drunkard, and now they are becoming an example to others who are perhaps still going out and getting together for a drink.



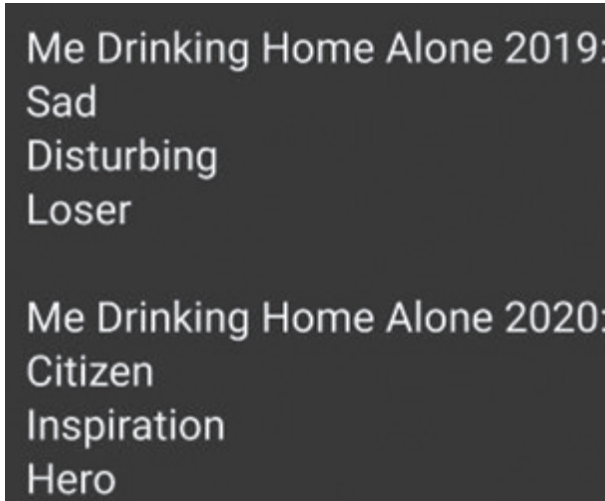
Example 1 Change in perception A

(we were in bank. Two masked guys with gloves appear. Situation got tense. When they yelled 'ROBBERY'.. we were all relieved...)



Example 2 Change in perception B

(No one is asking anyone where they had been in 1941 or 1991. Now everyone's asking where have you been in the past 14 days)



Types of humorous content

A vast majority of humorous content is graphically arranged almost to a professional level – in the case of video clips, one could notice above-average production quality. This property of the analysed humorous content tells us that the author of the content cares about the message being a) viewed/received, b) understandable, c) accepted, and d) forwarded.

Regarding the classic division of content into text, image and video, in the observed corpus, most of the content was a combination of text and image.

Humorous content is mostly short – in most examples, it contains a single image or one graphically designed sentence. Video posts averaged 30 seconds in duration, with the longest funny video post in the observed sample being 1 minute and 33 seconds long.

The educational function of humor

Every message, including a humorous one, reflects some (one or more) intentions of the sender. Even if there is no intention, it is defined as intention.

Fortunately, humorous messages all have at least one purpose: to achieve the effect of humor in the recipient.

Humorous content can perform the function of raising awareness about a problem. According to Schmidt (1994), humorous content will be more often and more easily remembered, making humor a valid tool for the effectiveness of message transmission.

The educational function was performed by messages with the common denominator 'It is important to adhere to preventive measures.'

Variations of expression when conveying educational messages take the following forms and connotations:

- Don't be 'stupid and incompetent' or 'be less able to follow these simple instructions than a dog'; simple instructions: don't touch your face, sit and wait,
- even irresponsible 'party people' behave responsibly and wear face masks and disinfect their hands at a group party;
- 'Stay home', that is, do not leave your house. This message was found in several variations, from appeals to 'stay home' to reprimanding people who do not 'stay home' and implications that everyone who 'stays home' is a hero (such as Superman);
- Keep distance with the perhaps already familiar phrase 'together yet separate' ;
- Avoiding mass gatherings and criticising people who do not follow this guidance due to panic shopping;
- Listing the symptoms of coronavirus;
- The fact that dogs, and pets in general, are not contagious;
- It is necessary to check body temperature;
- Warning of current events that have been taken to the point of absurdity given the situation ('thanks to daylight saving time we will be able to stay home for an hour longer');
- Awareness of whether you are at risk due to old age;
- How to make a face mask, which was a big problem due to the shortage of face masks; the chosen example shows how to make a mask from men's boxers;
- Education in some examples refers to the general knowledge that people should have, for example, alcohol as a frequently used sanitiser is flammable, so be careful when disinfecting and wait a bit before using a lighter;
- Suggestions on how to bear to be constantly at home without going out, including a message from a psychiatrist about where the limit of insanity is (so education consists

- of judging for ourselves whether we should report in for psychiatric treatment or not);
- Do not travel while you have a fever;
 - Raising awareness about the dangers of sitting at the computer all the time (because life has switched online), so a humorous message appears to remember to stretch your neck;
 - Do not shake hands; there are ways to greet people without physical contact;
 - The importance of listening to the official guidelines.

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"Deco perite ruke da ne dobijete KORONAVIRUS. Od njega nećete umreti, ali na infektivnoj klinici nema WIFI a to nećete preživeti".
 Propaganda u Češkoj za decu da peru ruke 😊

Example 4 Educational function A

(kids, wash your hands so you don't get coronavirus. You will not die from it, but hospitals don't have wifi and you would not survive that)



The cats are on day 3,721 of their stay at home quarantine. They have some lessons for us amateurs. Lessons like: Nap early, nap often. Seek out sunbeams. Eat on a regular schedule. Keep yourself clean. And most importantly, it's ok to run up and down the apartment screaming when it all gets to be too much. Just take a nap afterwards.

Example 5 Educational
function B

**"Don't touch your
face."Ok.**
**"Wash your hands
frequently." Ok.**
**"Stop kissing your dog."
If I die I die.**

Example 6 Educational
function C

Sad su svi konačno
naučili da peru ruke



Predlažem da
sljedeće sedmice
učimo da palimo
žmigavac pri
skretanju

Example 7 Educational
function D

(now that everybody has
learned to wash hands, I
propose that next week
we all learn to switch
on the turn signal when
turning)

Molba češkog psihijatrijskog
društva -

"Dok u izolaciji pričate sa
svojim ljubimcima, cvjećem ili
nameštajem je normalno. Zbog
toga ne morate da nas zovete.
Stručnu pomoć potražite kada
počnu da vam odgovaraju"

Hvala, vaši psihijatri.

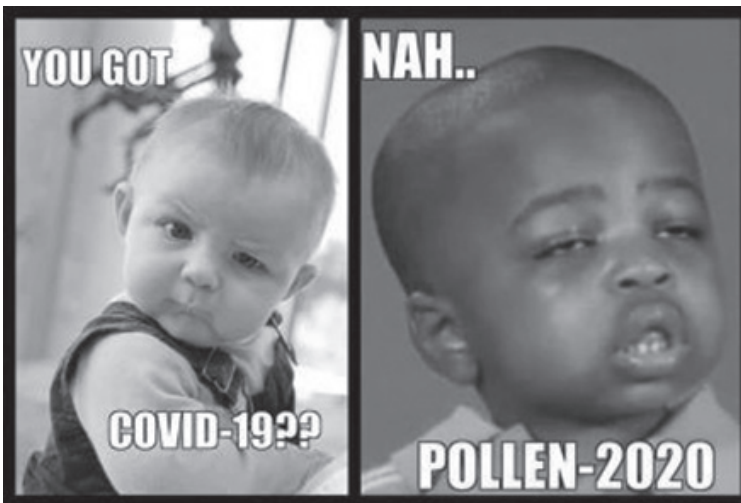
Example 8 Educational
function E

(Check psychiatric society
plea - 'Talking to to pets,
flowers of furniture during
isolation is normal. You
do not need to contact
us for that. You should
seek for professional help
when they start to talk
back.' Thank you, your
psychiatrist.)

Unforeseen problems arising from the pandemic

Caring, empathy and compassion for sick people is something that is not only natural to us, but is additionally encouraged in society and in education. If someone is in trouble – and disease certainly is trouble – help them if you can. Ultimately, this is one of the paradigms of all world religions – to help others.

The outbreak of the pandemic resulted in an increase in the level of empathy and care for loved ones (as indicated by the interview results). But on a personal level, that concern and desire to help was overwhelmed by fear of infection from known or unknown people (anyone nearby). This panicky fear of the possibility that I PERSONALLY would contract COVID-19 resulted in panic withdrawal from any symptom of the disease, such as sneezing, coughing, blowing one's nose into a handkerchief, etc. All diseases – COVID-19 just being one of many – become perceived as something to move away from, something we don't want to get close to and are afraid of.



Example 9 An unforeseen problem

Coronavirus or COVID explicitly – keyword cloud

Based on the humorous announcements collected, it is quite obvious to all participants in the event that they deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences it has on various aspects of life. For individuals who have not

'Staying at home', 'leaving the house', 'isolation', 'quarantine', 'gatherings', 'a pass', 'distance' and 'exponential graph' are terms that are strongly related to the vocabulary of responsible persons, but have also found their place in humor. We could also mention the term 'cage', which vividly represents how people experienced spending time indoors.

'Staying at home' takes on several language variants, such as the phrases 'I'm staying at my house', 'I'm staying at home'.

As one of the results of staying at home, the terms 'hairdresser' or 'hairstyle', 'obesity' and 'excessive eating' also appear.

A good portion of humorous posts talks about problems with supplies, where most posts ridicule the issue of a lack of toilet paper, yeast, or empty shelves. The word 'supply' is often replaced by the word 'shopping' or shop names.

Humor related to remote learning, which has become common for all school kids since mid-March this year, is mainly related to the terms 'television' or (television) 'programme'.

The phrase 'for your own good' appears in a paternalistic and even patronising way, and it is presented mainly by animals (which are still pets to humans, and not the other way around). The same kind of humor, in which people and animals swap places, is found in all those funny posts in which animals are amazed by people wearing muzzles.

'2020' is often the only term that helps distinguish that humor is related to COVID-19 and its consequences on individuals.

However, there are also many posts that still cannot be explained by the simple keyword tags related to the situation, but are undoubtedly related to the COVID-19 humor.

Of course, making such a word cloud is not enough to cover every single post, because some humorous posts do not contain a single tag and yet relate to the coronavirus.

International or local?

The next research question refers to the territorial reach of humor. Can we argue that humorous posts are funny only locally or globally?

In an ideal world, we would look at the country of origin of individual posts and observe the spread through different areas and the applicability of humor in its original or modified

form in different areas and further examine whether the representative population in each country considers each post humorous and in what way.

These large amounts of data were not available, so the corpus of collected posts was divided into two categories:

1. Foreign or international post,
2. Local post.

Within the observed corpus, a significant portion of humorous posts relates to local humor which takes already known elements (situations for example) and shapes them to fit the Covid-19 context.

The global or international character of messages is reflected in the following: the language of the message is foreign, mostly English. Internationally known symbols or people are used, or memes⁹ as templates or GIFs that have already been used.

Local humorous messages are those that are in the Croatian language or use symbols, people, institutions, prejudices or phrases characteristic of Croatia. If this cannot already be called cultural heritage, then at least we can say that the specifics of the local cultural circle have found their place in the COVID-19 related humor.

The existence of international humor indicates connection and communication, perhaps even agreement, if not in the desire for improvement, then at least in humor with other countries. Perhaps it cannot be said that the similarities of humorous messages for different countries of the world show the same way of experiencing the situation, because the matter of perception of the received message cannot be approached only through similarity of content, but the existence of humorous messages accepted as humorous in different countries indicates similarity.

It was certainly interesting to note that some publications appear in foreign and Croatian languages, in different variations yet with the same message.

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⁹ 'Meme' is an image, video, part of text etc. Mostly humorous in nature that is copied and quickly shared via the Internet, often with minor modifications (author's description)



Example 10: The same message in two expressions and languages A

(#stayathome because it is not everyday that you can save the world in pyamas)

Ako može Superman, možete i vi! :)



Example 11: Same message in two expressions and languages B

These forms of communication lead to the conclusion that some content is the same for all areas affected by the same problem and that humor is equally applicable even without translation.

Target: Who is humor aimed at? And how?

Within the observed sample, the majority of posts are not related to any persons, groups or institutions. Still, some of the posts base their humor on famous persons or institutions.

There is a difference between the presence of (famous) persons or groups in the content of the post as a means of transmitting the message and those posts in which some characteristics of persons or groups are ridiculed.

The former category refers to the appearance of celebrities, institutions, or groups that serve as a means of conveying a humorous message. This use of an entity in humor is not aimed at ridiculing the entity – the entity is used because of some of its characteristics that support the humor of the message, regardless of whether a given feature is used in its original meaning. Famous 'persons' or entities can be divided into the following groups:

- Musicians (singers and bands)
- Actors (mostly related to a specific role)
- Politicians and institutions (foreign and national)
- Characters from fictional works (cartoons, superheroes, books)

Me after washing my hands for 20 seconds 57 times in one day



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Example 12 Presence of entities in content A



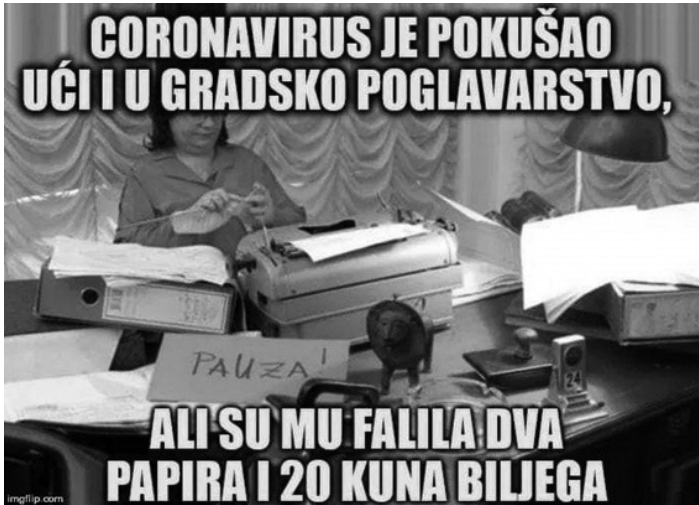
The second categorisation involves observing who (or what) is being ridiculed as part of COVID-19-related humor. Because, not all posts that ridiculed someone included celebrities, nor all posts that include celebrities also ridicule them (unlike the already observed category of occurrence of entities in humor).

So who is COVID-19-related humor making fun of?

The humor targets:

official persons (postmen, teachers), politicians (Boris Johnson, Putin, Trump, Manolić), institutions, organisations and events (Zagreb City Authority, Ministry of the Interior, Olympic Games), religion (Our Lady of Medjugorje, Jehovah's Witnesses), groups (people from Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Islands of Brac, Germans, anti-vaxxers, vegans and vegetarians).

Almost all humorous messages that ridicule an entity base their humor on making fun of some of the previously known attitudes, one might even say prejudice.



Example 14 Presence of
ridicule A

(coronavirus tried to enter
the city council, but it was
missing two papers and 20
kuna of revenue stamps)

Yet, there is a special category that surpasses the usual frameworks in which ridiculed entities are the subject of humor. A common feature of these posts is **IGNORANCE**, primarily in terms of the use of face masks and the application of rules of conduct and hygiene. Although public figures who (intentionally or accidentally) do not follow the rules of hygiene and conduct are ridiculed, this is not based on an entity – the subject of ridicule may also be an unknown person who does not follow the rules of conduct.

EXAGGERATION is also a subject of ridicule, mainly when buying excessive quantities and stockpiling (mostly toilet paper).

Another form of ridicule (not related to well-known persons) is related to **RULES OF CONDUCT**. Rules of conduct are ridiculed to the point of absurdity, or people who do not adhere to these rules are made fun of.



What are we laughing at?

During the analysis, we tried to draw a thematic categorisation of posts, guided by the main question: 'What is the topic of this humor?'

Consequently, we were able to extract the following content categories:

- Animals and pets – where the roles of animals and humans are swapped (man is trapped in his home/cage) or people are equated with animals, so now man wears face masks (while animals normally wear muzzles or collars). Animal-related humor is often closely linked to ecological ideas of how 'nature strikes back'.



Example 16 Animals A



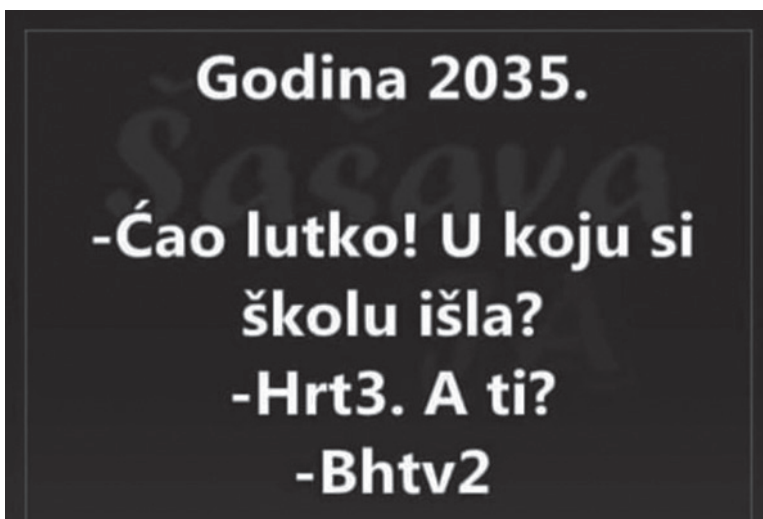
Example 17 Animals B

(they call me disobedient, yet half of them can not do 'sit' and 'wait')



Example 18 Animals C

- Homeschooling or remote school, where the funny side of homeschooling is shown or posts are making fun with possible scenarios arising from that situation.



Example 19 Remote school
(year 2035 –Hey doll! What school did you go to? – HRT3. You? – BHTV2)

- Songs and films, where the words of previously published works are now given a new connotation.



Example 20 Songs and movies

- Politics, where politically significant individuals and parties are placed in a COVID-19 context.

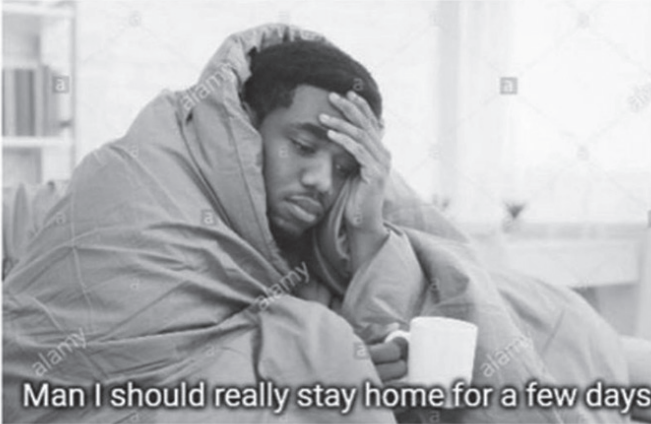


Example 21 Politics
(they discovered that virus transfers from animals to humans)

- Travel, where it is shown in various ways how COVID-19 positive people travel and thus infect others, or how some long for travel while 'staying at home'.

Normal people with fever:

Example 22 Travel



Man I should really stay home for a few days

People with coronavirus:



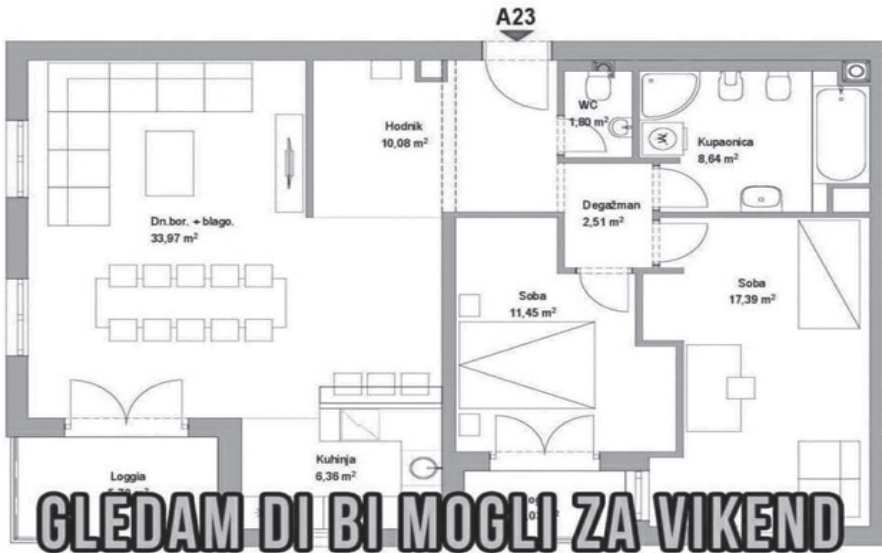
- Measures and rules of conduct that include hand washing, wearing face masks and social distancing, where the humorous side of the newly created situation when adhering to the measures, as well as the consequences of adhering to the measures, is presented.



Example 23 Measures

- Staying at home (isolation). The category of staying at home mostly contains posts that show what people are doing now that it is recommended not to leave their homes.

Example 24 Stay at home
(I am wondering where we might go for the weekend)

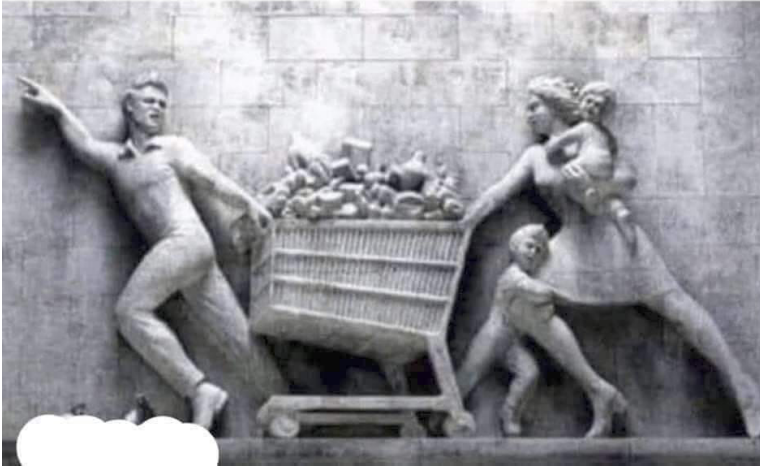


- Stocks and supplies, with posts speaking of stockpiling and consequently the issue of availability of certain items in stores.

BITKA KOD KONZUMA (2020. god poslje Krista)

Example 25 Supplies

(Battle at Konzum (shop name) (2020 Anno domini))

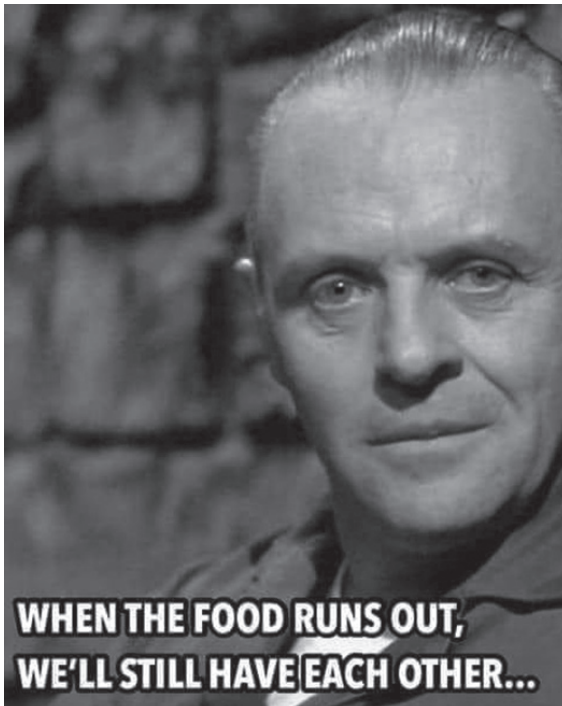


Dark humor

Humor varies from gentle, mild, positive or 'cheerful' humor to extremely dark, negative and derogatory humor. The emergence of black humor as part of 'disaster humor' (humor circulating immediately after a catastrophic event) is not new, but, according to Bischetti, Canal and Bambini (2021), 'even though Covid-19 humor is inspired by the certainly grievous aspects of the pandemic, it does not always revolve around the offensive themes that typically characterize the genre of dark humor, such as death and illness,' compared to other pandemics such as the Spanish flu and the emergence of AIDS, which is also supported by this research, as no predominance of dark humor was observed in the sample at the expense of other types of humor.



Example 26 Gentle/benign humor



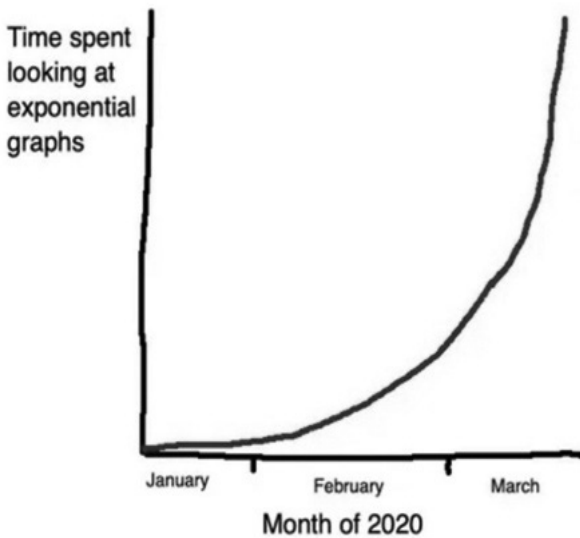
Example 27 Dark humor

Emotions

The subject of the study from the aspect of emotions was based on two questions: how intensely the emotions were presented in the humorous content and which emotions were contained in the messages.

Emotions that could be read from the content of the messages are fear, despondency and despair, boredom, love and sympathy, mainly through the expression of humanity and anger.

The intensity of the displayed emotions varied depending on the content of the individual message, where most of the content did not have any strongly expressed emotion, and some did not include emotions at all.



Example 28 Emotions were not detected



Example 29 Strong emotions detected

(Emil and sedatives)

The issue of the reception of emotion was further explored through interviews.

Humor requires pre-knowledge

In order to understand humor, prior knowledge from some general or specific areas is required. In addition to knowledge about the situation or the necessary behavior and the 'new normal', to understand humor it was also necessary to have knowledge from movies, music, literature, politics, drug culture, sexual aids, prejudices circulating in society, video games, and decisions of the Civil Protection Headquarters (or measures).

May your healing crystals
protect you during this
trying time...

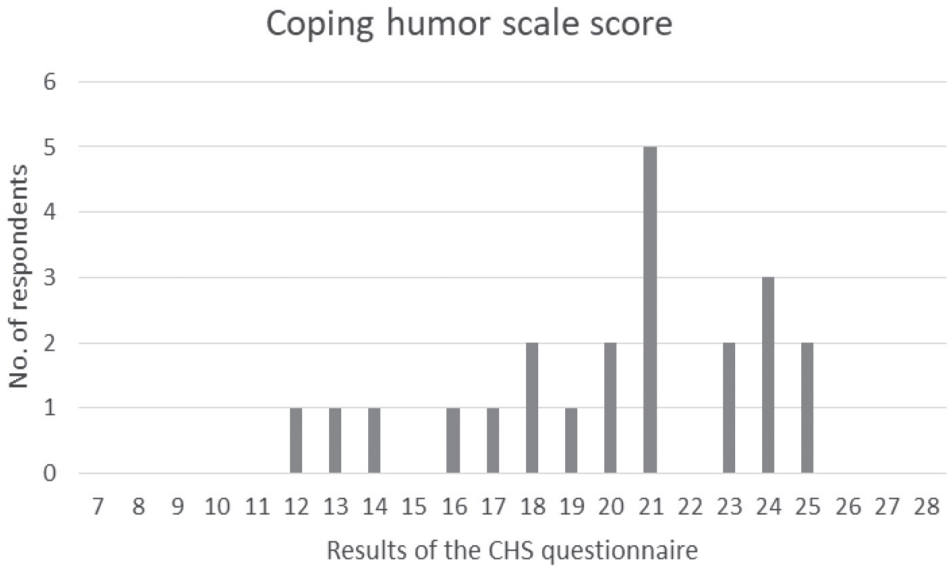


Example 30 Content of
humor that requires prior
knowledge to understand

b) Interview

Humor as a coping mechanism for stress

The average score of the respondents on the Coping Humor Scale (CHS scale) is 20. Values on the scale can range from 7 to 28, with the lowest score among respondents being 12 and the highest being 25. The results of 6 respondents deviate from the average standard value by more than one standard deviation, 4 respondents have a result significantly below the average, and two respondents significantly above the average.



Graph 1 Display of respondents' results on the CHS questionnaire

But did all respondents really describe their experience in March 2020 as a stressful situation?

All respondents stated that they experienced negative emotions during March 2020. Only two respondents stated that their level of negative feelings in 3/2020 was the same as before while the remaining 20 stated that their levels of negative emotions were moderately or significantly higher than before. People who do not attribute negative emotions to COVID-19 and the consequences of the virus attribute it to the disease they were experiencing at the time or to the illness of their loved ones (not caused by this virus).

For the sake of control, respondents were also asked about the existence of positive emotions in a given period. Most respondents stated that negative emotions outweighed positive emotions. This is the range of positive emotions and events expressed in March 2020:

- Excitement because something new and different is happening,
- More time for family,
- Getting closer/connecting with family,
- Freedom to set your own schedule (due to work from home),

- Team spirit of colleagues at work,
- Gratitude (because nothing terrible happened to me or my loved ones),
- Initially positive because you have less contact with people who annoy you, but also reduce contact with people who do not annoy you, so it is good in the short term.

17 out of 22 respondents noticed a significant increase in humorous content, while all respondents stated that at least half of all of the humorous content was related to COVID-19 and situations arising from the COVID-19 crisis.

Of all 22 respondents, only one described the effect of humorous content in March 2020 as negative. She said: 'I would feel guilty if I laughed and something happened to someone,' and the emotions that the humorous content triggered at that time were described as 'It made me angry: how can you joke about something like that?' It should be emphasised that this respondent has a low result on the CHS questionnaire, and that this person already in the third month of 2020 knew people who became ill and people who died from COVID-19. This respondent describes her personal experience of the situation at the time as a notably greater feeling of fear, confusion, financial and health uncertainty and insecurity. This respondent admits that in the months that followed (summer months) she could accept humorous content on the topic of COVID-19 and laugh at it, but at the beginning of the pandemic 'it wasn't helping. It wasn't funny to me, and I didn't take it as a joke, but really: what we will experience this year.'

Most respondents, on the other hand, believe that humor had a positive effect on them or their emotional state.

The values of the CHS questionnaire results correlated with the effect that humor had on the emotional state of the respondents. The effect of humor is divided into three groups: positive, negative and neutral. The correlation was calculated using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient, and stands at 0.506.

Table of printout of correlation results using Spearman's correlation coefficient of ranks, in the SPSS tool

| Correlations | | CHS | humor_score | |
|----------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------|
| Spearman's rho | CHS | Correlation Coefficient | 1,000 | ,506* |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | ,016 |
| | | N | 22 | 22 |
| | humor_score | Correlation Coefficient | ,506* | 1,000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,016 | . |
| | | N | 22 | 22 |

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 Spearman correlation

This medium-strong correlation proves that the character trait of the propensity to use humor in stressful situations is related to the studied experience in the specific stressful situation of the onset of the pandemic and lockdown.

How do respondents describe the effect of humorous content?

Respondents attribute the positive effect of humorous content to the following mechanisms, as stated in their own words:

- Relaxation, calming,
- Joy,
- Improving mood,
- Laughter,
- Shift from reality ('provides objectivity and a grain of common sense'),
- Putting things back in balance, self-regulation,
- Defence mechanism ('it's easier to laugh at something than to be afraid'),
- Connecting with others, togetherness,
- Breaking down negative emotions,
- Changing perspectives to a situation that was neither rosy nor optimistic. People did not lose their spirit, the sense of humor remained.

In general, the positive effects of humor could be grouped as follows:

1. Respondents experience laughter as a consequence of the humorous content received, but find that the effect of that laughter is very short-lived (a minute, two) and there is no long-term shift on a personal level because of that laughter.
2. Respondents receive and send humorous content and thus connect with others in a group or community, or strengthen social ties, and describe a positive shift as a consequence of connecting with others where humor was a means of connecting.
3. Humor helps on a personal level in a way that makes it easier for an individual to deal with a difficult situation.

The negative effects of humor were also investigated and their existence was noted with the respondents. One person, mentioned above, considered humor unacceptable and thus her overall experience of humor in 3/2020 was negative.

Other negative effects of humor are described as:

'Populist nonsense gets on my nerves, it annoys me. It's not a healthy kind of humor, it's caustic, and it's humor that mocks/belittles/spits on others and doesn't bring any joy.'

'It's funny at first, but if you stop and think why you're laughing then you start to feel bad about it.'

One of the respondents put a negative effect of humor into a group of humor related to conspiracy theories. He also provided the description of negativity: it is 'humor that spreads panic.'

'Anger because I didn't find it funny.'

'Despair was expressed through humor.'

'At first you laugh, but it also reminds you of reality.'

'One example annoyed me, but because I didn't like the author, not because of the humor or message.'

Out of a total of 9¹⁰ respondents who recognised the presence of a personal negative influence of humorous messages, only three persons attributed the negative effects of humorous posts as general rather than related to any particular group of humor (populism, conspiracy theories, personal preferences). This general negative effect is described as despair read between the lines of humorous posts or a reminder of the gravity of the situation. All of these three respondents described their

¹⁰ Not counting one respondent who experienced a completely negative effect of humor

condition as a higher level of negative emotions, describing humorous messages as a positive effect or a neutral effect, and it could be argued that the presence of negative effects of humor did not diminish the presence of a positive effect. In other words, the negative effects did not outweigh the positive effects of humor.

Humor in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Noticing an educational note of humor

The researchers used the phrase 'educational note of humor' to describe those humorous posts that contain messages about how to behave or not to behave. As some examples of educational content, we cite messages about washing hands, wearing face masks, distancing. During the interview, no distinction was made between the explicitly and implicitly stated educational messages in the content. Primarily, the researchers wanted to find out if the respondents noticed such content in humor. If respondents noticed it, they were asked if they felt that such humorous messages made them question and reconsider their attitudes and behaviors, and whether they might have changed their attitudes and behaviors.

Half of the respondents (11) said that they did not notice any elements in the humorous messages that would encourage them to rethink or change their behavior.

Respondents who noticed an educational note of humorous content agree that only a small portion of the content can be considered educational. One respondent said that based on a humorous message, he concluded that 'You're exaggerating, don't buy so much toilet paper,' another said in a similar tone, 'most of us still use these supplies – pickles, water, cans...' a third one said she considered how 'maybe I should also buy toilet paper or flour.' Some respondents said that this educational function could only serve someone 'who has no idea what is going on' so that now they wonder why they should wear a face mask or keep their distance.

In general, although there was undoubtedly an educational note in some of the humorous content, the messages were not primarily educational in nature and respondents did not notice many of them. To an even lesser extent, such messages made them reconsider their attitudes and actions or change their behavior.

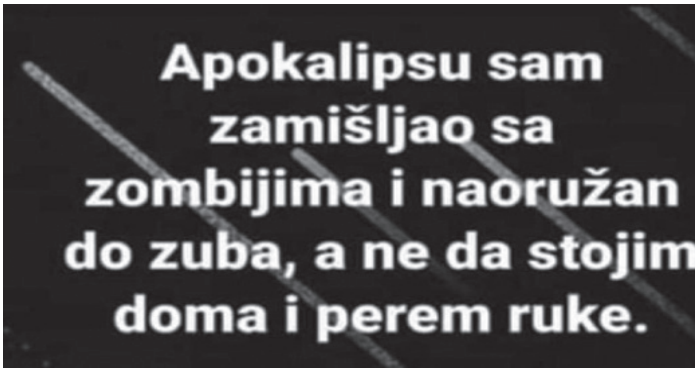
Best according to respondents

Respondents were asked to choose the best humorous messages from March 2020. For the sake of simplicity, the researchers prepared about 50 humorous posts from the content analysis corpus before the interview so that respondents could recall the events and humorous messages of the time. Most of the respondents chose the best humorous messages from the corpus sent to them by the researchers.

The question of the best messages was left intentionally undefined because in the subsequent question the respondents were asked to explain in their own words why they chose these humorous posts. Most respondents perceived this question as the question about which posts they found the funniest. Some respondents, however, chose the best messages according to the following criteria: content related to the respondents' profession (good graphic design or interesting visual expression); the content that was most often shared or that was the subject of further discussions; content that best affected the respondents' everyday life. The following are the contents that most respondents mentioned as the best.



Example 31 The best post as chosen by respondents



Example 32 Second best post A

(I've imagined apocalypse with zombies, armed to the teeth, not staying at home washing my hands)



Example 33 Second best post B

(as electricians would say: better isolation than grounding)



Example 34 Second best post C

Conclusion

As part of the content analysis of humorous messages, it was detected that there was a change in perception in such a way that new circumstances made what was otherwise unacceptable or inappropriate acceptable and commendable. The existence of educational messages within humorous posts was recorded. Keywords have been recorded which may be used in future research to search for content when looking for humor from the COVID-19 pandemic period. The presence of local and international humor was detected. A categorisation of humorous messages based on the topic of the messages was made. Variations in the tone of humor (from gentle to dark) were detected and the prior knowledge needed to understand the messages was detected.

In the second part of the conducted research, the interview method was used to find out how the respondents experienced the received humorous messages in March 2020. The majority of respondents (14 out of 22) describe the effect that humorous messages had on them as positive, and only one respondent experienced a negative effect of the pandemic-related humor. The results of the Coping Humor Scale questionnaire show a large correlation with the effect that humor has on respondents (Spearman's correlation coefficient 0.5), which confirms that the positive effect of humor is related to how much respondents tend to use humor in dealing with stressful situations. Also, the majority of the respondents detected increased negative emotions compared to the 'normal' period before the onset of the pandemic, and most of the respondents found that humor helped them at least in the short term. The mechanisms to which respondents attribute the help that humor provided to them in dealing with a stressful situation are: connecting with others and change of perception – humor gives you a break from the situation and helps take the edge of a stressful situation.

Most respondents were both senders and recipients of humorous posts, thus connecting with others they know to share their opinions on a particular topic, while maintaining virtual contact. Also, some of the respondents stated that they were impressed by the ingenuity and speed of production of humorous messages.

In March 2020 in Croatia, humor was a form of a response to the new situation. People used humor to establish and maintain contacts with others. Also, using the content of humor and prior knowledge needed to understand the message, we can draw conclusions on general topics that were of interest to most citizens at that time: COVID-19 pandemic as such, problems with household supplies, how to respect social distancing measures and use a face mask and sanitisers, how we are reduced to (dis)obedient animals, the problems of closed service facilities, and the feeling of general boredom that many felt at the time.

Through this indicative research, we gained insight into people's reactions to a dramatic event through humor. Further research should be population representative and place more emphasis on the experiences of individuals compared to the group they share humorous content with.

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Bits and Pieces: Experiences of Social Reality in the Midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Key words pandemic, ontological security, late modernity, digital media

Abstract Covid19-pandemic has had a profound impact on the way we live and on the social reality in the world around us. Except for the enormous strain on public and health of individuals, it has affected social functioning to great extent, at least temporarily. It has sped up digitalization and forced social activities to transfer to the digital realm to an unprecedented level. It has simultaneously confined social actors to their geographical localities. In all of this, it has offered an opportunity of different observational point of human being in the world in the context of late modernity. It is possible to assume that this kind of social situation has the potential to affect the sense of ontological security of social actors, as well as their experience of space. The contradictory implications of the transfer of the social activity to the digital communicative spaces to current extent are also discussed.

Dijelíci i komadići: Iskustva društvene stvarnosti usred pandemije Covid-19

Ključne riječi pandemija, ontološka sigurnost, kasna modernost, digitalni mediji

Sažetak Pandemija uzrokovana koronavirusom imala je dubok utjecaj na načine na koji živimo, kao i na društvenu stvarnost u svijetu oko nas. Osim ogromnog opterećenja na javno zdravstvo te pojedinačna zdravstvena stanja, utjecala je na čitav niz promjena vezanih uz socijalno funkcioniranje. Ubrzala je digitalizaciju i prijelaz društvenih aktivnosti na digitalno područje u dosad neviđenom opsegu, a s druge strane je ograničila društvene aktere na lokalna zemljopisna područja. U svemu tome pružila nam se prilika da zauzmemo novu točku promatranja ljudskog bivanja u svijetu kasne modernosti. Moguće je pretpostaviti da navedena društvena situacija posjeduje potencijal utjecaja na osjećaj ontološke sigurnosti društvenih aktera, kao i na njihovo iskustvo prostora. Kontradiktorne implikacije prijelaza društvene aktivnosti na digitalne komunikativne prostore u trenutnom opsegu također se promišljaju.

The COVID19-pandemics functions as the situation which throws us out of the ordinary social functioning. With its massive shutdown of social activity, its disruption of the functioning of the interconnected expert systems basic to social functioning in late modernity, as well as its transference of social activity to the sphere of digital communication channels it disrupts the usual social routines that are constitutive of our social reality. It can therefore affect our sense of ontological security. This can be connected to the rise of the feelings of anxiety. What we rely on for our everyday functioning is a sense of ontological security - Anthony Giddens posits this sense as a sense of stability and continuity felt by the individuals.¹ Giddens links trust directly to the sense of ontological security through the evolvement of the safe environment created by the habit and routine and emotional investment of our caretakers in early childhood which further transforms into a sense of protective cocoon that makes human beings feel safe later in life – what he calls ‘ontological security’.² For the understanding of how current lockdown can impact the sense of ontological security, it is important to especially emphasize here that Giddens, building on the work of psychoanalysts, closely connects everyday routine to the feelings of ontological security and that this sense of order is further maintained by the routines that accompany everyday social functioning in later phases of life of human beings. As Giddens notes, the robustness of the shared social reality is conveyed by the high level of reliability of the contexts of day-to-day social interaction.³ Ontological security functions like an envelope that shields human beings from their awareness of those questions of existence, which, if one was to ponder them all the time, would produce paralysis, Giddens notes, or the feelings of engulfment.⁴ This envelope keeps existential anxiety at bay, anxiety which can be triggered by things that we do not usually ponder about in our everyday reality but they have to do with the basics of our human existence. These questions concerning the existential structure of human existence beyond our everyday lives are what existential philosophers and psychotherapists have called existential givens - various philosophers have interpreted them differently but they are all those things that the human condition will inevitably contain, such as bodily existence, aloneness, illness or death. Anthony Giddens sees

1 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity*, Polity press, London, 1991., p. 3

2 *Ibid.*, p. 3

3 *Ibid.*, p. 36

4 *Ibid.*

those as questions of time, space, continuity, and identity.⁵ To be able to function on an everyday level in our human lives, it is necessary to bracket these things and this is what ontological security contributes to⁶. In the course of everyday life, individuals do not usually ponder about things that could endanger them existentially on a day-to-day basis. Giddens explains how day-to-day routines together with the practical consciousness help bracket such anxieties because of their constitutive role in organizing an 'as if' environment concerning these issues of existence and provide modes or orientation which serve as cognitive and emotional answers to these questions⁷. He proposes that the maintenance of habits and routines provides a 'formed framework' which is a crucial bulwark against threatening anxieties.⁸ It is usually only in the cases of encounter with happenings that bring to one's awareness the possibility of endangerment of one's existence, such as in an encounter with an accident, that this bulwark can thin out.⁹

It can be argued that this is precisely what is happening within the COVID-19 pandemics. An encounter with a possibly life-threatening virus not yet sufficiently researched with potential deadly consequences and virulency is enough in itself to affect the sense of ontological security since it presents precisely such encounter that Giddens posits as the events that bring to our awareness the possibility of a threat to our very existence. Added to that, the imposed lockdown measures are disrupting shared daily social routines due to the shutdown of the shared social activity to great extent, from the work-routines to educational activities. Some of the routines can be transferred online, but most social activities in physical spaces that allow for shared social framework are discontinued due to the fear of contagion. It can be argued that replacement activities in the isolation of private households or the ones in the digital communicative spaces can only partly replace daily routines of social actors happening within the shared social settings which are, as explained before, constitutive of our sense of ontological security. All of this can thus affect the sense of ontological security. The sense of ontological security can become unsettled in the wake of the lack of the shared social activities that contribute to its maintenance. Ontological security is a concept of well-being in the world that is rooted in a sense of order in one's social and material environment - in

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5 Ibid, p. 37

6 Ibid, p. 36

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid, p. 39

9 Ibid, p. 40

a qualitative grounded theory, thematic analyses indicated that the markers of ontological security were, for example, constancy, routine, and control.¹⁰ We can see how these markers could be disrupted in times of COVID-19-pandemic. When the number of those infected with the COVID-19 virus is measured daily and unpredictably varies, therefore causing measures to be introduced to capriciously fluctuate, a shared social reality is created that does not have an emphasis on constancy. Furthermore, the discontinuation of the aforementioned routines that constitute a shared social framework and can cause a rip in the social reality. It can potentially disturb the modes of orientation usually provided for social actors through social activities. To put this into metaphor, it is as if social actors get bits and pieces of their usual social routine and shared social framework. For example, qualitative research of the experiences of young adults in Portugal with COVID-19 has shown that many participants reported experience of abrupt changes to major events, as well as lack of stimulation and the absence of a structured routine, further noting felt loss of contacts, increases in distrust of others and the experience of a loss of social competences through reduced interactions with others and shared social activities.¹¹ It can be proposed that this kind of experience can put great pressure on the sense of ontological security, and can provide a fertile ground for the disturbance in the sense of ontological security of social actors. This kind of rip in social functioning can bring individuals into greater proximity to the so-called existential givens. Usual continuity of social activity and daily routines produce a sense of being-in-the-world¹² whose felt sense is immersion which prevents one from thinking about existential questions and enables the social actor to take social and existential reality for granted. The discontinuation of the social activity to the current extent due to measures against the spread of COVID-19 can unsettle this. It has the potential of making social actors fall out of this immersion and bring them into contact with the existential structures beneath this sense of immersion. It can, in other words, bring into awareness the possibility of existential threats that are inherent in human existence. Consequently, there is a risk of the flood of existential anxieties kept at bay by social activities¹³ that constitute usual social functioning. This can manifest as a variety of changes in the experience of bodily

10 Benjamin, Henwood, Brian Redline, Sara Semborski, Harmony Roades, Eric Rice and Suzanne L. Wenzel, 'What's next? A grounded theory of the relationship between ontological security, mental health, social relationships, and identity formation for young adults in supportive housing', *Cityscape*, 20(3/2018), p. 87-100.

11 Catia Branquinho, Colette Kelly, Lourdes C. Arevalo, Anabela Santos, Margarida Gaspar de Matos, 'Hey, we also have something to say': A qualitative study of Portuguese adolescents' and young people's experiences under COVID-19', *Journal of Community Psychology*, 22(5/2020).

12 Martin Heidegger, *Being and time*, Harper&Row, New York, 1962.

13 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity*, Polity press, London, 1991, p. 39.

existence, perception of time and space or one's relation to the world. For the social actors unaware of the ontological nature of these processes, but even to those aware of it, this can have an unsettling effect.

What also creates potential conditions for unsettlement on the collective level is the lack of the possibility for the ascription of meaning to events of COVID19-pandemics within the confinements of the system of technological rationality whose principles are prevalent in the social system of today. Pandemic is namely on the social level interpreted within the discourse of technological rationality, which is the principle underpinning the management of the social system in contemporary society. Social system based on technological rationality has from the time-period of industrialism¹⁴ continued functioning on these principles also in the age of late modernity. Such a system manages social organization on the principles of calculability and utility.¹⁵ This is happening also with the management of the social crisis caused by the COVID19-pandemics. It is reflected in the areas that it handles, but also in the kind of narrative that it uses. The areas it handles are the ones of the instrumental rational action, while the language of this kind of narrative is technical and is reflected in terms used in public discourse to handle the crisis, such as 'social distance', 'numbers of the diseased', 'number of the deceased'. Such a language is oriented towards measurements. It reduces social handling of this crisis to the principles of calculability and utility, as Adorno and Horkheimer have noted that principles of technological rationality tend to do.¹⁶ Such a narrative can be equipped to address the technical dimension of the COVID19-pandemics, but its potential to address the emotional and symbolic dimension of the experience is limited. Phrases such as 'social distancing' are devoid of human content, as Adorno and Horkheimer have posited about the principles of pure reason¹⁷ guiding contemporary systems of technical management. The dealing with the crisis that is concerned with purely managerial aspects of the crisis handling does not include understanding of the consequences felt after the isolation or the need for human touch that people lack during the lockdown. These needs are of no concern to the system of technological rationality. Technological management of the crisis is not capable of offering the meaning or a point for social actors to

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14 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno: *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical fragments*: Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002.

15 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno: *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical fragments*: Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002., p. 3.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*, p.71

orient themselves to during the handling of the crisis, beyond instructions of technological rationality. These instructions do not concern themselves with the needs regarding the sociability, emotional or symbolic needs. They reveal the full extent to which such a system of technological rationality is lacking when it comes to handling the human needs beyond those of practical functionality. Emotional or symbolic needs are left for the individuals to handle themselves. This is in line with the principles guiding the age of individualization which deem systemic problems to be dealt with in an individualized manner.¹⁸ However, in the times in which social support is minimized and the social activity is significantly reduced, in times in which the access to the shared social routines is to great extent disabled, it is questionable whether such handling of the COVID-19 pandemic can create sufficient support to handle experiences of loneliness and anxiety potentially created by isolation and ontological insecurity that the COVID-19-pandemic threatens to unleash on a collective level. The social conditions in which the disruption of social activity which contributes to preventing existential anxiety is extreme enough to bring the sense of instability to the forefront of human experience, accompanied by the lack of meaning-making symbolic narratives does not seem supportive of the sense of psychological stability of the social actors participating in it.

It is no wonder that in such social circumstances there is a danger of mental health crisis ensuing. The studies that have documented the extent of the mental health crisis following the pandemics or being linked to pandemics are numerous and growing. Anxiety, loss of identity, disruption in usual activity, increases in feelings of loneliness are some of the experiences related to the COVID-19 imposed quarantine¹⁹ reported by the social actors on a global scale. Further, a longitudinal research in the UK during the three waves of the lockdown has shown that the 21% of the general population experienced above the cut-off point for moderate or severe levels of symptoms of anxiety and that the rate of suicidal ideation felt by young adults increased.²⁰ The study predicts the effects on mental health to be profound and long-lasting, while especially impacting the mental health of women, young people those from more socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with pre-existing mental health problems.²¹ Another study in Germany found

18 Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Gernsheim-Beck: *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, Sage Publications, London, 2001.

19 Samanta K Brooks, Rebecca K Webster, Louise E Smith, Lisa Woodland, Simon Wessely, Neil Greenberg, Gideon James Rubin, 'The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence', *The Lancet*, 10227(395/2020), p. 912-920.

20 Rory O'Connor, Karen Wetherall, Seonaid Cleare, Heather McClelland, Ambrose Melson, Claire Niedzwiedz, Ronan E. O'Carroll, Daryl B. O'Connor, Steve Platt, Elizabeth Scowcroft, Billy Watson, Tiago Zortea, Eamonn Ferguson and Kathryn A. Robb, 'Mental health and well-being during the covid-19 pandemic: Longitudinal analyses of adults in the UK covid-19 Mental Health & Wellbeing Study', *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 2020.

21 Ibid.

increased levels of psychosocial distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, irritability, and a decrease in overall well-being, sense of coherence, sexual contentment, and sleep quality.²² It can be suspected from these findings that there can be a mental health crisis following the current modes of social functioning within the COVID19-pandemic. Perhaps it is also important to note that the research has shown that actual and perceived social isolation are in general both associated with increased risk for early mortality.²³ This should be taken into account upon crafting the measures to prevent contagion.

In an attempt to further explore the lived experience of the pandemic, it is interesting to note how the transfer of social activity to the digital communicative spaces has the potential to affect the social experience of time and space of social actors. Manuel Castells noted that the space is in contemporary society becoming less important due to the development of what he terms the 'space of flows', based on the understanding of the space in terms of experience and social actions, which is a new type of space – the material support of simultaneous social practices communicated at a distance.²⁴ Separation of time and space is noted as crucial to the dynamism of the process of disembedding in late modernity by Anthony Giddens; the separating of time and space into standardized dimensions cut through the connections between social activity and its 'embedding' in the particularities of time and space.²⁵ This can be noted in the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts and their re-articulation across indefinite tracts of time-space.²⁶ Furthermore, in late modernity, the influence of distant events on the proximate ones as well as on one's self becomes more commonplace.²⁷ This is enabled by the ICT-supported digital communication channels. Breaking free from local practices and habits is what can be recognized as one of the implications of this process. These processes have accelerated with the rapid technological development at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. However, the current organization of everyday life during the COVID19-pandemics where the social activity is increasingly situated within the communicative realm of digital communication channels further accelerates the transfer of social activity to the digital communication realm. What happens is an incrementation of time at home and increased communication and relationship-maintenance

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22 Stefanie Jung, Jonas Kneer, Tillmann H.C. Krüger, 'Mental Health, Sense of Coherence, and Interpersonal Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown in Germany', *Journal of Clinical Medicine* 9(11/2020).

23 Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy B. Smith, Mark Baker, Tyler Harris, David Stephenson, 'Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(2/2015), 227-37.

24 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society, Volume I: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010., xxii.

25 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity press, Stanford, 1990, p. 20.

26 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity*, Polity press, London, 1991, p. 18.

27 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity*, Polity press, London, 1991.

through digital devices²⁸. The imposed social isolation measures due to the risk of contagion have fostered the use of digital communication in everyday lives of people at an unprecedented level in modern history. There is observed change in the noticeable increase in digital communication – the research from the USA shows that during the COVID19-lockdowns 43% of respondents used text messaging more often, while voice calls increased for 36%, social media use for 35%, video calls in 30%, almost a quarter of people used email more frequently (24%).²⁹ They have also forced some people to use new digital practices for the first time.³⁰

This is bound to be felt in the experience of time and space of social actors. It can be proposed that the increased organization of social activities through the digital communication realm further lessens the importance of space which was already taking place in late modernity. During COVID-19 pandemics most social events are held online due to the measures of social distancing intended to prevent the contagion. It is thus now possible to attend a conference or to see a theatre-play anywhere in the world, to attend class or hold a meeting from one's living room. The increase in the social and digital practices during the COVID19-pandemics has, in other words, enabled social actors to attend an event without being physically present – it has further freed social actors of their physicality as precondition for the participation in social activity. Giddens's consequences of modernity in terms of disembedding of events from their local context³¹ seem to be even more radicalized. It seems that space is due to the measures imposed on the social gatherings and consequently the transfer of all events online, becoming even more irrelevant. Human beings are now able to participate in an event held anywhere in the world, which constitutes a new lived experience of the globalized shared social reality with people in different geographical locations worldwide. This novel situation has the opportunity to turn the world into McLuhan's global village unlike ever before.³² Global happenings on digital applications are currently held daily on Facebook and are attended by the participants on the global level. In the COVID19-lockdowns, most social activities transcend the scope of the nation-state and turn into a stream of events in the digital realm. Physical presence is during the COVID-19 pandemic

28 Valeria Saladino, Davide Algeri and Auriemma Vincenzo, 'The Psychological and Social Impact of Covid-19: New Perspectives of Well-Being', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11/2020.

29 Minh Hao Ngyuen, Jonathan Gruber, Jaelle Fuchs, Will Marler, Amanda Hunsaker, Eszter Hargittai, 'Changes in Digital Communication During the covid-19 Global Pandemic: Implications for Digital Inequality and Future Research', *Social Media + Society* 6(3/2020).

30 Eszter Hargittai, Minh Nao Nguyen, Jaelle Fuchs, Jonathan Gruber Will Marler, Amanda Hunsaker and Gökce Karaoglu, Marco Gui, Tiziano Geroza, Elissa Redmiles, Marina Micheli, John E. Evans, Kerry Dobransky, *Covid – 19 Study on Digital Media and the Coronavirus Pandemic, Internet Use and Society Division*, Institute of Communication and Media Research, University of Zürich, 2020, available at: <http://webuse.org/covid/>.

31 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity press, Stanford, 1990.

32 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding media: The extensions of man*, Mc Graw-Hill, London i New York, 1964.

being erased as the condition necessary to one's attending of an event to such an extent on a social level that it is becoming the norm. Another example of this is the phenomenon of 'remote work'; significant scope of labor activities are being transferred to the digital communication realm and at distance from the actual working location. This phenomenon is during the COVID19-pandemics being normalized to such an extent that it has the potentiality of becoming the usual form of the social activity of work³³, at least partially. What is happening is a kind of a workplace displacement or its disembedding from the working place and re-embedding into the private household or the location freely chosen by the social actor. In all of these aspects, it indeed seems that the significant aspect of the COVID19-pandemic is that physical space is becoming even more increasingly irrelevant in the context of social activity than it was at the advent of late modernity. However, social phenomena are rarely one-dimensional. Instead, they often contain inherent contradictions. Manuel Castells recognized the contradiction inherent in the supposed lessening of the relevance of the space in the conditions of contemporary society - it is reflected in the fact that while the world is constructed around the logic of the space of flows, people still make their living in the space of places.³⁴ This contradiction can be seen as the contradiction inherent in the general feature of the digital communication realm, which is its divorce from the material and physical aspects of the social reality, as well as its features determined by those aspects. This contradiction is becoming palpably accentuated during the current COVID19-pandemics. Social actors are increasingly spending their time in the realm of digital communicative spaces, relying on them to maintain their everyday social functioning. This current situation, however, simultaneously reveals the extent of their constraints by the physicality and spatiality in terms of material practices and social support in the local social context to which social actors have or lack access to. Digital communication channels are enabling the continuation of those social practices that can be maintained only through the communicative aspect online. However, the satisfaction of the parts of social practices that require embodiment within digital communicative spaces is questionable. For example, a birthday or Christmas party thrown over Skype makes for a different

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33 Rahul De, Neena Pandey and Abhipsa Pal: 'Impact of digital surge during Covid-19 pandemic: A viewpoint on research and practice', *International Journal of Information Management*, 55(2020).

34 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society, Volume I: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010., xxxix.

experience than the birthday party in physical presence, which is reflected in the uncanny feeling when participants having to provide their drinks and food themselves and send gifts per post. The usefulness of the digital communicative spaces during the lockdown is indisputable, since they allow for at least partial continuation of the social activity. It is the phenomenological quality of those activities that is explored here. The absence created by the lack of the possibility of embodiment of symbolic social practices during digital communication point us to the limitations that the digital communicative spaces have for the replacement of the multifaceted nature of the human social activity. If there is a need for care by a certain social actor it becomes palpably evident that the task can be performed only by those living in the geographical proximity. It can be seen as revealing of how the material practices that support the survival of our bodily existence as well as determine it to some extent in the social sphere, such as in the cases of material support needed for basic care or human contact needed for social support, resist the transfer of the social activity to the digital realm. When borders between geographical areas were closed for the prevention of contagion in Croatia at certain points during the lockdown, the digital communicative realm had difficulties compensating for the lack of physical geographical locality and its social and material circumstances. However, here it should be warned against, as Eva Illouz calls, 'the paradigm of pure critique' and what she calls its 'longing for purity' and its requirement for the evaluation of certain cultural practices progressive or regressive in their totality.³⁵ The aim of this paper is not to discard or undervalue all the aspects of digital communication practices. It is needless to say that the possibilities of continuation of communicative aspects of social practices offered by digital communication channels enable at least partial social functioning and partial retaining of the social routines during the ongoing pandemic. Furthermore, it is also evident that the stretch of the events beyond their geographical localities to the global sphere of digital communicative spaces can be beneficial for the social actors of late modernity. At least in the communicative aspects and in relation to education and exposure to new influences, this can be advantageous for social actors. The aim of this paper is not to undervalue the extent of the opportunity of

35 Eva Illouz, *Hladne intimnosti: Oblikovanje čustvenega kapitalizma*, Založba Krtina, Ljubljana 2010., p. 112.

these practices to further lift social relations out of local context at least partially regarding the spread of the knowledge and reach. The aim is instead to use the opportunity that was granted by the transition of social activities online to this extent due to the COVID-19 pandemic – to explore the implications of the transference of the social practices online for the lived experience of social actors. Eva Illouz advocates for the critique to leave the area of purity and try to understand certain cultural practices from the perspective of their participants.³⁶ Building on this, to explore this further, an insight into how participants themselves see digital communicative spaces during COVID-19 would be required – an inquiry into how they experience these practices as a tool for relationship-maintenance during pandemic and to which extent the lack of the possibility of the embodiment of the social practices through digital channels affects the very social activities maintained through them. Namely, there is an intimation of a special type of exhaustion that is felt after participation in social activities online, which differs from the fatigue felt within embodied communication in physical reality. This exhaustion could point to the human physicality as understood by Maurice Merleau-Ponty³⁷, where the spatiality of the phenomenal human body takes hold of the space and social situations through the objects it touches and stimuli it anticipates in the space, thereby creating situational intentionality necessary to make full sense of social situations. To what extent can this intentionality be engaged when the only points of access to the communication process are a voice and picture of another person on a computer screen instead of other bodies? One is in contact only with the picture and the voice of the person we are communicating with, bits and pieces, but the body's inclusion in the process is limited. It is as if one gets only the communication aspect of the multifacetedness of the embodied social situations – these are felt intimations of the experience of the lack of embodiment of social practices online, after what is currently almost a year-long transfer of digital practices online and lack of shared physical social activity. There are also some intimations of the difference in the phenomenological experience between face-to-face and online communication given that the research has pointed to the face-to-face communication being associated with lower levels

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36 Eva Illouz, *Hladne intimnosti: Oblikovanje čustvenega kapitalizma*, Založba Krtina, Ljubljana 2010., p. 112-114.

37 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, The Humanities Press, New York, p.100.

of loneliness and higher life satisfaction in comparison with online communication.³⁸ Given such possible implications that point to the different phenomenological experience of the face-to-face encounter and consequently shared social activities in comparison to online communication there is a need for further discussion on this matter.

Furthermore, it has to be noted that the sudden transfer of social activity to the digital realm to the current extent is bound to have implications for social marginalization. Digital inequality research has documented how the internet use functions according to the patterns of inequality correlated to different educational, race, and age backgrounds which may then influence the benefits one can get from the use of the internet.³⁹ The internet is mostly used as a resource of support by those with greater Internet experience and skills, while people who lack digital skills or access to digital technologies are less likely to receive digital support since they have fewer resources of support for establishing new ways of communicating – those are older people or those with lower Internet skills, who are according to the research more likely to reduce digital communication in times of COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁰ In this way, the transfer of the social activities to the digital realm of the internet can deepen already existing social inequalities. This is especially troublesome when it is considered that digital communication is related to the building of certain kinds of capital: economic, social, cultural, political, and civic.⁴¹ Due to the extent to which social activity is transferred online in times of COVID-19 pandemics the maintenance of the social capital is to a large extent also transferred to the digital realm and that this can have implications for further widening of already existing social inequalities. Marginalized social groups can experience hardship in the request to maintain social activities and routines through the digital communication realm if they possess no access or lack of high-quality equipment needed to engage in them and/or the lack of the skills needed for the engagement. Data shows that those with lower internet skills, as well as older people, are more likely to reduce digital communication during the pandemic, which might add to their disconnection from society.⁴² When social activities are to large extent moved online, the exclusivity of access to them is based on the premises of digital skills and/or digital access to the extent

38 Donghee Yvette Wohn, Wei Peng, Doug Zytko, 'Face to Face Matters: Communication Modality, Perceived Social Support, and Psychological Wellbeing', ResearchGate, available at: file:///C:/Users/paska/Downloads/2017-chi17-facetofacematters.pdf

39 Paul DiMaggio, Eszter Hargittai, Coral Celeste, and Steven Shafer (2004). Digital inequality: From unequal access to differentiated use, in K. Neckerman (Ed.), *Social Inequality*, Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 355-400.

40 Minh Hao Ngyuen, Jonathan Gruber, Jaelle Fuchs, Will Marler, Amanda Hunsaker, Eszter Hargittai, 'Changes in Digital Communication During the covid-19 Global Pandemic: Implications for Digital Inequality and Future Research', *Social Media + Society* 6(3/2020).

41 Ellen Helsper, *Digital inclusion: an analysis of social disadvantage and the information society*, Department for Communities and Local Government, London, 2008.

42 Minh Hao Ngyuen, Jonathan Gruber, Jaelle Fuchs, Will Marler, Amanda Hunsaker, Eszter Hargittai, 'Changes in Digital Communication During the covid-19 Global Pandemic: Implications for Digital Inequality and Future Research', *Social Media + Society* 6(3/2020).

unknown before. This further brings us back to the necessity of material practices that digital communicative spaces require for their functioning and their consequent inherent physical aspect. It seems that so-called virtual reality is still determined by the physical one to great extent.

In general, it can be noted that the implications of COVID19-pandemic are contradictory. On one hand, they force social actors to transfer the activity online and render space more irrelevant. In this sense they offer new opportunities for global interconnectedness, rendering physicality as unnecessary precondition for attendance of social activity. However, in the context of accompanying lockdowns they simultaneously also enforce the return to the spatial confinements of social material reality and physical bodily existence. They reintroduce social actors to the material reality of the social reality that the digital realm has trouble overcoming – the local economic and social context we have increasingly started to believe that we were in the process of abandoning by the possibilities of distanced social activity through digital communicative spaces and the increased mobility in the age of late modernity and globalization. It is almost as if the COVID19-pandemic functions as the reminder of the importance of the physicality of social space that human beings inhabit despite the space becoming more irrelevant due to technological advancements of late modernity. This is happening in the advent of late modernity which, building on the legacy of modernity stemming from the Enlightenment as well as the processes of individualization, has started taking self-determination and bodily autonomy for granted, expanded further by the possibilities of self-exploration offered by the increased mobility and digital communicative spaces. In this context, the return to the confinements determined by geographical spatiality and its social and material constraints might come as a shock.

What can be noted by now in general is that the pandemic has interrupted the framework of the shared social practices. They are now engaged in partially and to great extent in digital communicative spaces which functions as bits and pieces of the shared offline social reality in pre-COVID19 times. In this manner the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the routines needed for the maintenance of the sense of ontological security of social actors. This pandemic can also be seen as a forced

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re-encounter with the spatial nature of human existence. It has seemingly freed us from the restrictions of physicality by removing the physical presence as the necessary condition for the social encounter and rendering physical locality as irrelevant to the unfolding of social activity. However, it has simultaneously revealed the extent to which digital communicative practices have trouble following material and spatial determinants of our social localities. The ultimate implications of the COVID19-pandemic on social and individual functioning are complex and yet unclear. Since the pandemic is still ongoing, their extent and shape is yet to be assessed.

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School for a Hollow Life or The Pedagogical Poem 2.0

Key words pandemic, corona, education, digitization, alienation, technoscience

Abstract In addition to medical and public health issues, the 2020 coronavirus pandemic raised some serious philosophical, (bio)ethical, social, political and legal questions that are essentially not new, although they appear under a new light. Among them is also the issue of education, because the coronavirus pandemic has accentuated the digitalisation and alienation trends in the field of education, urging us to consider not only the problems of education during the pandemic, but also the systemic problems in education, science and knowledge in the era of technoscience and neoliberal economy and politics.

Škola za životarenje ili Pedagoška poema 2.0

Ključne riječi pandemija, korona, obrazovanje, digitalizacija, alijenacija, tehnoznanaost

Sažetak Uz medicinska i javnozdravstvena pitanja, pandemija koronavirusa 2020. godine izazvala je neka ozbiljna filozofijska, (bio)etička, socijalna, politička i pravna pitanja koja nisu u bitnome nova, premda se pojavljuju u novome svjetlu. Među njima su i pitanja obrazovanja jer je pandemija koronavirusa potencirala trendove digitalizacije i alijenacije u sferi obrazovanja, što nas upućuje ne samo na razmatranje problematike obrazovanja u doba pandemije nego i sistemskih problema obrazovanja, znanosti i znanja u epohi tehnoznanaosti te neoliberalne ekonomije i politike.

As is the case with the field of labour, the field of education has also been strongly hit by the coronavirus pandemic. As in the case in the field of labour, including the economic and political context of labour, workers' rights and workers' struggle, the problems in the field of education are not new and are systemic. The crisis caused by the pandemic has only made them more explicit and more pronounced. Both in the field of labour and in the field of education, form has continued to overpower content and the system has continued to overpower people, the same as in this set-up, the interests of the powerful overpower the interest of the oppressed and personal interests overpower the general good. In the field of labour as in the field of education, old hierarchies, discriminations, exploitations, automatisations, bureaucratisations and alienations did not disappear, but have been upgraded by digitalisation, leading us to the dystopia of a dehumanised world, seemingly closer and more unavoidable today than ever before because today resistance to new and essentially negative trends is weaker than ever.

The similarities between the field of labour and the field of education are not random because labour and education are connected in their essence. Moreover, they are closely intertwined, especially in capitalist systems. This is why we can notice negative trends from the field of labour, both the old and the new, in the field of education, and vice versa. I will discuss two trends here: first *alienation*, which is not new, and its new driving force – *digitalisation*.

A classic and to date, the most in-depth discussion on alienation (estrangement) is to be found in Karl Marx's *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, more precisely in the chapter *Estranged labour*.¹ We can tackle the issue of alienation in education simply by reading Marx's deliberations on estranged labour so as to replace the word *labour* with the word *education*, replace the word *worker* (producer) with the word *student*, the word *production* with the word *learning* and the word *product* (product of labour) with the word *knowledge*. Let us then see how this modified Marx would read:

"The student becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his learning increases in power and size. The student becomes an ever-cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. [...] Education produces not only commodities; and the student as a *commodity*, and this at the same

¹ Marx, Karl, *Ekonomsko-filozofski rukopisi iz 1844* [*Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*], in: Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich, *Rani radovi* [*Early works*], Zagreb: Naprijed, 1989, pp. 187–343, chapter: *Otuđeni rad*, pp. 244–258, (citation in English from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>).

rate at which it produces commodities in general. This fact expresses merely that the object which education produces, its product, confronts it as something *alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of education is education which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of education. The realization [*Verwirklichung*] of education is its objectification. Under these economic conditions this realization of education appears as *loss of realization* (*Entwirklichung*) for the students; objectification as *loss of the object and bondage to it*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*. [...]

Indeed, education itself becomes an object which the student can obtain only with the greatest effort and with the most irregular interruptions. So much does the appropriation of the object appear as estrangement that the more objects the student produces the less he can possess and the more he falls under the sway of his product, capital. All these consequences are implied in the statement that the student is related to *the product of his education, knowledge*, as to an *alien* object. For on this premise it is clear that the more the student spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself, his inner world, becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. [...] The student puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence, the greater this activity, the more the student lacks objects. Whatever the product of his education, knowledge is, he is not. Therefore, the greater this product, knowledge, the less is he himself. The *alienation* of the student in his product, knowledge, means not only that his education becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists *outside* him, independently, as something *alien* to him, and that it becomes a power *on its own* confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien. [...]

Education produces beauty, but for the student, stupidity, cretinism. *The direct relationship of education to its products, knowledge, is the relationship of the student to the objects of his learning.* The relationship of the man of means to the objects of learning and to learning itself is only a *consequence* of this first relationship – and confirms it. [...]

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But the estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the *act of learning*, within the *learning activity*, itself. How could the student come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of learning he was estranging himself from himself? Knowledge is after all but the *summary* of the activity, of learning. If then knowledge is alienation, learning itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. In the estrangement of the object of learning is merely summarized the estrangement, the alienation, in the activity of education itself. What, then, constitutes the alienation of education? First, the fact that education is *external* to the student, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his education, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The student therefore only feels himself outside education, and in education feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not learning, and when he is learning he does not feel at home. His education is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced education*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, education is shunned like the plague. External education, education in which man alienates himself, is an education of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of education for the student appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another. [...]

We have considered the act of estranging practical human activity, education, in two of its aspects. (1) The relation of the student to the *product of education, knowledge*, as an alien object exercising power over him. [...] (2) The relation of education to the *act of learning* within the *education process*. This relation is the relation of the student to his own activity as an alien activity not belonging to him; [...]. [...]

In estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged education estranges the *species* from man. It changes for him the *life of the species* into a means of individual life. First it estranges the life of the

species and individual life, and secondly it makes individual life in its abstract form the purpose of the life of the species, likewise in its abstract and estranged form. [...] Life itself appears only as a means to life. [...]

Estranged education turns thus: (3) *Man's species-being*, both nature and his spiritual species-property, into a being *alien to him*, into a *means* of his *individual existence*. It estranges from man his own body, as well as external nature and his spiritual aspect, his human aspect. (4) An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his education, knowledge, from his life activity, from his species-being, is the *estrangement of man from man*. When man confronts himself, he confronts the *other* man. What applies to a man's relation to his education, to the product of his education, to his knowledge and to himself, also holds of a man's relation to the other man, and to the other man's education and object of education. [...] Hence within the relationship of estranged education each man views the other in accordance with the standard and the relationship in which he finds himself as a student. [...]

If knowledge is alien to me, if it confronts me as an alien power, to whom, then, does it belong? If my own activity does not belong to me, if it is an extorted activity, to whom, then does it belong?'

It is with this Marx's question, to which any one of us, with Marx's help or without it, could find the answers, that I end this long, transposing quotation. Why at all did I endeavour such a translation of Marx's deliberations on *labour* to the language of *education* and why do I force the reader to read Marx's passages interchangeably, as they were originally written and as they might be understood? The first answer is: because of the key word, which is *alienation*, an occurrence found equally often both in labour and in education. The second answer is: because alienation in education, as we may conclude by reading the 'translated Marx', progresses rapidly in the era of digitalisation, while digitalisation progresses rapidly in the era of a pandemic.

The total reorganisation of life in the era of a pandemic may also be viewed as a laboratory examination of alienation, in education and elsewhere: alienation from own activity, alienation from products of own labour, alienation from other people and alienation from oneself. What is, in the context

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of such alienation, the role of students in education? What is the relationship of students towards their own education, towards learning and knowledge, towards themselves? What are the relationships among students as living beings and persons like? And what are the relationships between students and teachers as living beings and persons (not to mention the alienation and self-alienation of teachers, which is a separate issue, although the context is the same) like? – All this became secondary. Efficiency and effectiveness are sought after at all costs and regardless of everything that should actually result from education.

This is known or at least felt by all those who were in the spring of 2020 thrust into the black box of the so-called distance learning or online-classes: teachers at schools and universities, parents who watched their children be de-educated (deformed), while being educated (formed), without being able to do anything about it, and last but not least, students in schools and at universities who are more than ever engaged in their education and reap less results than ever from it. If the first, the second and the third group knows it, i.e., if all of them became aware of this, then they can voice criticism, although there is still not much they can change. If they are not even aware of it, as is the case for most, then their unconscious insight is rummaging through their consciousness and, in the words of Sigmund Freud, 'it comes to discontent, displeasure for which other motives are sought'². Which is a Freudian introduction to neurosis.

Nevertheless, it would be naïve to think that it was the pandemic that led to this. A long process of 'modernisation' of education in the form of 'informatisation' and 'digitalisation' of teaching and learning lies in the roots of this phenomenon, and this is in turn based on the never overpowered model of repressive and manipulative education, for which digitalisation represents only a new means to an old end.

The instrumentalisation of education by the ruling elites and structures, in accordance with their ideology is not new. Ever since it became clear that public (mass and compulsory) education is a much more effective means of ideological indoctrination, manipulation and oppression than restrictive education, that is, the education of upper, wealthier and more powerful social classes as paired with keeping the lower, poorer

² Freud, Sigmund: *Nelagodnost u kulturi [The Discomfort in Culture]*, in: Freud, Sigmund: *Iz kulture i umetnosti [From Culture and Art]*, translated by Đorđe Bogičević, Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1984, p. 346.

and disempowered social classes uneducated – a sophistication of education methods has been undertaken, without forgetting about the objectives, purposes and values of education that have been continuously reinterpreted to serve the maintenance and advancement of the ruling regimes. Automatisation, informatisation and digitalisation of education only bring the old educational malice to a higher level and make it less noticeable, thus weakening resistance. This is not only because manipulative elements are becoming ever harder to notice but also because the system remembered in time to make use of human weakness for its benefits, be it ignorance (because knowledge, as we can clearly see today, need not necessarily be the result of education and schooling), laziness or shyness.³

The reorientation of education towards outcomes, outputs and impacts (all 'key' and 'buzz' words) only confirms the theory by the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, on the 'banking concept' in contemporary education as an instrument of disempowerment and oppression.⁴

Sociological and pedagogical criticism of the 'banking concept' of education is undoubtedly useful, but deeper layers are at play here, that only deeper philosophical analysis may tackle. In other words, a phenomenology of technicised education is necessary, but without essential questions into the nature of education and the nature of the technique we are not going to reach the core of the problem. A discussion on this topic would lead me to far astray from the points I would like to stress here. Nevertheless, I would like this, if only exemplary, to be mentioned in this review. In this context, I find illustrative a passage from the book *The Technical Society* by a French thinker Jacques Ellul:

"The milieu into which a technique penetrates becomes completely, and often at a stroke, a technical milieu. If a desired result is stipulated, there is no choice possible between technical means and nontechnical means based on imagination, individual qualities, or tradition. Nothing can compete with the technical means. The choice is made a priori. It is not in the power of the individual or of the group to decide to follow some method other than the technical. The individual is in a dilemma: either he decides to safeguard his freedom of choice, chooses to use traditional, personal, moral, or empirical means, thereby entering into competition with a power against

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³ For instance, it is only when 'distance learning' was no longer just one of the teaching methods and a matter of choice, that I realised that among my fellow colleagues and teachers there were some who like this 'virtualisation' because the 'classic method', 'the face-to-face', is too strenuous and they do not enjoy it, be it due to laziness or certain psycho-emotional aversion from social contacts. So, it could be said that they are not only the advocates of 'distance learning' (teaching/learning from a distance), but that they are advocates of 'distanced learning' (distanced and thus alienated teaching/learning), thereby repressing the obvious negative implications of this model of teaching/learning.

⁴ Cf. Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogija obespravljenih [Pedagogy of the Oppressed]*, translated by Sanja Bingula, Zagreb: ODRAZ, 2002, (citation in English from: <https://envs.ucsc.edu/internships/internship-readings/freire-pedagogy-of-the-oppressed.pdf>).

which there is no efficacious defense and before which he must suffer defeat; or he decides to accept technical necessity, in which case he will himself be the victor, but only by submitting irreparably to technical slavery. In effect he has no freedom of choice.⁵

The unwilling or disillusioned participants of the educational process in the era of digitalisation and during a pandemic should have their minds tickled at least a little, but even if this does happen, the question is: what to do with these realisations? What kind of 'pedagogical poem' (after discussing and dissecting the socialist *Pedagogical poem* by Anton Semyonovich Makarenko⁶ and other pedagogical theories and practices, from anarchist to capitalists, for example from William Godwin to Benjamin Bloom) could be written in these digital and pandemic times? I still have not determined its kind, but I know it should be written because there are still no comprehensive deliberations regarding the recent educational situation, with answers to old and unsolved problems which have been digitally and pandemically distorted these days. Although now, in accordance with the spirit of the times, they are not called problems. Other, more endearing terms are employed, such as 'challenges'.

We fought problems called 'challenges' even before the pandemic, so we should not cover them in a pile of new problems. We should rather try to unearth both piles and review them together at one glance. My reference here is, of course, to the Croatian 'comprehensive curricular reform' and its avantgarde, the experimental programme called School for Life [*Škola za život*], which promises that students will 'learn how to think critically and how to solve problems and not just cram facts', that is, that 'each student will get his or her own tablet to learn and thus prepare for the digital era.'⁷ Whether and (how exactly) 'critical thinking' will be reconciled with the 'use of a tablet' and 'navigating the digital world' remains completely unclear, especially if we read these statements parallelly with warnings, such as those by Ellul, and especially when, in accordance with the pandemic and police measures, the entire teaching and learning process has overnight become virtual.

The answer to the 'challenges' of the pandemic digitalisation should at the same time be the answer to the problem of

5 Ellul, Jacques, *Tehnika ili Ulog veka* [*The Technological Society*], translated by Nenad iz Erevona, Beograd: Anarhija/Blok 45, Bratstvo iz Erevona, 2010, pp. 101–102, (citation in English from: <https://ia803209.us.archive.org/2/items/JacquesEllulTheTechnologicalSociety/JacquesEllul%20-%20The%20Technological%20Society.pdf>).

6 Makarenko, Anton Semjonovič, *Pedagoška poema* [*The Pedagogical Poem*], Beograd: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika sr Srbije, 1965.

7 Cf. promotional video *Škola za život* at: <https://skolazazivot.hr/promotivni-video-skola-za-zivot/>.

digitalisation in general, and thus to problems in education in general. Some thoughts, written down *ad hoc*, might help:

– The tabletisation of education through tablets (computers) is equally as dangerous as the tabletisation of children through psychotropic drugs (as used increasingly more often in the ‘developed world’ as a shortcut to treating misunderstood psycho-emotional and psycho-social problems, such as ADHD). Oftentimes, tablets (as in computers) are the cause of the problem that is tried to be solved by tablets (as in pills).

– Digitalisation (in education and in general) does not contribute to acceleration or simplification, in line with the slogan used every time new technical and digital tools and procedures are introduced. Truth be told, it does contribute to acceleration, but not to simplification, because acceleration, which is entangled, without necessary reflection, in all of the old issues, even if in fact it aims to solve them, only causes additional and all the more difficult complications to be eliminated later. If digitalisation simplifies anything, then it simplifies, bordering on banality and stupidity, reflection and criticism.

– The key failure of the recent educational reform in Croatia is that it relies on ‘informatisation’ or ‘digitalisation’ as its core element, while the key problem of the pandemic reorganisation of the school system in Croatia is that digitalisation of teaching and learning is embraced uncritically and superficially, as if it had no implications on teaching and learning.

Against the backdrop of such (lack of) deliberation and (lack of) criticism, one should carefully monitor, both at school and at home, the devastating impact of digitalisation on the minds of children and youth. Should special attention be drawn to this? Obviously, it should, because the deconstruction of the mind (ratio, identity, autonomy, freedom, etc.) under the influence of information and communication technology is noticed even in those who spent most of their lives without the information and communication devices now available, let alone those who never came to know life outside the ruling matrix.

Therefore, in the field of education, we should strive to save as much of children’s souls and as many of children’s souls from the virtual techno-Moloch, rather than plugging the last remaining cracks in the wall that keeps the children from reaching to digitally unmediated world with gadgets. The world

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in which love and hate, acceptance and unacceptance, gentleness and cruelty and other important traits of humanity live a different life from that lived among cold and calculated bits.

This advice could have counted with understanding and acceptance until recently, while informatisation/digitalisation was only one of the options (although preferred) for 'modernising' and 'reforming' education. Now, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, it seems that this advice has no foothold in anything from the 'real world', that it is completely 'unrealistic' because: if there is no 'distance learning' and 'digital education', then there will be no classes or education at all!

However, I still think that we should not fall for arguments that apply in 2020, but perhaps will no longer apply in 2021 or 2121. Moreover, I think that no flaws that we found in education and education systems in the pre-pandemic and the pre-digital era should be disregarded under the pandemisation and digitalisation pressures, because these are, as I tried to show, only symptoms of very old maladies which will continue to plague us for a long time to come.

If we address problems on this primary level, by giving them a historic dimension and removing the euphoria that currently surrounds them from the equation, we will see that both the 'pandemisation' and the 'digitalisation' of education stem from what has been well-established much earlier. Specifically, education in a certain social, political and economic system is always the education for that system. What a system is, is reflected in education, while education helps to maintain the system such as it is. Bluntly speaking, education today, regardless of standard rhetorical euphemisms, is merely a reproduction of an oppressive society in the form of school. Ideological, curricular and, finally, financial underscoring of the importance of STEM⁸ at the expense of humanistic and social sciences is not only promoting a certain vision of science and education. It also shows only a certain vision of society, which is, as it seems, more dystopic than utopic because it is mechanistic and technical, devoid of wider social and deeper humanistic reflection.

Nevertheless, this is the situation, this is the hand that has been dealt to us and that we must play. Do we have an ace to pull out of our sleeve? Probably not much else than analysis and criticism, whose meaning and dignity we have to defend from the hegemonistic attacks of the system. Sometimes this

⁸ STEM = science, technology, engineering, mathematics.

means invoking 'common sense', because even 'common sense' tells us that the system is cheating at this game, that the cards are fixed. For instance, there is the earlier mentioned 'School for Life' which will, as it is being promised, finally meet the needs and interests of students through, for example, tabletisation. Some (more superficial) critics of this educational reform have complained that this is cosying up to children who are already completely digitalised because it attempts to make education more fun and more memorable, but not better. This type of criticism misses an important point: it is not the case of cosying up to autonomous children's wants and needs, but a case of deceptive cosying up to children's wants and needs manufactured by those who now promise to fulfil them. The key manipulation is hidden in the fact that methods of discipline and control are now presented in the form of something children like and that goes in their favour, as if children themselves chose or created this manipulative system they have been planted into, as is often deducted from their capability to quickly master technical procedures and skilfully use technical gadgets.⁹ Information and telecommunication technologies (cunningly programmed to create addiction) and mass media (cunningly programmed to anesthetise and stupefy) are a much more efficient means of control and manipulation than military or police repression, as was understood long before the internet, mobile phones or social media.

Since this medialisised, virtual world, the world of information and communication still does not meet all human wants and needs, human life still cannot, luckily, be reduced to direct inputs and outputs, so the 'School for Life', which aims to reduce education to inputs and outputs and reproduce this medialisised virtual world in the field of education, is not a school for life but rather a school for a hollow life. As one, but an important one, segment of manipulation with life – in which, in Marx's words 'Life itself appears only as a means to life.'¹⁰ – 'School for Life' is in its essence contrary to life, antibiological. And, if freedom is written in the essence of the human, and if liberation is written in the essence of human activity, then this 'school for a hollow life' also serves to enslave, no matter how happy the slaves are to participate.

In short, Croatian reformist 'School for Life' and all other schools for a hollow life offered at today's market of

9 Interesting in this context and even very relevant today is an article by the German theologian, teacher and 'the father of European bioethics', Fritz Jahr, *Children and technology*, from 1933, in which Jahr contemplates 'two characteristics of today's youth', 'one is the propensity for technology and a gift for it' (Jahr Fritz, *Dijete i tehnika* [*Children and technology*], in: Rinčić, Iva and Muzur, Amir, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike* [*Fritz Jahr and the Emergence of European Bioethics*], Zagreb: Pergamena, 2012, p. 239). Jahr examines this in the context of the then technological wonder, a camera, while in the context of recent gadgets his conclusions seem even more true. He states: 'It is most significant that children do not see these things as miraculous at all. [...] The young use the advantages of apparatus without knowledge of its technical or biological assumptions. [...] When all this is cleared, one comes to realise that the young are in extreme danger of the greatest superficiality in technical matters and, in my opinion, one might say that not only a few succumb to this danger. [...] Simply stated: the change in the relationship between children and adults as a result of their seemingly independently acquired greater technical knowledge seems, in my opinion, wrong, as well as educational measures (or neglect thereof) that are based on this misconception.' (Ibid., pp. 240–241).

10 K. Marx, *Ekonomsko-filozofski rukopisi iz 1844* [*Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*], p. 251, (citation in English from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>).

pedagogical and political ideas get further and further removed from life, unless human life is irretrievably made equal to controlled execution of functions in complex technical systems. Being removed from life also means being removed from the purpose and the sense of education, upbringing and knowledge, of which today we get to read only in the works of critically and radically minded theorist – not in various documents of educational politicians, which serve as an unsatisfactory compensation for deep and far-reaching contemplation of education, while we find less and less meaningful contributions to such deliberations in pedagogical, psychological, sociological and philosophical tractates dedicated to education, because they mostly recycle and thus confirm that what has already gained prevalence in the social and historical as well as in economic and political sense.

If we only focus on the fate of knowledge in contemporary education, we witness an accelerated reduction of the term *knowledge* to the term *information*, which is extended to the reduction of the term *information* to the term *data*. The volume and the greatness of human knowledge – as a historic project in which each man, without exception, participated – has been ironically reduced to 'big data', collected and processed by machines.

Knowledge is further and further away, and wisdom – as lived knowledge and as the purpose of knowledge in the entirety of a fulfilled human life, both individual and joint – has already become a completely archaic idea. This process is also not new. But, while until a few decades ago it brewed beneath the surface, chipping away at the roots of thousand years-old trees, it is now happening on the surface, where heavy machinery is felling weakened trees.

Thomas Stearns Eliot, in *Choruses from 'The Rock'*,¹¹ in verses that are more than ninety years old already vailed:

*O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!
The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,*

11 Eliot, Thomas Stearns, *Choruses from 'The Rock'*, in: Eliot, Thomas Stearns, *Collected Poems 1909–1962*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1963, p. 147. (citation in English from: https://www.arak29.am/PDF_PPT/6-Literature/Eliot/Chtherock_eng.pdf).

*All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
 But nearness to death no nearer to God.
 Where is the Life we have lost in living?
 Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
 Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?*

However, far from it that reducing wisdom to knowledge, knowledge to information and information to data is not 'useful'. Of course, it is useful (if it were not, it would not be done systematically), but the question is: to whom? I would like to repeat Marx's question that can be applied here as well: 'If my own activity does not belong to me, if it is an extorted activity, to whom, then does it belong?'¹²

Knowledge has always been manipulated; it has always been both the subject and the means of manipulation. The same goes for information, while in the case of data, there are virtually no obstacles to manipulation. Those that are economically, politically and socially the most powerful manipulate the most and most successfully, and the primary ground for manipulation is education, that is, the system of education. Various authors in various fields wrote about the usurping and manipulation of education by the ruling classes and associated structures and ideologies – which was always combined with the (re)defining of the term knowledge and its purposes – among them were also those of the anarchist persuasion.¹³

So, in addition to internal restrictions of knowledge – which I previously mentioned, and for which I used T. S. Eliot – also important are the external restrictions of knowledge, that I underlined as well, and that the American poet William Carlos Williams wandered about in his legendary poem *Paterson*:¹⁴

*Who restricts knowledge? Some say
 it is the decay of the middle class
 making an impossible moat between the high
 and the low where
 the life once flourished ... knowledge
 of the avenues of information —
 So that we do not know (in time)
 where the stasis lodges* And if it is not
 the knowledgeable idiots, the university,
 they at least are the non-purveyors*

¹² Marx, Karl, *Ekonomsko-filozofski rukopisi iz 1844* [Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844], p. 258, (citation in English from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>).

¹³ A provisional list includes contemporary authors such as Paul Goodman, Paulo Freire, Colin Ward, Ivan Illich, Noam Chomsky, Joel Spring and Judith Suissa, then authors from the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, such as Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Leo Tolstoy, Francisco Ferrer and Emma Goldmann, but also older (e.g. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and Max Stirner), whose criticism of educational models and systems, with a certain degree of recontextualization, are relevant even today. For a relevant concise overview of the anarchist and/or libertarian approach to the problem of education cf. Kranjec, Jelena and Jurić, Hrvoje, *Anarhija u školi* [Anarchy at school], *Ispod pločnika*, No. 7, Year 3 (2009), April/May 2009, pp. 5–10; also in: Jurić, Hrvoje, *Iskušenja humanizma* [Temptations of humanism], Zagreb: Hrvatsko filozofsko društvo, 2018, pp. 139–156.

¹⁴ Williams, William Carlos, *Paterson*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983, p. 34. (citation in English from: <http://www.patersonproject.com/Paterson-Poem.html>).

*should be devising means
to leap the gap. Inlets? The outward
masks of the special interests
that perpetuate the stasis and make it
profitable.*

*They block the release
that should cleanse and assume
prerogatives as a private recompense.
Others are also at fault because
they do nothing.*

But what could be done? If we speak about education, the first answer is – a reform of the education system. If we are unhappy with the situation in education and if we find the existing model, organisation and the effects of education unacceptable, we should design and try to implement or at least support reform. This was, as it seems, also claimed by the Spanish anarchist and pedagogist Francisco Ferrer when he said that the method of 'changing school':

'[...] offers great advantages, and is in harmony with the evolutionary conception which men of science regard as the only effective way of attaining the end. They are right in theory, as we fully admit. It is evident that the progress of psychology and physiology must lead to important changes in educational methods; that the teachers, being now in a better position to understand the child, will make their teaching more in conformity with natural laws. I further grant that this evolution will proceed in the direction of greater liberty, as I am convinced that violence is the method of ignorance, and that the educator who is really worthy of the name will gain everything by spontaneity; he will know the child's needs, and will be able to promote its development by giving it the greatest possible satisfaction'¹⁵.

However, Ferrer immediately voices his doubt in the reformist endeavours, thus really rejecting them as an option:

'In point of fact, however, I do not think that those who are working for the regeneration of humanity have much to hope from this side. Rulers have always taken care to control the education of the people; they know better than any that their

¹⁵ Ferrer, Francisco, *Moderna škola: poreklo i ideali* [*The Origin and Ideals of the Modern School*], translated by Bratislav Srećković and Milenko Srećković, Beograd: Centar za liberterske studije [Center for Libertarian Studies (CLS)], 2010, p. 65, (citation in English from: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/francisco-ferrer-the-origin-and-ideals-of-the-modern-school>).

power is based entirely on the school, and they therefore insist on retaining their monopoly of it.¹⁶

And he is right. All those who have participated in educational reforms – and only a few of us who work in the system could afford the luxury of not collaborating in reform processes – know how little can be changed and how many frustrations arise out of every attempt at change.

So since those in power 'organised the school in accord with the new scientific ideas in such a way that nothing should endanger their supremacy', 'the hope of reformers has been void because the organisation of the school, instead of serving an ideal purpose, has become one of the most powerful instruments of servitude in the hands of the ruling class. The teachers are merely conscious or unconscious organs of their will, and have been trained on their principles. (...) 'Education' means in practice domination or domestication.¹⁷

As a result, there is no other way for radical pedagogist but to found – new schools 'in which principles may be directly applied in the service of that ideal which is formed by all who reject the conventions, the cruelty, the trickery, and the untruth which enter into the bases of modern society.'¹⁸

However, since 'education' has, step by step, been made equal with 'schooling' and schooling became entangled in social life to such an extent that it has become as necessary for survival as breathing and eating, today it is even hard to imagine the possibility of a socially efficient education outside the system and outside institutionalised education. In Ferrer's era, when state repression was much more explicit than today, the possibility for this, was paradoxically, much greater because society was not as 'schooled' as today, so the request for 'deschooling' of society could appear only decades later.¹⁹

Ferrer and other 19th century anarchists managed to create autonomous educational enclaves outside the system, which were not only against the system but were really undermining it. That is why they could go frontally against the system of public and compulsory education that serves to uphold and advance an oppressive social and political system. Radical, free-thinking educational theorists of the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century (e.g. Paulo Freire, Colin Ward, Noam Chomsky and Joel Spring) are mostly

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16 Ibid., pp. 65–66.

17 Ibid., pp. 69–70.

18 Ibid., p. 65 – Ferrer did it too, by establishing Modern school [Escuela moderna] in 1901 in Barcelona and in several other Spanish cities. He paid for his free spirit with his life: he was sentenced to death and executed in 1907 and his schools were closed. However, schools modelled after Ferrer's Modern school were established elsewhere as well, for example in the USA, thanks to anarchists such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman.

19 Here I refer to analyses and criticism by Ivan Illich, expressed in the book *Deschooling Society* from 1971 – cf. Ivan Illich, *Dole škole*, Beograd: Duga, 1972.

academically established, so they have been corrupted from the very start, untrustworthy to a degree, and in the end inefficient, while the projects of 'alternative' or 'free schools,' such as Summerhill, were in one way or another incorporated in the system and, what is even worse, they were private schools attended only by students whose parents could afford them.

What then is the alternative? An unsatisfactory but accurate answer would be: acting in small, almost invisible liberated territories within the system, i.e., subversions undertaken with a slim hope that they will lead to more substantial changes. However, in neither of the cases as well as in the existing, extremely unfavourable circumstances, may great objectives be forgotten, although we know that they will not be attained, either soon or easily. Ferrer knew how to express such grand objectives concisely and simply:

'We do not hesitate to say that we want men who will continue unceasingly to develop; men who are capable of constantly destroying and renewing their surroundings and renewing themselves; men whose intellectual independence is their supreme power, which they will yield to none; men always disposed for things that are better, eager for the triumph of new ideas, anxious to crowd many lives into the one life they have.'²⁰

Can this be achieved within the ruling system, regardless of whether we describe it in the narrow sense, as a capitalist system, or in the broad sense, as a technical system? The answer has, in a sense, already been given. It is quite simple and almost surely accurate: no way!²¹ It is much harder to provide an answer to the question whether we even still have the capacity to act outside this system, the capacity that is not deeply infected by the maladies of the system? This paradox was also pointed out by Jacques Ellul when he said:

'There is no place for an individual today unless he is a technician. No social group is able to resist the pressures of the environment unless it utilizes technique. To be in possession of the lightning thrust of technique is a matter of life or death for individuals and groups alike; no power on earth can withstand its pressures.'²²

20 Ferrer, Francisco, *Moderna škola [The Origin and Ideals of the Modern School]*, pp. 72–73, (citation in English from: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/francisco-ferrer-the-origin-and-ideals-of-the-modern-school>).

21 Ferrer says that the ruling elites 'have resolved to use education for their purposes, and they will take advantage of every improvement of it', because 'there is question only of imposing ready-made ideas on it [the child], of preventing it [the child] from ever thinking otherwise than is required for the maintenance of existing social institutions — of making it, in a word, an individual rigorously adapted to the social mechanism.' – *Ibid.*, p. 71.

22 Ellul, Jacques: *Tehnika ili Ulog veka [The Technological Society]*, p. 102, (citation in English from: <https://ia803209.us.archive.org/2/items/JacquesEllulTheTechnologicalSociety/Jacques%20Ellul%20-%20The%20Technological%20Society.pdf>).

What we can do and how – remains unanswered here. However, being satisfied by asking a question, even without finding an answer, need not necessarily be a sign of defeat, especially if circumstances are such that even asking question has become scarcer and scarcer. All in all, if sudden exaltation about anything transcends into euphoria and quiets or eliminates criticism, it is our duty to fuel scepticism. If digitalisation (pre-pandemic or pandemic) is a trend praised from all sides with diminishing resistance, if digitalisation is considered an ‘ultimate solution’ for many of our educational issues, and often even a ‘magic wand’ which will make certain problems disappear, we must remember Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his work *Emile, or On Education*, where he provided advice as helpful today as it was in 1762:

‘Reverse the usual practice and you will almost always do right.’²³

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23 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques
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Ageism in the Age of Pandemic

Key words pandemic, hatred, ageism, young people

Abstract Elderly persons, in addition to their health needs, also have a need for being socially perceived as persons and for considering aging as a normal life process. Throughout history, older people have been considered a social problem, resulting in a negative attitude towards the old age group. Ageism is a term denoting discrimination of a group of people because of their old age. Discrimination occurs because of the belief that aging causes negative changes that make a person less attractive, less intelligent and, most importantly, less productive. During a pandemic, the society's unethical actions towards this particularly vulnerable group become evident. These include cruelties in the triage procedure in some EU countries, giving preference to those who have a better chance of survival, and the recurring impression among the younger populations that nothing significant has changed in their lives and that, accordingly, nothing should be changed in their habits and behaviour.

Staromrštvo u doba pandemije

Ključne riječi pandemija, staromrštvo ili ageism, mladi ljudi

Sažetak Stariji ljudi, osim zdravstvenih potreba, imaju i potrebu za društvenom percepcijom njih kao osoba i starenja kao normalnog životnog procesa. Kroz povijest, starije osobe su se smatrale socijalnim problemom i razvilo se negativno stajalište prema starijoj dobnoj skupini. Ageism je pojam koji označava diskriminaciju određene skupine ljudi zbog njihove starije dobi. Do diskriminacije dolazi zbog uvjerenja kako starenjem dolazi do negativnih promjena koje čovjeka čine manje atraktivnim, manje inteligentnim i, najbitnije, manje produktivnim. Za vrijeme pandemije očituju se neetički postupci društva prema ovoj posebno ugroženoj skupini. Od onih početnih okrutnosti u trijažnom postupku prema velikom broju bolesnika u nekim europskim društvima da se prednost dodijeli onom koji ima veću šansu za preživljavanje do svakodnevno ponavljanje činjenice kako je većina umrlih starije životne dobi i osoba s nekom kroničnom bolešću u jednog dijela mlađe populacije stvorilo se dojam kako se njima ništa značajno u životu ne mijenja u današnje vrijeme te da sukladno rečenom ne treba mijenjati ništa u svojim navikama i ponašanju.

Introduction

I was inspired to give a lecture on this topic by Ante Tomić's column titled 'Getting Old Ain't for Sissies,' published on April 12, 2020 in *Jutarnji list*.

'Who in their right mind would decide that a seven-year-old schoolgirl, a beautiful budding creature, should sing about an elderly woman sitting on a park bench and watching the children play, thinking about her life fading like the sun on the horizon? What did these frivolous young men and women really know about the torment of aging, about illness, fear and loneliness, about sagging skin, withered muscles, squeaky bones, and dentures on shelves?'¹

During the current pandemic, when publishing data in the media about persons who have died of COVID, it is always emphasized how old the person was and whether he or she was suffering from chronic diseases. Nearly one-quarter of the tweets analyzed in a study had ageistic or potentially offensive content concerning the elderly.² This constant repetition of the fact that the majority of deaths were elderly and people with chronic diseases has created an impression in one part of the younger population that nothing significant in their lives has changed. With the advent of summer and in search for familiar summertime patterns of behavior, the numbers of diseased and the epidemiological situation have changed significantly. Patients are no longer only 'old,' 'oncological,' or 'chronic.' Generational differences and social changes caused by the spread of infectious diseases have long been the subject of writing. A good example is found in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, when he describes the Florentine society during the Black Death of 1348: 'Such fear filled the hearts of men and women... that a brother neglected his brother, a sister her brother... a wife her husband, and even... fathers and mothers avoided caring for their children.'³ Boccaccio's advice is the following: protect yourself with stories. By fleeing the city, surrounding yourself with pleasant company, and telling stories for good mood, a mixture of social isolation and entertaining activities, you can survive the worst days of the epidemic. By advising people to avoid the cities, he thus pioneered what today's public health experts call social isolation.

1 Ante Tomić, 'Starenje nije za curice' [Getting old ain't for sissies], <https://www.jutarnji.hr/naslovnica/pise-ante-tomic-starenje-nije-za-curice-kakav-je-samo-uzas-lezati-napusten-s-krivnjom-da-ste-uzeli-postelju-i-respirator-nekom-mladem0196539> (last accessed on May 27, 2020).

2 Maria Renee Jimenez, Carolina Gomez Moreno, and Enrique Soto-Perez-de-Celis, 'Coronavirus, Ageism, and Twitter: An Evaluation of Tweets about Older Adults and COVID-19,' <https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.16508> (last accessed on August 20, 2019).

3 Rušev Marija, 'Giovanni Boccaccio, Dekameron, PPT,' 198.53.8 › rivaon › hrvatski › Boccaccio_ Dekameron (last access on June 20, 2020).

He also understood the importance of what we now call mental wellbeing, threatened not only by the feeling of isolation, but also by stigma. Stories cannot protect people from the virus, but they at least give them a chance when it comes to fighting the negative feelings created by the epidemics and quarantine. How much humanity have we retained through this time and do we recall the triage procedures in some EU countries and the decisions on who would be put on respirators? Community attitudes towards the elderly during a pandemic can be analyzed by focusing on three important issues: the lockdown of nursing homes, recommendations of staying at home indefinitely long despite being separated from the family and suffering from increased social exclusion, and denying access to respirators during the early days of the pandemic and the exponential growth of sick persons. From 'benevolent' health advice on age sensitivity to ghettoizing the elderly in order to minimize risk, ageistic rhetoric has been dominant in pandemic control.⁴

We like to look for good qualities in ourselves, as well as for confirmation and gratitude in the eyes of others, and we often point out that a society is as strong as its weakest link. The World Health Organization emphasizes: 'The true measure of any society is found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.' (WHO, 2019)⁵

Unfortunately, there are different examples as well. The state policies of Western societies often see the elderly as a burden rather than an integral part of the population, whose members must be equally valuable. The elderly are rarely sufficiently represented in the media and the administration to have a voice in decision-making. The media play a significant role in spreading ageistic stereotypes and negative attitudes towards the elderly, especially in times of crisis.⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted this exclusion and prejudice against them. The current crisis emphasizes the disturbing public speech about aging that calls into question the value of elderly lives and neglects their irreplaceable contribution to the society.

Based on the negative perception of age and aged persons, and the social attitudes towards them, we were interested in establishing how many young people without medical education could identify violence against elderly persons in their own environment.

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4 Ruscak Silvija, Štambuk Ana and Verić Jelena, 'Dobna diskriminacija: iskustva starijih osoba' [Ageism: Experiences of elderly persons], *Hrvatska revija za rehabilitacijska istraživanja* (49/2013), pp. 96-105.

5 Renato Matić, 'Odnos hrvatskoga društva prema starijim osobama: Ispit humanosti i vizije budućnosti' [Attitudes of the Croatian society towards elderly persons: A test of humanity and a vision of the future], <https://doi.org/10.31823/d.26.4.5> · UDK: 314.8-953.9:17(497.5) (last accessed on August 20, 2020).

6 Fraser Sarah, Lagace Martine, Bongue Bienvenu, et al., 'Ageism and COVID-19: What Does Our Society's Response Say about Us?' *Age and Ageing* (49/2020), pp. 692-695.

An important dimension of the lives of older people, in addition to their health needs, is the social perception of them as persons and of aging. Throughout history, older people have been considered a social problem, resulting in a negative attitude towards the old age group. Ageism is a term denoting discrimination of a group of people because of their old age. Discrimination occurs because of the belief that aging causes negative changes that make a person less attractive, less intelligent and, most importantly, less productive. The term was coined by Maggie Kuhn, who fought discrimination against the elderly after the Vietnam War.⁷ In some societies, the prevalence of ageism has led to gerontophobia, i.e. fear of aging. Four factors have contributed to the development of a negative attitude towards aging. The first is the fear of death that comes with aging. Another is the emphasis on youth culture, especially in the media. The third factor is economic, and the fourth is the way in which age was initially researched in the scientific community. Most often, the respondents would be persons placed in care centers, where only a small part of the elderly population lived, moreover the part that was barely functional on its own. Ageism should be observed from two vantage points. One is that the elderly are a group within a population, and the other that this group is made up of people of different social, economic, racial, and gender characteristics, who contribute to an overall picture of a particular individual from an older population. Sexism within ageism should be mentioned as well. Elderly women have a far worse experience of aging in the society than men. They are more often marginalized by the community, often ridiculed in popular culture, and more likely to have trouble finding care towards the end of their lives. One of the ways to fight ageism is education, propaganda, and struggle against the spread of ageism in the media and the society.

7 Formosa Marvin,
'Exposing Ageism,' *BOLD*
(12/2000), pp. 15-23.

Our goal

The aim has been to point out the inequality of elderly people in the society, with a special emphasis on the ability of young people to identify violence against the elderly, which is also increasingly covered by the media during the COVID pandemic.

Sources and methods

In this cross-sectional survey, we interviewed 102 young persons attending the first year of Health Studies at the University of Split with a questionnaire on identifying violence against the elderly in families within the framework of the Reference Centre of the Croatian Ministry of Health for Protection the Health of Elderly Persons. The questionnaire consisted of ten statements to which the respondents answered with 'True' or 'False'.⁸ The authors and source of the questionnaire were: doc. dr. sc. Silvia Rusac, Faculty of Law, Study Center for Social Work, Department of Social Gerontology, and Office for Public-Health Gerontology NZJZ 'Dr. Andrija Štampar' – Reference Centre of the Croatian Ministry of Health for Protection the Health of Elderly Persons: www.stampar.hr/gerontologija.

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8 Silvia Rusac, 'Nasilje nad starijim osobama u obitelji na području grada Zagreba' [Domestic violence against elderly persons in the Zagreb area], *Ljetopis socijalnog rada* (16/2009), pp. 573-594.

Results

In this study, differences in responses that are due to socio-demographic differences were not significant. All respondents were of the same age, with few men among them.

| Age | <20 | >20 | |
|-----------|-----------|----------|----------------|
| | 100 | 0 | |
| Sex | M | F | |
| | 13 | 87 | |
| Statement | False (F) | True (T) | Correct answer |

Table 1. The respondents' answers to the questions of the Test for Identifying Domestic Violence against Elderly Persons.

Question No.

- 1 Elderly persons are mostly abused by strangers.
- 2 Abuse of elderly persons occurs only in poorer social strata.
- 3 Elderly persons always despise their abusers and report abuse.
- 4 Violence against elderly persons is a serious social problem.
- 5 Older and younger people react similarly to abuse.
- 6 Children who abuse elderly parents were most likely abused themselves.
- 7 Models of prevention and intervention in cases of child abuse cannot be applied to cases of abuse of elderly persons.
- 8 Causing feelings of fear or restricting the freedom of movement or communication with third parties does not constitute violence against the elderly.
- 9 The number of abused elderly persons increases with the growing number of elderly persons in the society.
- 10 Caregivers may neglect care for the elderly due to excessive alcohol consumption.

Table 1 shows the ten statements to which the respondents were to give a correct answer by responding with 'True' or 'False'. The respondents offered the most correct answer to the statement 'Abuse of elderly persons occurs only in poorer social strata,' where only one person gave an incorrect answer.

Discussion

From the results shown in Table 1, we see that most respondents showed good knowledge of the given problem. In this study, the respondents were students of Health Studies, so it is to be expected that we have obtained more promising data than we would have in the general population, as they have chosen a profession that requires empathy for others. Differences in relation to the respondents' sex are not significant because the share of male respondents was small. Most of the wrong answers referred to violence against the elderly and its difference in relation to other forms of domestic violence. Distinguishing the specifics of domestic violence with regard to specific age groups is not yet sufficiently recognized in our

society. Thus, when asked whether violence against elderly persons was a serious social problem, only three respondents gave the right answer. A large number of incorrect answers was also given to the questions regarding the identity of the persons who abuse the elderly, whether children who abused the elderly had themselves been abused by their parents or relatives, and whether measures and models applied to violence against children could also be applied in the prevention of violence against this social group.

Domestic violence is a set of behaviors aimed at controlling family members through the use of force, intimidation, and manipulation. Healthcare professionals can play a key role in the early detection and prevention of domestic violence, because they are the only professionals that all people come in contact with throughout their lives and can therefore create a confidential conversation environment. The victims tend to minimize and cover up domestic violence for fear that their safety will be further compromised if they confide in someone, because of shame they feel because of living in such a family, and because of the specific dynamics of violent relationships that makes the victim helpless and loyal to their abuser. It is a legal obligation of healthcare professionals to report domestic violence to the police and the state attorney's office. This is in accordance with the ethical principles of the profession, because they need to identify the causes behind the patients' problems even when they are of a non-medical nature. Through their intervention, healthcare professionals help the victim to avoid and reduce his or her exposure to violence, which helps reduce harmful health consequences and can save the victim's life and health as domestic violence tends to recur and escalate.⁹

Socially, elderly persons also experience discrimination even in healthcare. Numerous studies have shown how healthcare professionals, such as nurses, physicians, and healthcare students, treat the elderly according to their personal attitudes toward aging and the elderly population.

Although research is heterogeneous, negative standpoints are generally associated with poorer healthcare for the elderly, which results in poorer treatment outcomes. Discrimination against the elderly is associated with treatment decisions. An example from England speaks of the treatment of breast

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⁹ Dean Ajduković and Marina Ajduković, 'Nasilje u obitelji: što zdravstveni djelatnici mogu učiniti' [Domestic violence: What healthcare workers can do], *Medicina fluminensis* (46/2010), pp. 292-299.

cancer in younger and older women. Although breast cancer is more common in the elderly female population, doctors are less likely to recommend an early screening test for breast cancer to elderly women than to younger ones. Only a small number of physicians perform physical examination of breasts in elderly women. Also, elderly women are more likely to be recommended a more radical form of surgery as opposed to younger women, who are suggested less radical surgeries. Another form of discrimination against the elderly in the healthcare system is the way in which medical staff communicates with the elderly population. Older people are less involved in the treatment process. Medical staff shows less patience and respect towards them than towards the younger population. Communication is considered to be one of the factors contributing to the treatment outcome. Systematic research on health education programmes has shown that the efforts invested in combating discrimination against the elderly are insufficient and that gerontology is poorly promoted in education. Medical students have expressed the need for better education in geriatrics. In recent years, there has been a positive shift in solving this deficiency, and the education of healthcare staff in the field of gerontology is moving in the right direction.¹⁰ One of the most obvious examples of neglecting elderly lives is the inefficiency of the French state authorities to report data on the deaths of elderly persons in nursing homes. This fact can lead the public to conclude that their deaths are insignificant and expected.¹¹

The pandemic was not taken seriously at first, either in France or elsewhere, and it was presented to the public as dangerous only for the elderly. This approach may partly explain the resistance to following public health guidelines. It has been found that younger adults who died from COVID-19 complications often generated lengthy and thorough media reports worldwide, while the deaths of thousands of elderly persons were simply counted and added, if at all documented.

Social and/or cultural norms are responsible for a certain level of consensus, while the diversity of individual experiences significantly contributes to the diversity of attitudes towards the same object.

Attitudes towards an object can be shaped by behavioural or direct experience of an individual with the object of his or

10 Wyman Mary, Shiovitz-Ezra Sharon, and Bengel Juergen, 'Ageism in the Health Care System: Providers, Patients, and Systems', https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325289340_Ageism_in_the_Health_Care_System_Providers_Patient_and_Systems (last accessed on August 20, 2020).

11 S. Fraser, M. Lagace, and B. Bongue, 'Ageism and COVID-19', pp. 692-695.

her attitude, but also indirectly, without behavioral experience. When it comes to a tangible, physical object, such an experience means manipulating that object or interacting with it. When the object of an attitude exists only in the person's psychological world or social reality, then direct experience refers to all previous behaviours related to the object. At the other end of the continuum are attitudes shaped by information that is not related to the individual's direct experience (e.g. information from books, newspaper articles, television, listening to the experiences of parents, friends, etc.). For an attitude thus formed, one says that it was shaped by indirect experience with the object of the attitude. When an attitude arises from such direct experience, there is a greater consistency between attitude and behaviour, greater sustainability of such an attitude over time, and its resistance to change, as compared to the attitude shaped by indirect experience with the object of the attitude.

The formation of attitudes begins with the birth of an individual and is based on a variety of experiences that are mutually reinforcing and result in a certain reaction in another, similar stimulating situation. Attitudes are a result of socialization and are acquired through social learning.¹² In addition to knowledge, their development is influenced by three other factors: motivation and reinforcement, personality traits, and social environment. The motivation and reinforcement factor refers to the development of a reaction in which personal motives, based on personal experience, influence the features of the attitude to be developed. Personality traits are also partly conditioned by cognition, which in turn affects the features of the attitude that the person will eventually adopt.¹³

Social environment limits the learning of experiences to those to which we are exposed in that particular environment, and thus influences the shaping of attitudes. Taking an attitude depends on its instrumental value for achieving certain goals of the individual. We usually have a positive attitude towards objects that contribute to the satisfaction of our motives, and a negative attitude towards objects that hinder the achievement of our goals. One of the processes that can affect the shaping of attitudes is social comparison.

Social comparison is defined as a process in which other persons, i.e. their attitudes, abilities, and modes of reaction,

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12 Jerončić Tomić Iris, 'Stigma – mitovi i predrasude depresivnog poremećaja – uloga videa kao medija u psihoedukaciji (Boli me – video za promociju mentalnog zdravlja)' [Stigma: Myths and prejudices of depressive disorder – The role of video as a medium in psychoeducation (It hurts – A video for fostering mental health)], https://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=toc&id_broj=15082 (last accessed on May 28, 2020).

13 Petz Boris, Psihologijski rječnik [A dictionary of psychology], Prosvjeta, Zagreb 1992.

become the basis for assessing personal insights, attitudes, abilities, emotions, and other states.¹⁴ According to L. Festinger's theory of social comparison, there is a need to evaluate personal insights, attitudes, abilities, modes of behaving and experiencing, and to assess their correctness and suitability.

In the absence of information from the 'objective reality', a person will evaluate himself or herself by comparison with other people, whose behavior is the 'social reality'. Social comparison can result in empathy, which is immersion in the mental state of another person and understanding that person's position, such as suffering or being threatened, based on an experienced or imagined situation in which that person may be. Entering the mental framework of another person requires recognizing and identifying with the current feelings, thoughts, and reactions of the suffering person, and simultaneously understanding these reactions in terms of their importance, i.e. relevance for the future of that person.¹⁵

The sum of social attitudes towards the elderly outlines the level of humanity as well as care and awareness of one's own future. A sustainable, humane society implies an awareness of the irreplaceability of each and every person involved in social life. In the first place, there is the idea of the value of a person per se. Every human society is directed to some goal and uses certain means of living and acting to achieve it, which means that it has a structure and direction of action, while the real beginning, subject, and purpose of every form of human community is the person.¹⁶

This implies a community based on the principles of life, because a free person is driven by the knowledge in which life is the beginning, the goal, and the greatest value. If the community members recognize it as such, understanding it as the fundamental value and choosing it as the principle of the community's existence, the person remains the beginning, content, and goal of the community, and thus the society.

For the future of a society, this is the basic level of awareness, which should be present among all its members, especially in those social groups whose task is to plan and make long-term development decisions. Integration and economic involvement of all members of the society is a strategic commitment, not just an individual exception.

14 Kolesarić Vladimir, Krizmanić Marija, and Petz Boris, Uvod u psihologiju – suvremena, znanstvena i primijenjena psihologija [Introduction to psychology: Contemporary, scientific, and applied psychology], Grafički zavod Hrvatske, Zagreb 1991, pp. 175-213.

15 B. Petz, Psihologijski rječnik, 1992.

16 R. Matić, 'Odnos hrvatskoga društva prema starijim osobama.'

'Getting old ain't for sissies,' Bette Davis once said. You need to have the guts to do it even if you live in comfort and wealth, if someone loves you and takes care of you, and then imagine what a horror it is to lie abandoned, without anyone you can call your own, with the feeling of guilt for having taken a bed and a respirator that could have saved someone younger, while an esteemed MP explains on TV in the corner that it is not such a pity if you die. It is a horror worse than the corona virus: cruelty, selfishness, emptiness of hearts and minds, the defeat of civilization. If that doesn't make you cry, you'd better cry for yourself, for your stupid, scared, and despicable existence that you, completely wrongly, call life.¹⁷

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17 A. Tomić, 'Starenje nije za curice.'

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Ecology and Media

Key words ecology, media, environment, ethics, sustainable development

Abstract The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of global goals targeting all levels: from a planetary biosphere to a local community. The aim is to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people can enjoy peace and prosperity, now and in the future. The beginning of the twenty-first century and the last fifteen years of the twentieth century have been the awakening of human consciousness when it comes to ecology and environmental protection. The man of the digital age is slowly becoming aware that a new society is a life-organization characterized by the use of modern technologies and overuse of natural resources and, in some places, already devastated and degraded environments. The modern economy survives on the use of living and inanimate natural resources. Natural resources such as air, water, soil are polluted and some animal species are exterminated in this period. For this reason, it is of great importance to force producing and broadcasting numerous environmental shows on local, regional and global media. Going deeper into the issue, we have to see that the problem should be addressed more and more, reinforcing at the same time the ethics of all people on the planet, which would lead to the adoption of binding norms that

Ekologija i mediji

Ključne riječi ekologija, mediji, okoliš, etika, održivi razvoj

Sažetak Početak novog tisućljeća i prethodnih petnaest godina karakterizira, svjedoci smo, buđenje ljudske svijesti kada je riječ o ekologiji i zaštiti okoliša. Čovjek koji preživi u doba digitalnih tehnologija polako razvija svijest da je potrebna nova organizacija društva i života u vremenu opterećenom modernim tehnologijama i pretjeranom upotrebom prirodnih resursa, a na nekim mjestima i već devastiranom i degradiranom okolišu. Suvremeno gospodarstvo preživljava od upotrebe živih i neživih prirodnih resursa. Došlo je do zagađenja zraka, vode, zemlje, izumiranja životinjskih vrsta. Iz tog su se razloga čisto ekološki problemi rješavali proizvodnjom i emitiranjem niza ekoloških programa na lokalnim, regionalnim i globalnim medijima. Ulazeći dublje u problem, moramo vidjeti da se problem mora riješiti prevladavanjem ekonomskih imperativa, istodobno, jačanjem etike svih ljudi na planetu, što bi dovelo do usvajanja obvezujućih normi koje bi utjecale na ljudsko ponašanje kada se radi o ekologiji i zaštiti okoliša. Mediji u tome moraju igrati ključnu ulogu.

would affect people's behavior when it comes to ecology and environmental protection. The media is playing a key role in this issue. A part of the discussion on the concept of conservation, including the main scientific and ethical points of view, is presented in this paper, highlighting the environmental, socio-ecological and ethical aspects behind the comprehensive concept of industry and economy. This paper is about the idea of being the appeal on media regarding the urgent need for socio-environmental ethical personal engagement and collective actions.

Introduction

Awareness of the interconnectedness of the natural and social environment in the human environment, as well as knowledge about the causes of disturbance and pollution, as well as the impact of their pollution on humans is essential. In building society's relationship to environmental problems, although man's relationship to nature is mediated by the political system, an important place belongs to environmental consciousness (Markovic, 2001: 14). The media is a very important agent that contributes to the activation of individuals and groups in environmental actions, to the proper functioning, in accordance with the acquired environmental knowledge and established environmental values. Media actions can be preventive, in terms of informing the recipients of the pollutants, the situation in the local, regional and global ecological environment, dangers of environmental pollution and damage to natural balance. It is the action of the media that is directly related to socially (un)acceptable environmental behavior. There are hardly any professional papers, or a small number of them, which play the role of the media in the development of awareness for the protection of human environment and the environment.

Social values and environmental awareness

The environment, the natural environment, and their protection and preservation are integral parts of every Constitution of a country. The impression is that the media has received insufficient attention. The value system of what is desirable, worthy of respect, less valuable, or irrelevant, right or wrong, is built through the process of socialization that every human individual goes through, no matter in what time or space of the planet he lives. The value system consists of a set of general beliefs, opinions and attitudes and contains the three most important components: cognitive (value as conception), affective (value as something desirable) and connotative (value as a selection criterion for what is considered important to a

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community, group, environment, etc.). (M. Jakovljevic, 2015: 34) The transfer of ecological values to a particular social community could be called ecological orientation (Cifrić, Čulig: 1987: 22-23). This view of the value component, as an integral part of environmental awareness, adopted through the mass media, is of particular importance for this work. It explains the specific behaviors of individuals and groups regarding preventative environmental protection against potential sources of environmental threats, in addressing local, regional and global environmental crises, but also in everyday work at the workplace and in the environment. Environmental problems can and must be addressed as cultural or civilization problems. (M. Jakovljevic, 2015: 36)

The Impact of Media on Environmental Behavior

Human behavior is in accordance with the adopted environmental values, and on the basis of knowledge that has about the environment and its importance for the individual, narrower and wider community, contributes to environmental protection, raising the quality of life. Opposite behavior is also due to an underdeveloped environmental awareness: that it is endangering the environment by irresponsible actions, classifying those people who contribute to larger and smaller scale environmental crises. Media play a special role and have importance in times of ecological crises, major natural disasters, earthquakes, floods, etc. when it is timely, accurate and meaningful broadcasting of messages of invaluable importance. When it comes to the role of the media in the development of environmental awareness, the media have, among other things, the role of a mobilizer, but also a catalyst for certain social processes regarding the environmental situation. The media must, by encouraging citizens to think critically about the ecological environment, actively participate in its evaluation, critically evaluate the degree of threat to the environment and the potential threats to their environment. In particular, the media should allow for 'public debate' by confronting opinions on specific and potential environmental problems. (M. Jakovljevic,

2015: 40-41) With such editorial policy and program orientation, the media can influence the political representatives of the community in the field of environmental protection. If a medium has in its programs specialized broadcast dedicated to the conservation and protection of the environment, the medium becomes at the same time a communication channel through which they can pressure potential or actual polluters, or corporations that destroy or exploit natural resources, especially non-renewable energy sources, or destroy wildlife. Change is possible only if one changes his/her consciousness and his/her beliefs, and brings the practice into harmony with the 'reality' he/she wants to experience. If we want cleaner cities, we must make sure their cleanliness, in particular, contribute to our behavior, stemming from our conviction (Prodanović, 1987: 396). Or, as Hans Jonas thinks and says, 'Act so that the effects of your actions are not devastating to the future possibility of your life' (Jonas, 1990: 193).

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Results of the research

In order to determine the impact of mass media on the environmental awareness of the population of Montenegro, with the aim of preserving and protecting the environment, research was conducted during which the results were identified, indicating a multi-layered relationship and interactions between the media and recipients of information. The survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire, by random sampling method, on a sample of 100 respondents, 20 from 5 cities in Montenegro. The survey was conducted during January and February 2020, and the respondents answered 8 questions by submitting one of the offered answers, or giving grades from 1 to 5. The gender structure of the respondents is as follows: 54% male, 46% female.

The age stratification of the respondents is as follows: 18 to 27 years: 60%, 27 to 55 years: 32%, over 55 years: 8%.

Educational structure-status of respondents: SE- 55%, HSE: 5%, HSS: 40%. Respondents live in the following cities: Berane, Bijelo Polje, Pljevlja, Niksic, Bar

The cities with specific characteristics of potential sources of environmental threats are covered equally. These pollutants can be thermal power plants, but also high concentrations of

cars, high levels of exhaust gases, unbearable noise, and other negativities that accompany urban life. During the research, the general impression was that the current ecological situation is significantly better due to the fact that many factories, pollutants, do not work due to problems, therefore do not pollute, not because a certain environmental strategy has been undertaken.

| Answer | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Extremely poor | 31 | 31 |
| Poor | 36 | 36 |
| Satisfactory | 16 | 16 |
| Good | 17 | 17 |
| Extremely good | - | - |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 1:
How do you evaluate the environmental situation in your area?

As shown by the results in Table 1, citizens have a very high degree of criticality about the state of the environment in urban areas, where they live. As many as 67% of respondents rated the environmental situation in their environment as bad and extremely bad. 33% consider the condition to be satisfactory and good.

| Answer | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|------------|-----------------------|------------|
| TV | 42 | 42 |
| Newspapers | 19 | 19 |
| Radio | 8 | 8 |
| Internet | 31 | 31 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 2:
With which media do you most inform yourself about the state of the environment and environmental issues in your environment, country and world?

Television in Montenegro still holds high primacy (42%) (see Table 2). Expectations that the Internet would be by far the most significant mean of informing by which residents of Montenegrin cities were informed about environmental issues had not been materialized. Of these, 31% said they were mostly informed about the environmental situation in their environment via Internet. Radio as a medium had lost its significance as only 8% of respondents cited this medium as a source of environmental information. Such a low level of trust in radio shows not only the deterioration of the central radio stations in smaller environments, but also the poor listening of local radio stations, which do not profile themselves as a medium to be trusted by citizens because, more than others, they will adequately report on local problems, could label pollutants, or encourage local actions to improve the environment. There is also a decrease in readership, as can be seen in the fact that the number of citizens who trust the print media is only 19 percent.

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| Answer | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Extremely poor | 62 | 62 |
| Poor | 16 | 16 |
| Satisfactory | 13 | 13 |
| Good | 9 | 9 |
| Extremely good | - | - |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 3:
Your assessment of media coverage on environmental status and problems?

As citizens have shown a high degree of environmental criticality (Table 1), similarly, the results of Table 3 indicate the high criticality of citizens towards the mass media, where 62% rated the media reports on environmental status and problems as negative. From this self-image, the media could draw a conclusion in the form of taking action and in the sense of opening an interactive communication channel in which citizens would suggest topics for making media contributions, opening channels for citizens to report on their own issues about environmental issues, initiating a public debate, during which

environmental officials and environmental experts would be responsible for environmental issues and plans of the environment, not only to journalists, but also to readers, listeners or viewers.

| Answer | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| 1 Extremely poor | 43 | 43 |
| 2 Poor | 45 | 45 |
| 3 Satisfactory | 5 | 5 |
| 4 Good | 2 | 2 |
| 5 Extremely good | 5 | 5 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 4:

How much does the media help you learn about environmental issues?

Citizens with a high dose of criticism rate of media content on environmental issues. Table 4 shows that with the lowest score of 43%, they assess how much the media helps them learn about environmental issues. Most gave a satisfactory, good, very good and excellent grade. The results show the importance of the media in educating citizens, as the media, despite their poor assessment of the quality of their content on media issues, continue to be labeled as helping citizens to find out about environmental issues to the highest degree.

| Respondents' answers | Number | Percentage |
|----------------------|--------|------------|
| food safety | 22 | 22 |
| Water safety | 25 | 25 |
| Air pollution | 32 | 32 |
| Forest protection | 8 | 8 |
| Animal protection | 3 | 3 |
| Other areas | 10 | 10 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 5:

Which areas of environmental protection are you most interested in?

The citizens of five Montenegrin cities are most concerned with air pollution. This was expected because the city of Pljevlja where the biggest problem was air pollution was covered by the survey (32%). They are almost equally interested in food protection (2%) and water protection (25%).

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| Answer | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Extremely poor | 66 | 66 |
| Poor | 23 | 23 |
| Satisfactory | 6 | 6 |
| Good | 5 | 5 |
| Extremely good | - | - |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 6:

To what extent are environmental issues from your immediate environment represented in the local media?

The poor state of the vast majority of local media is reflected in the results in Table 6, where as many as 66 respondents rated the lowest environmental representation of environmental issues in local media. If there are areas whose media coverage each local media can build trust with the recipients of messages in a short time, then those are environmental problems. The problems of the local media when it comes to environmental issues are twofold: on the one hand, the lack of specialist journalists who would handle such content with the required level of professionalism, and on the other hand, the local media are largely powerless to resist the pressure of local power centers.

| Answer | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| 1 (not affected at all) | 59 | 59 |
| 2 (not sufficiently affected) | 19 | 19 |
| 3 (affected) | 17 | 17 |
| 4 (highly affected) | 5 | 5 |
| 5 (highly affected) | | |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 7:

Evaluate how much the media have an impact on the formation of citizens' opinions on environmental issues in their area and beyond?

Citizens are not satisfied with media coverage of environmental issues in their environments, and therefore have high expectations of the media when it comes to influencing the formation of citizens' opinions on environmental issues in the immediate and wider environment (Table 7). 59% think that the media does not affect the citizens' awareness, 19% think that they are not influential enough, while 5% of the respondents think that they are very influential, and 17% think that they have an influence. In addition, the results also point to untapped potentials arising from the educational and informational function of the media when it comes to environmental topics.

| Answer | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| 1 (not affected at all) | 10 | 10 |
| 2 (not sufficiently affected) | 18 | 18 |
| 3 (affected) | 31 | 31 |
| 4 (highly affected) | 34 | 34 |
| 5 (highly affected) | 7 | 7 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 8:

Evaluate how much the media can influence the Government, competent ministries, agencies, inspections and other state bodies to protect citizens from existing and potential polluters, or to protect the environment?

Citizens believe that the media can influence the Government, ministries, agencies, inspections and other state bodies to protect them from potential pollutants, i.e. to protect the environment (Table 8). The society is divided on this point. 31% think the media can influence, 41% think that they are

very influential and have the highest influence on government bodies, 10% think that they have no influence at all, and 28% of respondents say that the government and ministries are not sufficiently or completely unaffected by the media. The table shows that the power of the media when it comes to influencing the Government and its ministries is 72%. Citizens believe that the media can influence the Government and ministries, and other state bodies, to address the protection of the environment and the protection of citizens from existing and potential polluters.

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Conclusion

Humanity needs a highly developed awareness of the need for greater alignment between human creative activities in advancing social development and the need to preserve and enhance nature during such development. (Berberovic, Hanjalic, Saric, 1984: 295). Building environmental awareness is closely linked to increasing the impact of the media on the public. For these reasons, a person already living in a kind of 'new media order' is advised to acquire a fundamental knowledge of so-called media literacy in order to obtain a more complete picture of the discourse in which the contemporary man is, a clearer definition of his attitude towards the media, but also according to environmental problems and challenges. The media should create the conditions for building a better world than the one in which we face the daily increase of environmental threats. Of all the pollution, the most serious is the pollution of human consciousness. In building and developing environmental awareness, the most important fact is contained in the need to find out the details of the environment. Some of the tendencies in the media sphere have been observed, which distance the media from their basic functions, but serve for new monopolizations, manipulations aimed at imposing the value attitudes of power centers that have a monopoly on capital. The results obtained through a survey of 100 respondents from five cities in Montenegro clearly indicate that citizens are highly critical towards the environment, but they are also critical when assessing the quality of media coverage of environmental issues. Citizens place high demands on the media, which, according to

this research, do not give adequate treatment to environmental problems. They are especially critical towards the local media, who are not adequately fulfilling their function when timely and meaningful reporting on local environmental issues is needed. The mass media significantly influence not only the formation of environmental awareness, but by shaping awareness, activating the educational function, they provide the recipients with the necessary information and value propositions on environmental issues, on the basis of which they make decisions about specific behavior. The media need to be aware of environmental issues in a timely manner, to report on them substantively, to reflect different opinions and attitudes, but also to initiate and assist the implementation of actions in the field of environmental protection. Environmental protection is a common goal of all participants in social processes.

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