

Introduction to the special issue

Assistant Professor PhD. Veronica JUNJAN

The presence of the COVID19 virus since the end of 2019 led to an effervescent increase of the research in all research fields. The COVID19 crisis raised again the call to researchers from medical, technical, humanities, and social sciences to use the theoretical and methodological instruments specific to their fields of expertise in order to a) understand and explain the emergence of and mechanisms behind the spread of the virus, b) develop technology needed to support the saving of human lives, and, closer to the attention of this special issue, c) elaborate and implement the (most) suitable mix of policy responses on behalf of governments worldwide. Particular attention focused on the translation of scientific results to policy: the acute need of policy makers to information and research insights needed to cope with an unknown problem with huge consequences at societal level led to a rally call for the contribution of scientific knowledge. The urgency of the situation rekindled the conversation regarding the relationship between academia, more specifically research, and society, and underlined the interdependences existent between them.

The role and tasks of governments in organizing, coordinating, and implementing the policy response received a highly necessary attention. OECD (2020) cautioned that, given the unprecedented scale and multi-faceted nature of the COVID-19 crisis, it may be of limited relevance to compare the current crisis with previous ones. Moorkamp et alli (2020) illustrate, however, very clearly, how centralisation and autonomy can be balanced provided that the characteristics of the compared cases are properly outlined. The first attention was focused on the development and implementation of governmental response at national level, and led to special issues such as Public Administration Review Viewpoints on Covid 19 (August 2020), the double issue of American Review of Public Administration (August-October 2020), and Transylvanian Review of Public Administrative Sciences (December 2020), which documented both the hard work to understand the response from scientific community.

The call to focus on analysing the response at local level was heard throughout the second part of the 2020. Central and subnational policies needed to be accurately coordinated: given regional heterogeneity, it is plausible to expect that the most vulnerable ones will be hit harder. Maher et al. (2020) illustrate how undertaking financial and managerial actions in coping with COVID-19 is demanding and full of uncertainty. Organizational, Administrative and (Health) policy capacity raised to attention again (Junjan, 2020), given the need to organize efficiently the acquiring and distribution of scarce means. Central and subnational governments found themselves, quite often, at the epicentre of the crisis response coordination in the current pandemic. This raised (again) the attention for the regional inequalities: contextualisation remains an important point for understanding the

local specifics of the organizing and coordinating governmental response. Additional attention needed to be dedicated to vulnerable groups. Armitage and Nellums (2020) discussed the case of those living with disabilities worldwide (more than 1 billion people) and estimate that the pandemic is likely to put them at risk of increased morbidity and mortality. Kulge et al. (2020) present the risks associated to refugee and migrant health, while Amon (2020) concentrates on detention centers and human rights violations.

The call for contributions which led to the organization of the current special issue has received very broad attention. The contributions accepted – developed both by academics as well as by practitioners- provide an overview on the existent capacities, analyse alternative scenarios, and explore local and territorial actions in a very diverse geographical range.

In the Indian setting, Basu analyzes different trajectories for slum redevelopment oriented on three directions of urban planning, infrastructure(re)development, and employments opportunity which could be implemented in order to improve local level response coordination in a pandemic situation.

Müller-Török and Prosser provide a critical, -and sobering- analysis of the expected effectiveness of using a smartphone app as policy instrument to aid epidemiological track and trace virus methods, applied to the Corona app in Germany. Additionally, the article provides an insightful analysis of the difficult dilemma between the values of “privacy” and “transparency” which needed to be addressed by governments within the EU setting when outlining the criteria for track-and-trace smartphone applications development.

Zamfir, Ciobanu, Marin, and Zamfir develop an narrative review – empirically located in the Romanian setting- to reflect upon the consequences of the quarantine for the development and design of new residential buildings. The results indicate that, for the context of the post COVID19 developments a fundamental – trans-disciplinary-reconsideration of the dimensions and characteristics of the design for residential buildings needs to take into account not only architectural and engineering characteristics of the built space, but also medical and psychological needs of the inhabitants.

Onescu and Florescu analyze the contributions that the EU’s new Tax Package bring for the development of a tax system based on fairness and simplicity, which has the potential to be more easily adapted to the requirements of a digital administration. This contribution reflects also on the different options available- within the framework of the EU’s Tax Package- for the Romanian tax system’s adaptation to a digital future.

Zuhdi and Fauzi provide an insightful analysis of the consequences that COVID19 pandemic brought for the Smart City transformation of the city of Surabaya, Indonesia. Particularly informative is the analysis concerning the interaction between the measures that needed to be taken by the government of Surabaya to address COVID19 and the policies that were pursued towards the achievement of the Smart City Strategy. To sum up, the contributions united within this special issue illustrate the complexity of the governmental response needed not only to address the current situation, but, perhaps more

important, to prepare the societal recovery and build for the future. From the Müller-Török and Prosser's analysis of the effectiveness of the Corona app in Germany and questioning the value trade-off between privacy and transparency to the outlining of the direction of the urban redevelopment of slums in India, to the analysis of the impact of the lessons learned for building residential dwellings in Romania and the influence of the COVID19 response for the implementation of the Smart City strategy in Surabaya, Indonesia, the special issue underlines the need for trans- and inter-disciplinary research needed to support governmental response and build back better for the future.

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