



## Sociological Briefing

# Why OMICRON socially matters

Pandemics affect in very different ways to countries and regions. The analysis of inequalities in the COVID-19 context includes health access, race, working conditions, environment, misinformation, or space management, among others. Sociology has a crucial role in the understanding of such inequalities and the social dynamics that may lead to reducing divergences across regions. The current OMICRON variant has increased the existing interdependences across the world to tackle health emergencies.

The author of “Conclusions: Towards a sociology of pandemics and beyond”<sup>1</sup> published in *Current Sociology* is a conclusion of a monograph addressing the role of Sociology in the COVID-19 context and the potential future pandemics, considering the relevance of the uncertainties and risks in current societies. The three main topics underlying the conclusive contribution are linked to the learning opportunities for the future, the synergies across society-nature- technology, and the role of subjectivities to respond to the crisis.

### Lessons learnt from the first wave

The author summarizes the overview of what has happened since the virus started and spread over the world at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. The different agents involved in the public

debates are mentioned, with a focus on the diverse views depending on the region, from Asia to Africa or the industrialized West, and the role of the WHO. The cultural divergences and how they influenced the health responses are approached, highlighting the political decisions and to what extent the scientific evidence has been taken into account. In this vein, questions such as the role of science to manage the crisis in successful ways, the collaboration between scientific knowledge and politicians, or the public engagement of citizens into science are included.

### Humans, nature and technology

The analysis of synergies across humans, nature, and technology is not new in social sciences but in the pandemic context, it has raised again major concerns that sociology contributes to understanding. In this vein, the author exemplifies the interconnections to illustrate the related opportunities and barriers linked to the topic. The aspects included in this section are very diverse, from physical environments, border controls, facemask-wearing, or the destruction of the environment. The 2003 SARS crisis illustrates the lack of knowledge and the potential risks linked to emerging viruses. The author refers to “non-knowledge” and the relevance to translating scientific knowledge

into everyday life language to be effectively integrated into reality. Through different examples of regions and countries, the issue of society-nature-technology emerges from the micro to macro levels to help to “understand the dynamics of the coronavirus crisis”.

### **The pending question: the new normal**

The uncertainties related to the COVID-19 crisis are mentioned mainly about vaccination, social distancing, or the future behavior of the virus. In all the scenarios, the question of subjectivities should be addressed considering transnationalities, among others. As the author highlights “One of the most pressing questions for future pandemics is how the experience of COVID-19 has changed people’s general understanding of viruses, epidemics and necessary responses”. In this arena, the personal experiences related to the COVID-19 are crucial and may influence the sense of vulnerability, the norms about facemask-wearing or the way people conceptualize

some types of work and connectivity. This is a question affecting mainly the Global North but the digital divide influences how pandemic conditions are faced in the Global South.

The author finalizes with a reference to Ulrich Beck and a final reflection stating that: “In Ulrich Beck’s (2009) perspective the cosmopolitan moment of the pandemic allows opportunities for cosmopolitanism to advance. To what extent the opportunity for global learning is taken up remains to be seen. There is little doubt, however, that pandemics will contribute to long-term changes in human attitudes and behaviour towards the environment and the technologically shaped lifeworld.”

### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Zinn JO. (2001). Conclusions: Towards a sociology of pandemics and beyond. *Current Sociology*, 69(4):603-617.  
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