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Impacts of the SARS-CoV-2 Virus and Covid-19 Pandemic on Societies, Sciences and Minorities

The Covid-19 pandemic, its impacts and consequences are addressed in the context of acute crises, such as environmental, ecological, climate, economic and social crises caused and/or aggravated by human impact in the Anthropocene, mainly as negative consequences of a capitalist economy and unlimited growth guided by short-term profits. Successful global crisis management, Covid-19 management included, demands coordinated and integrated approaches, strategies and policies that promote sustainable, green, ecologically and socially responsible, balanced, inclusive, solidary and fair societies, economy and development. In particular, the article addresses the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on societies, science(s), minorities and persons belonging to them, focusing on their situations, position, status, rights and protection, inclusion, integration, participation and representation.

Keywords: sustainable development, minority rights, protection and participation, inclusion/integration, diversity and crisis management, Covid-19 pandemic.

Vplivi virusa SARS-CoV-2 in pandemije covid-19 na družbe, znanost in manjšine

Članek obravnava pandemijo bolezni covid-19 in njene posledice v kontekstu lokalnih, nacionalnih in globalnih kriz, kot so npr. okoljske, klimatske, ekonomske in družbene. Te je v antropocenu v veliki meri povzročil ali vsaj zaostril človek, predvsem zaradi negativnih posledic kapitalistične ekonomije in razvoja, ki temelji na neomejeni rasti in maksimiranju kratkoročnih profitov. Uspešno upravljanje in razreševanje kriz, vključno s to pandemijo, terja usklajene in integrirane pristope, strategije in politike, ki vzpostavljajo trajnostno, zeleno, ekološko in družbeno odgovorno, uravnoteženo, vključujočo, solidarno in pošteno družbo, ekonomijo in razvoj. Posebej se ukvarja s posledicami in vplivi pandemije bolezni covid-19 na družbe, znanost, manjšine in njihove pripadnike, zlasti na njihove situacije, položaj, status, pravice in varstvo, vključevanje, integracijo, participacijo in predstavljanje v okoljih, kjer živijo.

Ključne besede: trajnostni razvoj, pravice, varstvo in participacija manjšin, vključevanje/integracija, upravljanje različnosti in kriz, pandemija covid-19.

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1. The Global Context and Methodological Approach¹

Everything, or at least almost everything, is linked and connected, interrelated and intertwined in different and complex, often interdependent ways. These connections might be difficult to detect and understand. In our attempts to comprehend, present and interpret complex realities that we observe from our specific perspectives, focusing on a few selected dimensions, contents and characteristics, we tend to simplify, stereotype, organize and classify those realities using invented and agreed upon terminologies, definitions and concepts that we use to describe and define complex phenomena. In this context, in science and research we use standardized measures, research/scholarly approaches and methodologies, which in natural sciences are based upon experiment that should provide a certain, possibly the highest level of objectivity and enable successful repetition(s), standardization and development of research and particularly scientific experiments. Based upon divisions, organization and classifications of sciences, disciplines, scholarly and research fields, we divide known complex phenomena – all discovered, invented, imagined and defined by us – into natural and social ones. Our concepts and definitions, rather imperfect and often static, tend to overlook or ignore that all phenomena, natural and social ones alike, should be observed as complex, dynamic and continuously evolving processes – in our space-time continuum with their spatial, temporal and relational dimensions/characteristics. Often, studying specific phenomena and their selected characteristics at a specific time, focusing on a specific (static) crosscut, we isolate them from other phenomena and environment(s), ignore their temporal dimensions and fail to identify and explain how they are interrelated and interdependent with other phenomena and their environments. Regardless of claims and slogans popular in public discourse and in some political documents that plurality, diversity and complexity of realities and phenomena as well as their links and connections demand multi-, inter-, transdisciplinary and new integral approaches, researchers and scholars – trained mostly disciplinary, depending on traditional disciplinary approaches and methodologies, particularly those developed since the 1950s and focused predominantly on analysis – are ill equipped for such tasks, particularly for studying why, how and when specific phenomena and environments are interrelated, intertwined and interdependent. For this reason, often our findings and knowledge, conclusions and recommendations as well as suggested solutions to studied problems are segmental and limited in their scope. In other words, synthetic and holistic approaches, findings and knowledge are missing. Additionally, scholars and researchers often forget or fail to realize that our terminologies, definitions, concepts, theories (that we build upon them) and our perceptions of realities and phenomena are not realities (themselves), but rather approaches, tools and approximations/simplifications that we use in studying, presenting and interpreting those realities. Being proud

that sciences and research crucially contributed to (particularly technological and organizational) progress, development and standardization in all fields, recognizing that our findings, inventions and concepts have been and are used by all societies and economies, we sometimes feel omnipotent, forget the limits of our knowledge, sciences and research, and tend to believe that sciences and research can answer all questions and resolve all problems. In this context, science(s) might not be all that different from religions and myths. I agree that science(s), research and technology are key factors in resolving current and future problems and crises. However, we should realize and recognize that, directly and indirectly also science(s), research and technology have contributed to those developments, problems and crises and are also responsible for them.

Consequently, presenting and commenting on (some) possible impacts of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and Covid-19 pandemic on contemporary societies, sciences and minorities, we need to address the broader context and historic development(s) as well as their (direct and indirect, sometimes difficult to identify) impacts and consequences. Considering the complexity of those issues, arguments and limited available space, while attempting to ensure clarity and vividness of the story and language as well as to bring the text closer to a wider readership, I decided to write the following paragraphs of this section of the article as a (scholarly and literary) essay.

We can start with a few (simple) and well known facts. Corona viruses, detected and studied by researchers in various host animals, such as bats that serve as their natural reservoir, have been known for decades. It is known that viruses mutate and that they can be transferred to humans in certain circumstances, possibly infecting them and causing severe diseases and health problems. Due to the shrinking traditional natural habitats as a consequence of growing population, invasion of people in new, previously unpopulated areas, urbanization and (aggressive) economic development, the likelihood of close encounters and interaction between people and host animals as well as the possibilities and risks of (trans-species) virus transfer increase. Specific local traditions and ways of life can additionally contribute to such risks. Scholars have predicted outbreaks of diseases, similar to those known in the past. However, their warnings that pandemics are an imminent threat to humanity have not been taken seriously.

The broader context in discussing Covid-19 is very complex. Consequently, the interrelations and interdependence of intertwined phenomena, processes and actors might be less evident. For this reason, at least briefly, we need to address the current global situation, problems and crises. In doing so, we choose the concepts of development as the broadest global context. I focus on the impacts, particularly tragic social and environmental consequences of capitalist economy and development on the current global situation, problems and crises as well as, specifically, on societies, sciences and minorities. Many, including the world-famous climate Swedish teenage activist Greta Thunberg, point that our

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house is on fire and we are doing nothing to put the fire out. The climate crisis is just one of acute problems and sources of the fire that combine and worsen in the recent decades. However, it seems that we choose to ignore these problems and underestimate their effects, impacts and consequences. Or worse, in times of urgent crises, we concentrate on minor issues and tasks, such as vacuuming the carpet and dusting the house while the house is on fire. Evidently, those marginal actions, irrelevant from the perspective (of the severity) of the present situation and negative trends of development, do not address (adequately) the real problems and worsening crises that combine in the global and overall crisis. The news, reports and comments in mass media, particularly those presented by public broadcasters and other independent media that are credible and trustworthy, confirm that our world is on fire. These views and warnings dominate also the expanding social media and networks. However, lacking trustworthy editorial policies and credibility, while attempting to increase their membership and number of users, they are often tempted or used – particularly by different groups and communities of likeminded followers – to spread dubious positions, stories and conspiracy theories.

Considering recent developments, we could say figuratively that a number of fires – such as the climate, environment and ecological problems and crises, including catastrophic fires, such as massive fires, wildfires and forest fires in the Amazon region, Africa, Siberia, Australia or American West Coast, natural and human-caused disasters, mass extinction (of species), economic and social problems and crises in different environments, from local to global ones as well as epidemics and pandemics, most recently Covid-19 – are combining in a deadly blaze, fiery inferno. Following and still believing in the same capitalist ideologies that caused or at least importantly contributed to and aggravated the present problems, crises and the current situation, many choose to ignore all warning signs and turn a blind eye to the severity of the situation and its possible consequences for the future of the humankind as well as for the survival of life on our planet. Considering the human impact on the environment and climate, socially responsible scholars, researchers and experts, public opinion leaders and activists, several (new) social movements and, hopefully, a growing share of the public, including politicians, agree that to a large extent we are responsible for the present state and the future of our world. The excuse that one day we will all be dead and should thus focus on our present moment and the pleasures and gains following our short term interests and profits, is immoral and socially unacceptable, as also Pope Francis points out. Consequently, we should conclude that it is our human and moral imperative and duty to elaborate a new, very different concept of development that will replace the current one, based on capitalist ideology of permanent and unlimited growth. The new concept of development should be sustainable, balanced, green, socially responsible and fair, based upon human rights and freedoms, principles of equality, justice and

solidarity, an inclusive development. Such sustainable development is possible only if it is humane and as such human, society, ecology, nature, environment and climate friendly. Already at that point in time we produce enough and have accumulated sufficient wealth that with a just and solidary distribution we could immediately eliminate famine, malnutrition and poverty in the world. Additionally, the existing capacities and wealth, current and expected scientific and technological advancements, progress and developments, if properly directed, (re)distributed and applied, should enable successful addressing, managing and resolving of listed and other problems and crises as well as the global crisis. However, currently the predictions and expectations for future developments might not be very optimistic, if one considers recent historic developments and current social situations in diverse social environments, several divisions in societies, the rise of populism, nationalisms, racism and other exclusive ideologies. Particularly, we should expect (and, possibly, fear) the opposition of the current dominant elites, particularly proponents of the omnipotent monopoly of capitalism, capitalist ideology and the current concept of capitalist development of permanent growth that control or, at least, attempt to determine and control everything. Surely, the current elites will oppose fiercely, use all their resources and do everything possible to prevent the introduction and implementation of the alternative model of sustainable development that will reduce and, possibly, eliminate their monopolies and profits as well as their current social roles. Consequently, I expect that developing and implementing an alternative concept of sustainable development will be everything but easy.

Still, I believe we should not give up. There is no viable alternative. Consequently, aware individuals, particularly public opinion leaders and activists, scholars, researchers and experts, associations, social movements and public acting as active citizens in democratic societies should do everything possible to inform and educate the public. We should join forces with training, educational and other public institutions and systems, socially aware and responsible private and public organizations, institutions and companies as well as media, particularly the public and independent socially responsible ones. Particularly, we need to inform the broadest public, hopefully all inhabitants in our social environments, about the recent historic developments and current situation(s), human and other impacts, their negative environmental, climate and social impacts and consequences that resulted in the aggravation of problems and crises, careless and irresponsible use of natural and social resources, unequal and unjust distribution of wealth. Whenever possible, we should indicate possible solutions to these problems and crises. In my view it is very important that in the world that is currently dominated by capitalist ideology and economy promoting consumerism and the (eternal and unlimited) growth-based development the public realizes that to a large extent the existing situation, problems, critical changes and crises, including the climate ones and the global crisis, are consequences of

human impact, particularly the current concept of capitalist development and ideology of unlimited eternal growth, claimed to be a basic human necessity and need, natural and normal condition. There is no proof that growth, particularly continuous and unlimited growth, is a natural and normal condition. To the contrary, even children when they become aware of existing limits in their surrounding realize that unlimited and eternal growth can be a problematic and possibly destructive concept. However, the current capitalist ideology and practice have failed to recognize and respect the limits of growth determined by the very nature and characteristics of environments, particularly available natural and other resources, climate, ecology and society. In the past five decades, everything was and still is dominated by global financial capitalism with its logic of short-term profits determined by stock exchanges, more precisely, at least recently, by computer algorithms built upon guesses and expectations of future profits and yields. With the invention and development of new financial concepts and products, such as options and financial derivatives, the stock exchanges can trade with everything. In the pursue of ever increasing profit(s) and wealth, regardless of possible ethical/moral reservations and implications, stock exchanges attempt to financially evaluate, monetarize, sell and buy everything, including vital resources, such as drinking water or water for irrigation, expectations of survival and extinction of particular endangered species, human resources as well as their organs or genomes, etc. Betting on expected future profits and yields, the modus operandi of stock exchanges resembles pyramid games or Ponzi schemes considered illegal by most legal systems. To make the situation in particular environments and globally worse, while using public systems, services and infrastructure as well as natural resources in different environments, several economic actors, particularly global companies, often avoid paying adequate and fair taxes. Attempting to reduce their costs and taxes and maximize their profits, they move their production and other processes or (at least) their profits to environments with looser and less strict environmental and ecological legislation, lower taxes, salaries and labour protection standards. This way they avoid paying the actual and fair price for their economic activities and for environmental, ecological, natural and social resources that they use as well as fair fines and damages for the negative environmental, ecological, economic and social impacts of their economic activities. They claim that they are responsible only to their shareholders that expect profits.

Hopefully, before it is too late, a global consensus will be reached that the current economy and concept of development based on unlimited growth need to be replaced by sustainable green, responsible and inclusive economy and development built upon principles of equal rights and duties, justice, equality, inclusion and integration, solidarity and public good (e.g. Piciga et al. 2016). Sadly, at this point there is almost no coherent and concerted global effort and strategy that would address the partial crises mentioned above as well as the global crisis

they combine in. Partial crisis strategies and actions, even if they were successful in addressing particular crises, could not successfully manage and resolve the global crises. The global crisis is not just a simple sum of all different simultaneous, interrelated and interdependent particular problems and crises. Rather, it is a new quality that requires new and different global, holistic and integrated approaches, strategies, policies and (programs of) actions that far surpass a sum of simultaneous individual segmental approaches, strategies, policies and actions designed to address particular crises. As much as analyses, analytical case and comparative studies of different phenomena or their segments, including all crises, are important for our understanding of those phenomena, their characteristics, interactions and interdependence, they are limited in their scope and inadequate for the main task. In order to address particular crises and the global one successfully, we need holistic approaches and synthesis, a common ground and framework (possibly a grand theory and overarching mobilizing ideology) that could bring together all relevant actors with their segmental strategies in a concerted effort to develop and implement common integrated strategies addressing the global crisis. It is essential that all necessary and integral, interrelated and interdependent components of partial and global strategies, policies and actions are constantly coordinated, evaluated and, based upon results of a permanent evaluation, updated and developed.

Although this article focuses on the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the Covid-19 pandemic and (at least some of) their impacts on contemporary societies, sciences and diverse minorities, particularly national, ethnic, religious and linguistic ones, it also considers the global dimensions and framework, particularly the global crisis briefly described above. As already stressed, we should be aware that the global crisis is not just a simple sum of partial and particular crises, but a new quality resulting from different combinations, interrelations and interdependence of those partial and particular problems and crises. Consequently, Covid-19 crisis strategy should be considered a relevant and interdependent segment of the common integral crisis strategies. In this context, the article examines how the Covid-19 pandemic, combined with other crises and problems, could impact the inclusion, integration and participation of diverse (social) minorities, particularly national and ethnic minorities and persons belonging to them.

With regard to the methodological approaches and research methodologies that could be applied in studying those issues, it is important to note that the existing ones in social sciences and humanities might not be adequate. I would argue that in addition to and in combination with traditional disciplinary and predominantly analytical research approaches, quantitative and qualitative methods, new approaches and methods are needed, particularly synthetic ones. No doubt, analytical approaches and methods are needed and used for gathering, organizing, presenting and interpreting the necessary information, data, research findings and insights on specific contexts, phenomena and situations;

usually they focus on specific segments and dimensions of studied contexts, phenomena, relations and situations. Simultaneously, synthetic approaches that enable holistic synthesis are crucial for studying, understanding and interpreting the overall context and situations, complex phenomena that need to be observed and interpreted as interrelated, interwoven and interdependent processes and trends of development. In this context, adequately combining analysis and synthesis methodological pluralism that combines quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques of different sciences and disciplines, such as case and comparative studies as well as multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches, proves particularly useful (della Porta & Keating 2008). In the past decades, social sciences and humanities have focused on analytical approaches, methods and techniques, resulting in a huge volume of respective methodological scholarly publications. Simultaneously, synthetic approaches and methods needed for a good quality synthesis have been neglected and have not been developed. Additionally, researchers and scholars have often not been trained adequately and relevant publications are missing. If philosophers and lawyers receive some training in deduction, induction, logical, analytical and synthetic reasoning, the others seldom study classic philosophy, philosophy and theory of state and law (particularly ancient Greek, Roman, Italian, French, English and classic German philosophers and social theorists)² that contributed to the development of those methods. Consequently, to a large extent the global picture and understanding of the overall situation and trends have been blurred or even missed. In research, particularly in the presentation and interpretation of research results, findings and conclusions, we need to consider all limitations and problems, particularly those resulting from applied research approaches and methods. Additionally, we should consider the problem of objectivity in social research elaborated by Myrdal (1969) decades ago. We should be aware that values, bias and ideologies that influence sources of information as well as values, bias and ideologies of involved researchers influence, direct and condition all research, presentations, explanations and interpretations. For this reason, it is important that researchers clearly present their positionality, topics, scope and goals of their research, methodological approaches and research methods as well as all limitations and problems of their studies they are aware of (Žagar 2011–2014).

In our preliminary research studying the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on minorities and persons belonging to them, focusing on their inclusion, integration and participation in respective social environments, initially, news, media reports and commentaries published in and broadcasted by selected media, particularly the relevant global, regional and national, public and private broadcasters, news agencies and their internet services, were collected, reviewed and analysed. Additionally, we started to collect, review and organize available³ public documents of different authorities and institutions, such as legislation, local and regional regulations, policies, policy and strategy papers and state-

ments of authorities that we considered relevant from Slovenia, neighbouring countries and some selected countries (e.g. USA, UK, Sweden, New Zealand, etc.). We plan to analyse them and those collected in the future in more detail in the following phases of research. In addition to the mentioned sources designed as a comparative study, our media analysis will also include selected national and local newspapers and social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, focusing particularly on contributions, posts and comments that we (will) consider relevant. In selecting the mentioned sources and in determining their relevance, we considered numerous factors and circumstances, such as their situation and social role, reach/audience/readership, status, independence, orientation, declared values and ideology, their editorial policies and practices, the ideologies and agendas of their owners and/or authorities that control them and/or can direct them. For example, editorial policies of state-controlled media tend to avoid topics that might be unpleasant for the authorities, while private media often follow specific interests and ideologies of their owners. We are aware that such practices reduce objectivity and reliability of those sources.

Our research on the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts on the situation, position, inclusion, integration and participation of national/ethnic minorities in Slovenia, neighbouring countries, Central and South-Eastern Europe in the time of the pandemic, considering the circumstances, public health and protective measures introduced in specific environments, was rather limited, mostly utilizing our regular communication and rather informal qualitative approaches and methods. However, we still made a few trips to regions in Slovenia and neighbouring countries where minorities live in the spring and in the summer of 2020. What made our (field) research in such circumstances possible were years, in several cases decades of intense communication, relationships, trust and cooperation in research and other activities with key individuals, particularly persons belonging to the respective minorities, representatives of minority associations, organizations and institutions, researchers and scholars in the mentioned countries and regions as well as with the relevant institutions, organizations and associations, including research and higher education institutions and their formal and informal networks, governmental offices and minority councils. Since direct person to person meetings and communication were limited, we continued our communication, contacts and cooperation in the form of phone and internet communication, using e-mail and skype, occasionally also social media. In addition to our ongoing communication with persons belonging to different minorities in Slovenia and neighbouring countries, we are planning field research when travel and field work are possible that will include (personal) observation (with and without own participation), interviews as well as other qualitative and quantitative research methods and techniques.

2. The SARS-CoV-2 Virus, Covid-19 Pandemic, (Contemporary) Societies and Science(s)

In recent months, the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the Covid-19 pandemic have changed our reality, lives and societies. Challenges of dealing with, successfully managing and overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic seem to be new for contemporary societies, particularly considering the global spread, scope and consequences of the pandemic, unprecedented since the 1918 Spanish flu (Spinney 2017). As a threat to humanity and contemporary societies, at least to a certain extent, we can compare the current pandemic with severe historic epidemics and pandemics, like the plague, cholera, smallpox, tuberculosis and the already mentioned Spanish flu that decimated populations of certain areas and/or killed huge numbers of people globally at different historic times. However, each of the listed cases is different and was happening in a specific historic and social setting. The world in 2020 is very different from the world a century ago, and the differences increase even more if we compare it with the world in the time of pandemics in the previous centuries. Among the most important historic factors, developments and transformations that characterize the evolution of societies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries we need to consider intense and ever faster scientific, technological, social and economic progress and development. If the twentieth century could be described as the time of competing ideologies, military alliances and blocks, in the beginning of the twenty-first century ideologies of capitalism and consumerism dominate everything.

The enormous volume of news, information, press reports and comments on the Covid-19 pandemic and its social, economic and cultural consequences broadcasted and published daily by the main global, regional and national media in the past months indicates their social relevance (e.g. 24ur.com, BBC News, CNBC News, DW, MMC RTV SLO).⁴ It should not be surprising that in the past year Covid-19 related topics dominate public discourses in almost all environments. Simultaneously, these contents mushroom in social media as central topics of several posts and discussions promoting different attitudes and positions of authors and participants. Usually lacking trustworthy and objective editorial policies and standards, social media in addition to relevant and substantiated information and scientifically verified facts present, spread and promote also diverse fake news and facts, guesses and conspiracy theories that frequently reject and deny science and scientifically verified facts. Unfortunately, in my view, some politicians and leaders, such as US president Donald Trump, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro and Ukrainian president Alexander Lukashenko,⁵ public personalities and social media influencers participate in spreading and promoting fake news, false facts and conspiracy theories as well as in denying research and scholarly findings, thereby confusing, polarizing and dividing the public as well as contributing to the problems related to Covid-19. Differently, understand-

ding the importance of timely, accurate and relevant information on the SARS-CoV-2 virus and effective medical treatment(s) for the successful management of the pandemic and wellbeing of patients, medical professionals working daily with their patients and observing the results, problems and successes of treatments and medicaments as well as researchers and scholars, particularly those in the fields of medicine, natural sciences and technology based upon preliminary results of their intensified research, try to communicate their observations and findings to fellow medical workers, other researchers and the interested public through all possible channels as soon as possible. Consequently, in the past year they produced and published a huge number of research and professional reports, papers, scholarly articles and publications on the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the Covid-19 pandemic, the development of effective vaccines, drugs, and treatment (e.g. Nature Research, Science, The Lancet).⁶ With more attention paid to these issues at most levels and increased funding, currently particularly in natural sciences and medicine, the related research and research production are likely to grow further, hopefully and at least in longer terms in all fields and disciplines.

In any case, the amount and scope of relevant information, data and facts about the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the Covid-19 pandemic are enormous and are growing daily almost exponentially in an unprecedented way. It is extremely difficult even to keep track of everything, while it seems almost impossible to organize, review, analyse and interpret the available information, data, facts and (research) findings in a short time-span. Consequently, we can expect that relevant scholarly publications, particularly in social sciences and humanities, will continue to appear in years and decades to come. However, as mentioned, already available research and publications, particularly in natural sciences and medicine, present important initial findings that continue to be complemented, improved and developed by new findings about the virus and pandemic. We all, including medical professionals, epidemiologists and (national) epidemiological institutes are learning in the process. In such process, different, possibly opposing views and suggested approaches, strategies, policies, measures and recommendations are likely. Nevertheless, defining the new normal, generally the medical profession agreed that the most effective (preventive) measures during the current pandemic should be social distancing, wearing face masks/coverings, personal and public hygiene, particularly hand, cough and sneeze hygiene, robust testing available to all, promotion of declared (obligatory) measures and recommendations as well as self-isolation and quarantine when there is a high risk of (possible) infection or when infection is confirmed by the test. Currently, the central attention of researchers, pharmaceutical industry and governments is paid to the development of effective vaccines that are hoped to end or at least neutralize the Covid-19 pandemic. Regardless of some breakthroughs and positive results in the testing of already developed vaccines in different countries, it is still uncertain how effective they will be in protecting from the infection. In any

case, we could expect that broad and global vaccination will not start before mid-2021 or 2022. Consequently, it is even more important that researchers and medical professionals, being aware of the severity of the illness, constantly develop protocols, medication and medical treatments, particularly those for seriously ill patients in intensive care units.

In this context, we shall stress the importance of public awareness and consensus that contemporary societies and states urgently have to introduce, fund and implement policies and measures as well as establish, fund and staff the necessary institutions and systems needed to control, limit and manage the current pandemic. Simultaneously, they need to develop, fund and implement robust and effective strategies, policies, systems, mechanisms, institutions and measures of crisis management that could prevent, control, limit and manage such pandemics and crises in the future.

The initial findings of our preliminary comparative research, based upon the analysis of collected media reports and public documents as well as our communication with members of different minorities in Slovenia and neighbouring countries, show that globally, at least in the first phase, tolerant, open, inclusive and well integrated environments, societies and states, built upon principles of solidarity, equality and justice, are better able to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and various crises that it provoked or worsened. However, it could be argued that simultaneously some more closed, possibly even isolated environments and societies, particularly those with tighter control over media, social media/networks, internet and civil society, usually associated with more authoritarian leadership and systems could be equally or even more successful in introducing necessary measures and limiting (the spread of) the pandemic. In any case, adequate economic and social resources and capacities, particularly developed functional, well-equipped, trained and robust public health systems accessible to the broadest population, other robust and functional public services and systems, such as education, welfare, social security and public media, improve their capacity. Their capacity to prevent crises and/or manage them successfully further increases when they promote communication and cooperation with other environments, including international communication and cooperation. As a rule, such environments are more likely to consider the findings and warnings of researchers and scholars and follow their recommendations. Consequently, we could say that in managing the pandemic more successful seem to be the authorities and countries that

[a]s soon as possible [...] implemented general and specific health recommendations, particularly social distancing, wearing face masks, public and personal hygiene; when needed they restricted travel and free movement of people in, from and to the most affected towns, cities and regions or in the whole country to reduce and control the spread of Covid-19; when necessary they closed international borders and introduced quarantine; stressing the importance of solidarity, individual and social responsibility

they managed to agree upon, introduce and implement crisis management strategies, policies and measures aimed to assist the economy and different spheres of society; they developed specific strategies and measures that improve their capacity to overcome the crisis, reduce joblessness and increase job, individual and social security (Žagar, forthcoming).

Broad public awareness and social consensus on proclaimed crisis management are important in this context, as everybody needs to contribute by following preventive measures and recommendations of authorities and medical profession. Although usually dialogue and consensus building take time and, consequently, are not considered the most effective approaches to and tools of crisis management, in inclusive environments, including democratic ones with traditions of dialogue and consensus building, they can be done rather quickly and effectively. Effective and popular leadership can help in this process by focusing the public discourse, promoting the public awareness of the problem and by assisting coordination and cooperation needed to act immediately and effectively upon adopted crisis strategies, policies and operational plans.

Among the successful states in the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, I would single out New Zealand. Although integrated in the international community, as geographically (and otherwise) isolated, relatively sparsely populated islands in the northern Pacific, New Zealand might be a specific case with several comparative advantages in fighting the pandemics in comparison with other, geographically less isolated states. However, experiences during previous crises, such as the terrorist attack known as Christchurch mosque shootings during Friday Prayer on 15 March 2019 and its aftermath as well as the Whakari/White Island volcanic eruption on 9 December 2019 show that the current Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, as an excellent crisis communicator, and her government are very capable crisis managers. It seems that New Zealand and its government, in cooperation with all democratic institutions, public services and the public, did everything right and successfully handled the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and crisis. The authorities there reacted immediately and responsibly, provided necessary, clear and scientifically founded information as the basis for a broad public discussion, mobilization of people and building of social consensus, introduced strict public health and preventive measures, including lockdown and closure of borders. Their measures and recommendations, accepted and followed by a large majority of the population, proved very successful in controlling and limiting the spread of disease. A typical example of the openness, inclusiveness and tolerance of New Zealand society was the consensual agreement to postpone the scheduled parliamentary election for a month, based upon the proposal of the opposition that explained they would not be able to prepare and lead their electoral campaign properly. Regardless of their record approval ratings and popularity because of the successful handling of the pandemic and crisis, the government immediately agreed with and accep-

ted the proposal and reasoning of the opposition. In the 2020 general election, Jacinda Ardern led the Labour Party to a landslide victory, winning an overall majority in the House of Representatives. The voters showed their support for the government and its work, particularly for its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and crisis (e.g. BBC, DW).

At least initially, some countries and their authorities (e.g. US, Brazil, Mexico, India, etc.) ignored or underestimated the severity and scope of the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences, possibly even denied the very existence of the pandemic or compared it to annual flu epidemics and similar respiratory viral diseases. Some authorities at national and regional/provincial level (e.g. UK, initially considering the strategy of herd immunity; Italy, Spain, etc.) underestimated the urgency to take the necessary measures and steps immediately. Consequently, they failed to implement the recommendations of the medical and science professionals, such as social distancing, personal and public hygiene, quarantine, lockdown of economy, cultural and public life in time. Media reports and our preliminary findings confirm that those countries have been less successful in managing the first wave of Covid-19. When they started to implement measures to contain the pandemic, the situation in those environments had already deteriorated, resulting in severe stresses and overload of their health systems, particularly intensive care units, as well as higher numbers and shares of patients with severe symptoms and pandemic related deaths in their population (e.g. BBC, CNBC, DW).

A specific case was Sweden. Swedish authorities, following the opinions and advices of their chief epidemiologist, opted for the strategy of herd immunity and did not decide for lockdown. However, simultaneously they promoted solidarity, personal and social responsibility of individuals in protecting the well-being of the vulnerable, particularly the elderly, and called on people to follow preventive measures. In comparison, based upon media reports, considering the number of related deaths this strategy seemed to be less effective than strategies of energetic immediate actions that in addition to personal preventive measures and some restrictions included lockdown when necessary (e.g. BBC, DW).

As mentioned, in most environments the Covid-19 pandemic provoked diverse crises and/or worsened the existing ones. At this point, we cannot predict all their possible social, economic, political and cultural consequences that will be exceptional challenges for contemporary societies and authorities at all levels. However, we can expect that they will test the capacity, adequacy and robustness of public and private institutions, services, systems and (nation)states worldwide. So far, recent developments, reactions, responses and functioning of states and their authorities, public and private organizations and institutions, systems and services showed that they have been ill prepared to deal with such crises. Obviously, the states, but also international organizations and forums, including the UN, were unprepared and failed to take seriously the warnings of medical

and science professions who warned against global pandemics and their possible negative consequences and impacts. Regardless of warnings and experiences from different epidemics (e.g. Ebola, SARS, bird-flu) in the past, even the World Health Organization (WHO) expected to coordinate the global management and containment of pandemics initially failed to present a coherent global strategy, established and operational international procedures, recommendations, criteria and protocols. To address these issues, every environment, authorities at all levels, states and the international community, particularly international, continental and regional organizations as well as public/state and private institutions and organizations, need to develop, implement and constantly update coherent, holistic, concerted, operational and effective approaches, preventive and crisis strategies, policies and measures, including the necessary medical and public health protocols. In this context, we hope that science(s) and scientists will play important roles. Although in the time of strengthening nationalism(s), populism and isolationism such calls for increased international cooperation, multilateralism and strengthened international structures might seem utopian and such developments unlikely, I believe that we have no viable alternative that would ensure successful management of and fighting with global pandemics. Consequently, all socially responsible actors, particularly scholars, are urged to present and explain to the public why such concerted global cooperation is necessary for the successful management of global crises.

Just like all spheres of life, research and science(s) are and will be impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences. Although in this context we usually consider research, science(s), researchers and scholars key (f)actors that can contribute to the successful management and resolving of the mentioned problems and crises, we should realize that they are also a part of these problems and crises or, at least, that they might have contributed to them. Particularly, we shall question their independence and objectivity. Namely, at least to some extent research and science, including publically funded research, research and innovation strategies and policies are influenced and directed by the current authorities and elites that determine funding. When funded by private funding, particularly powerful industries, corporations and capital, we could say that research, science(s), researchers and scholars are in their service, consequently also responsible for outcomes and consequences. As already presented, it is unlikely that the current authorities and (ever richer and more powerful) elites will be willing to give up their privileges, the current behaviour patterns and power relations. We can expect that they will reject the conclusions and recommendations based upon our research in the past decades (e.g. Medvešek & Novak Lukanič 2020; Žagar 2010; Žagar 2020; Žagar, forthcoming) that in crises, including pandemics, societies and states can improve their stability, robustness and ability to survive and overcome those crises by strengthening cohesion, compassion, mutual responsibility and solidarity as well as public systems and institutions,

particularly public health systems, civil security (services and organizations), nongovernmental organizations and civil initiatives, particularly those stimulating and promoting equal cooperation, neighbourhood assistance, mutual responsibility and public good. Comparing the power and influence of economy, particularly main and most influential economic players (individuals and corporations) with the power and influence of states and authorities, we could conclude that states are no longer the most powerful global actors. Just like research, science, researchers and scholars, also states seem to be in service of economic elites that in crisis situations demand state intervention and aid, as the bailout of banks and other financial institutions during the last financial crisis showed. Consequently, it is not surprising that to a large extent, (private) capital dictates also public research and science funding and policies, thereby strengthening the dependence of research and science, including public research and higher education institutions.

This, however, does not reduce the responsibility, particularly moral and social responsibility of research, science(s), researchers and scholars for their work, findings and results as well as their outcomes and consequences. With regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, science(s) should study it, its consequences and impacts comprehensively, from all angles and considering all dimensions, interactions and interdependences. Science has known corona viruses and their potential dangers in case of possible transfers from their traditional hosts, such as bats, to humans for decades. However, due to the lack of funding and consequently interest, the related research was not intensified and consequently potential medications and vaccines were not developed proactively. Profits, particularly expectations of future profits, dictate private and public funding of research and science. Consequently, it should not be surprising that the pharmaceutical industry shows no interest in developing treatments, medications, including new, much needed antibiotics that would be effective against antibiotic-resistant bacteria and vaccines that do not bring profits or only bring small, marginal profits.

It is not by chance that a new, current geological epoch is called the Anthropocene, the Human Epoch. Considering other factors that have contributed to environmental and climate change, evolution of life and survival of species in the past, special attention needs to be paid to studying the human impact on the environment, climate, life, including wildlife, plants, fungi, bacteria and viruses as well species extinction. Consequences of the human impact, particularly the (exponent) growth of population, exploitation of environment and nature, capitalist economy and development of (unlimited) growth in the past century are predominantly negative from the perspective of environment, climate, other living species and their survival. I would add that the consequences of the human impact prove negative also for humankind and contemporary societies, considering all problems and crises, ever growing social and economic inequalities, exclusion of large sections of the population, populism, exclusive nationalism

and xenophobia. It seems that humans fail to recognize that we are an integral part of (living) nature, interrelated, intertwined and interdependent with our environment, climate and nature. Additionally, as already mentioned, we should be aware that research, science(s) and technology, particularly when in service of the ruling elites, contribute to human impact(s), both in positive and negative ways. In studying those impacts all sciences, disciplines and fields should participate and cooperate, when possible utilizing inter-, trans- and multidisciplinary (research) approaches and methods as well as methodological pluralism that combined can offer more comprehensive and holistic research and understanding of the studied phenomena. Simultaneously, ethical scientists should present and explain to the public that, often, contemporary science and technology rather than serving the people and humankind are in service of the capital and profit(s). Being aware of the responsibility and potentials of research, science(s), researchers, scholars and technology, considering the ethics and the precautionary principle followed in medicine, they should consider the complexity, interrelations and interdependence of the environment and life in it, promote and contribute to sustainable inclusive green economy and balanced development, built upon principles of equal rights, duties and responsibility, justice, equality, inclusion and integration, solidarity and public good. In this context, social sciences and humanities should point out that in order to achieve this goal, in addition to analytical and empirical approaches and analyses, disciplinary and interdisciplinary research that focus on specific phenomena and segments of society providing the necessary information, empirical data and insights, we also need holistic and synthetic approaches and synthesis that take into account and present the whole picture, interconnections and interactions as well as interdependence; such approaches are necessary to develop alternative, balanced and sustainable solutions and strategies.

3. The SARS-CoV-2 Virus, Covid-19 Pandemic and Their Impact on Minorities

Everybody exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 virus risks being infected and the risk increases if the preventive measures and recommendations mentioned above are not followed. However, the first analyses of the situations and developments in different countries, such as US, Brazil, Mexico, India, UK, and South Africa, show that in comparison with the rest of the population, the poor, less educated and marginalised, diverse (social) minorities, including ethnic, racial and religious ones as well as persons belonging to them, are two to four times more likely to be affected by Covid-19, considering the numbers and (relative) shares of patients in intensive care units, deaths, increased unemployment, poverty and social exclusion (BBC, DW). These analyses are consistent with our findings regarding the impact(s) on ethnic and other minorities of diverse crises, escalated divisi-

ons and conflicts, such as the Yugoslav crisis (in the late 1980s and early 1990s), Global War on Terrorism (since 2001) and European migrant/refugee crisis (2015–2016) (Grafenauer & Munda Hirnök 2016; Medvešek & Pirc 2015; Žagar 2010). Particularly the implementation of predominantly restrictive and repressive approaches, strategies, policies and measures, particularly those limiting and/or suspending certain human rights and basic freedoms introduced by authorities at all levels to prevent crisis, instability and violence, usually failed to produce the desired and proclaimed goals and results. Several limitations and suspensions of human rights, such as increased security measures, including stricter, often excessive control(s) and security in public spaces and transportation, comprehensive excessive control of electronic and other communication that authorities declared in the name of security as partial and temporary at the time of their introduction, have become permanent and contributed to the erosion of democracy.

As mentioned, the Covid-19 pandemic escalated different crises that had already existed and caused several new ones in specific environments and globally. From the perspective of marginalized and minority communities and persons belonging to them, it is particularly important to establish how these crises, limiting and repressive approaches, policies and measures and their implementation in practice affect their social situation and status, inclusion/exclusion, integration and participation in all spheres of life. Considering the past research at the IES (e.g. Medvešek & Bešter 2010; Medvešek & Novak Lukanovič 2020; Žagar 2009), we hypothesize that the Covid-19 pandemic and crises further increase their exclusion and, consequently, have a negative impact on their participation.

Thematically, our research focuses on the situations and social processes caused and/or determined by the Covid-19 pandemic and related crises that can have an impact on effective and successful regulation and management of socially relevant diversities and asymmetries, especially ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious and identity related ones. In this context, we study various impacts and consequences of these crises on (social) minorities, particularly national and ethnic ones, including migrants. Studying majority-minority and minority-minority relations and situation(s) in selected, internally diverse environments and globally, special attention is paid to the specific situations, status, position, inclusion/exclusion, integration, protection and (special) rights of diverse minorities, particularly ethnic/national minorities in Slovenia, neighbouring countries, Central and South-Eastern Europe. Comparing these countries, we have to stress that regardless of some similarities, the situation, status and problems of diverse minorities and persons belonging to them, their exclusion and/or inclusion, integration and participation as well as the presence and incidents of racism, xenophobia and aggressive exclusive nationalism are specific and different in every country. These specifics and differences result, among others, from specific histories and historic developments, their perceptions and interpretati-

ons, different ways of life and traditions, specific identities and socially relevant diversities that exist in respective environments, cultures, values and ethics, current economic, political, social and cultural situations, developments and future expectations as well as diverse ideologies and policies. Considering the impacts and consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and crises related to it in different environments, we can expect that they will differ, often substantially in the following years, possibly decades. Particularly, they will depend on the specific perceptions and attitudes of the authorities and population regarding Covid-19, on chosen and implemented approaches, measures, reactions and responses, policies and strategies of authorities in respective environments as well as on their success in achieving the stated short, medium and long-term goals.

Presenting and commenting on our preliminary Covid-19 research, based upon findings of our research in the region in the past decades (Bašič et al. 2018; Žagar 2010, 2017), we should stress that the situation is specific and different not only in every country, but at least to a certain extent also in every region of the respective country where minorities live. Additionally, the situations, status and position(s) of various minorities in a respective region might differ. Moreover, each minority differs from every other minority community. We could say that each minority is a case *sui generis*. Simultaneously, diversities, different interests and asymmetries exist within every minority community. Internal pluralities, diversities and asymmetries are reflected in a number of specific situations, internal relations, organization and power distribution, diverse institutions, structures and associations of distinct communities as well as in the existence of several different, sometimes conflicting views, positions and interests. Consequently, we should be very careful in presenting and interpreting different situations, while any generalization of findings, even for a specific minority community, might be very problematic. However, already a quick initial review of media news, reports and commentaries as well as data and statements collected by our research confirm that usually those who are poorer, deprived, excluded and marginalized within respective communities, including diverse minorities, are more affected by various crises. The members of diverse national/ethnic minorities in Slovenia and neighbouring countries in our communication expressed that during the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly during the lockdown in their respective environments, they felt that they were even more isolated than the rest of the population. Their views and perceptions confirm our findings and a general conclusion that poverty, isolation and social exclusion, particularly marginalization, have an impact on the status, situation and position of individuals and distinct communities in contemporary societies. More specifically, in case of diverse minorities, including national, ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities and persons belonging to them, they have a negative impact on their inclusion and integration as well as on their political, social, economic and cultural participation in their respective social environments.

Presenting research, results and findings, for the reasons mentioned above, respecting research ethics and our social responsibility, all researchers and scholars should list, describe, present and explain all limitations and problems regarding theoretical foundations, frameworks, concepts and (working) definitions, applied research approaches and methods, collection, organization and analysis of data and information that can be predicted and we are aware of. Particularly, we need to be cautious in the formulation and interpretation of research results and findings. In this context, in order to ensure objectivity of our research, as already pointed out by Myrdal (1969), we have to present and carefully explain our positions, values, focus and main goals. Consequently, we need to point that we are aware that already the very selection of included media, analysed materials and their contents determines the scope, orientation and results of our research, particularly our analysis and findings. Regarding the formulation and interpretation of our research findings, conclusions and recommendations, we state that our position, (social) values, main goals and intentions are to improve the position, (special) rights and protection, inclusion, integration and participation of national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and other (social) minorities and persons belonging to them.

Our communication with members of various minorities in Slovenia and neighbouring countries showed that most minority communities, especially traditional national minorities, quickly and innovatively adapted to changing situations and circumstances with their civic, economic, educational and cultural activities during the Covid-19 pandemic. Often, they concluded that the pandemic accelerated the digitalization of their communication and activities, particularly in the fields of culture, education, religion, economy, politics and social life in general. We could assume that public life of those national minorities was transformed as much, if not more, as the life of the rest of population in respective countries, the region, Europe and globally. However, all their experiences with digitalization were not positive. The changed situation and digitalization within those minority communities emphasized existing internal differences and stratifications. Particularly, the digitalization increased marginalization and exclusion of those that did not have the access to digital technologies and internet. Such problems were mentioned particularly in connection with education and distant learning, working from home as well as participation in cultural events. Especially affected were some pupils and students, particularly those from larger and/or less affluent families that did not have computers for every child who had to participate in distant learning as well as the elderly who did not have the access to adequate computers, phones, software and/or internet connection. Often the elderly and the parents expected to help their children in distant learning as well as some pupils and students lacked the knowledge and skills necessary to use computers, phones, software and internet successfully.

As mentioned, the more marginalized and poorer a minority and its members, the more they can be affected by crises, including the current pandemic. The specific situation, status and position of a respective minority and persons belonging to it influence their perceptions of situations and problems they experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic and particularly during the lockdown. The Roma have been the poorest, most isolated, excluded, marginalized, economically and socially disenfranchised minority in Slovenia, all its neighbouring countries, Central and South-Eastern Europe already before the pandemic (Bešter et al. 2017; Komac & Barle Lakota 2015). Their social and economic situations, particularly their poverty, unemployment and exclusion, further deteriorated during Covid-19. Due to their often-inadequate housing, poor sanitary and living conditions, lack of resources, such as water supply and internet access, the Roma find it extremely difficult to follow recommended social distancing, hand and personal hygiene as well as other preventive public health recommendations, while it would be virtually impossible to follow the recommendations for isolation or governmental quarantine orders in the case of possible infection. Consequently, I would suggest that the risks of their potential exposure to the virus and its uncontrolled spread increase, at least in certain settlements and communities. Considering their existing health situation, chronic problems and related health risks, if infected with SARS-CoV-2 virus, the Roma are more likely to experience severe illness, suffer severe and long-term health consequences or die. Analysing the past developments and experiences in times of crises and considering the current general social and economic situation in respective environments where they live, we could predict that their unemployment would increase further, proportionally more than that of the rest of the population, thereby contributing to their increased poverty, (social and economic) exclusion, isolation and marginalization. Consequently, discrimination – both direct and indirect – against the Roma in different fields of life could increase as well.

In our informal conversations addressing the possible consequences of Covid-19, an interesting hypothesis was mentioned, namely that it might be less likely that the Roma catch a virus, in this case the SARS-CoV-2 virus, considering the existing isolation and marginalization of their communities and persons belonging to them. However, once a single Roma is infected, the epidemic would spread rapidly due to the specific social, economic and health situation and circumstances in respective Roma communities (Žagar, forthcoming).

The lockdown and closure of international borders affected the members of diverse minorities, particularly traditional national minorities, more than the rest of the population and had additional negative impacts on their lives and activities. The closure of the borders with Italy after the spread of the epidemic there in the spring 2020 was particularly difficult for the Italians in Slovenia and Croatia

and the Slovenes in Italy. They felt isolated and cut from their traditional cultural hinterland. The closure temporarily cut or, at least, substantially limited their traditional, permanent and intense close links, communication and cooperation particularly with border regions of their kin-nation states. These links and cooperation include intense cross-border cooperation and exchange, daily commuting and visiting of cultural and other institutions and public events, such as concerts, theatre shows, exhibitions and gatherings.

Members of those minorities expressed their dissatisfaction with the restrictive measures during the Covid-19 lockdown introduced by respective authorities that did not consider the needs of minorities. They suggested that the Slovene and Austrian national authorities should have considered substantial regional differences in Italy, as border regions have not been impacted by the epidemic as much as Lombardy and some other regions. They pointed out that in the spring of 2020 the situation and spread of the virus in Friuli Venezia Giulia were similar to that in Slovenia at the time. Consequently, they believed that the government of Slovenia should have allowed the inhabitants of this Italian border region or at least the members of the Slovene minority there and the members of the Italian minority in Slovenia who live along the border to cross it. In this context, in order to prevent the spread of the pandemic, the Slovene government should have determined and enforced criteria, instructions, recommendations and measures that those crossing the border should be following (Žagar, forthcoming).

To conclude this section of the article, we address the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on inclusion, integration and participation of minorities and persons belonging to them. Inclusion, integration and participation, in this context understood as equal, full and active participation of all individuals, distinct groups and communities in social, cultural, economic and political life of societies, particularly in processes of decision-making in all walks of life, should be considered key components of successful regulation and management of socially relevant diversities. Such inclusion, integration and participation should be based upon human rights, including (special) rights of diverse social minorities, such as national and ethnic minorities and persons belonging to them, principles of equality, equal rights, justice and solidarity. In order to fully exercise their rights and full and equal social, economic and political participation, distinct communities, including minorities as collective entities and persons belonging to them as individuals, might require a certain level of autonomy, particularly in regulating and managing their own affairs (e.g. Žagar 2017, 2018). However, in most cases, discussions on participation of minorities and persons belonging to them focus on their political participation (e.g. Bešter et al. 2017; Brezigar & Vidau 2018). Much less attention is paid to other dimensions of participation, although, in my view, they are very important for their full and equal integration in their environments.

As already presented, the situations, position(s), status, rights and protection, legally determined and actual inclusion and integration in their respective social environments as well as social, economic and political participation of diverse minorities and persons belonging to them differ, often substantially. In the region of Central and South-Eastern Europe, some minorities, such as, for example, the Germans in South Tirol or the Hungarians and Italians in Slovenia, are considered to enjoy the highest standards and level of minority rights and protection, while other minorities still lack the adequate protection and often face marginalization and discrimination, such as the Roma in all countries, although their situation differs from country to country. Regardless of differences among them, however, rightly, all minorities and their members, particularly their representatives, associations and organizations, constantly complain and suggest that their status, inclusion, integration and participation are insufficient and should improve, possibly asking for the introduction of some kind and level of (minority) autonomy or, if autonomy already exists, they demand that it is increased. Among the main problems in this context, they point to the substantial gap between the regulation and legally determined rights and protection of minorities and persons belonging to them on the one side and their actual situation and position on the other.

With regard to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the situation, position, inclusion, integration, participation and representation of minorities, members of minorities and researchers agree that it causes additional problems, particularly by worsening already existing problems and crises, combining them and provoking new ones. The feeling expressed by members of different minorities is that in the time of the pandemic their voice is heard even less than before. Consequently, it is believed that the pandemic could have a negative impact on the situation, participation and representation of minorities. In this context, the referendum on the electoral reform and reduction of the number of representatives and senators in the Italian parliament was mentioned as a possibly negative example that could result in inability of the Slovene and, possibly, other minorities in Italy to elect their representatives. Consequently, several Slovenes in Italy expressed their hopes that the legislative reform will address and adequately regulate the issue of representation of minorities in the parliament in a way that will ensure the election of minority representatives. Although they would hope for the full support of the Republic of Slovenia as their kin-state in their efforts, they are not sure that Slovenia will deliver.

In our conversations, members of different minorities also expressed their fear that some positive trends and transformation of minority policies in most countries of the region in the recent decades might be slowed down or reversed, using arguments and excuses of security and prevention of the spread of the pandemic. Consequently, they stress the need to advocate the policies of multiculturalism/inter-culturalism and the immense importance of the promotion of the

concept and continuous process of the open inclusive public dialogue in diverse environments as an effective tool for the successful regulation and management of socially relevant diversities that demands the formal and actual recognition, inclusion, integration, participation and representation of minorities (Bašić et al. 2018; Žagar 2020).

4. Some Conclusions

Presenting some of the most acute problems and crises at all levels, from local, regional and national to global, caused or aggravated by the current concept of development based on (eternal and unlimited) growth, capitalism, capitalist economy and logic of capitalization and (particularly) short term profits, this study establishes the broader context and framework within which the Covid-19 pandemic, its impacts and consequences, particularly different problems and crises that it worsened and escalated or caused, should be studied. It points out that all these problems and crises, such as environmental, climate, social and economic crises, are interrelated, interwoven and interdependent. They could not be managed and resolved successfully if they are addressed each separately, with separate, isolated and/or independent (segmental) strategies. This applies also to the Covid-19 crisis. Consequently, integrated and concerted approaches, strategies and policies that include effective crisis management are needed. This study suggests that this might be possible only if the current concept and ideology of capitalist development are replaced by a new concept and ideology of sustainable, balanced, green, environmentally and socially responsible fair economy and development based upon human rights and freedoms and the principles of equality, justice and solidarity. Sustainable development needs to be human, society, ecology, environment and climate friendly.

Based upon our preliminary research, this study suggests that the consequences and impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the related problems and crises for societies and minorities are profound, possibly also lasting. In cases of national, ethnic and other minorities and persons belonging to them they have already impacted their situations, position, status, rights and protection, inclusion, integration, participation and representation in social environments where they live, frequently in a negative way. Consequently, our research findings confirm the hypothesis that the Covid-19 pandemic and crises further increase their exclusion and, consequently, have a negative impact on their participation and, possibly, representation. These findings and detected trends should be considered in the context of securitization of contemporary societies, a concept and trend started after the events of 11 September 2001 that treat almost all social phenomena, problems and crises as security risks, suggesting that they could be managed by the introduction of additional security and restrictive measures, including temporary limitation or suspension of some human rights. In this con-

text, we should stress our research findings that such repressive approaches and measures, particularly limitations and/or suspensions of human rights, as a rule, do not achieve the goals proclaimed at the time of their introduction. Nevertheless, often these restrictive and repressive approaches and measures, including limitations and suspensions of human rights, continue for a long time or become permanent, thereby limiting and harming democracy. They can be considered one of reasons for the appearance and strengthening of some populist policies, regimes and illiberal democracies.

In the broader context, we should consider the role and responsibility of science(s) and technology as well as individual professionals and experts, researchers, scholars and scientists. When they are uncritically in service of the capital, guided by short term profits, and particularly when they promote the current concept, ideology and logic of development, they are a part of the problem as they contribute to the worsening and escalation of the existing problems and crises at all levels. In this context, negative impacts of military complex and arms industry, fossil fuel industry and other industries that contribute the most to the global and local pollution should be singled out. The responsibility of researchers and scholars is even greater when, rather than common good and regardless of the promoted and proclaimed research ethics, they plan and carry out their research in a way that the central part and goal of their research activities become generation and increase of (financial) profit. In other words, research strategies and policies, both private and public, when directed by capital and (short term) profit, tend to direct, fund and support predominantly research that could generate (financial and/or other measurable) profits, while other research of other themes and fields is not funded or is underfunded. Such approaches and logic could be blamed that, unfortunately, several topics and problems, critical also for the future of the environment, climate, humankind and survival of life in general have not been and are not researched adequately. Among such critical topics and problems that, at least recently, due to the mentioned approaches and logic have not been researched adequately, we could mention basic research of viruses, development of antibiotics and other drugs that do not bring huge profits to pharmaceutical companies, development of clean, green, environment, society and human friendly technologies that might reduce and/or endanger the profits of key current economic players and monopolies, as well as several, if not most, topics and themes in social sciences and humanities.

Simultaneously, research, science(s), technology, researchers and scholars, particularly their findings and the knowledge they generate, seem to be the only viable solution to all mentioned problems and crises. Without their contribution and engagement, the elaboration and implementation of the concept and strategies of sustainable, balanced, green, socially responsible and fair economy and development based upon principles of equality, justice and solidarity that is human, society, ecology, environment and climate friendly seem to be impos-

sible. In this context, also crisis strategies that can urgently react to and manage possible problems and crises need to be developed. Among important topics and contributions in this context that could contribute to the successful regulation and management of socially relevant diversities, thereby contributing to peace, stability, coexistence and cooperation in contemporary diverse societies necessary for sustainable development, we should also mention research of the situations, position, status, rights and protection, inclusion, integration, participation and representation of national and other minorities and persons belonging to them in social environments where they live.

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Notes

- ¹ Some parts of this section are based upon the text prepared for my chapter How does the Covid-19 pandemic influence peacebuilding, diversity management, the handling of ethnic conflict, and ethnic minorities, prepared for a monograph *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding and Ethnic Conflict* (Žagar, forthcoming) to be published by Routledge (Byrne et. al., forthcoming).
- ² Reading, for example, Plato (especially his writings on Socrates), Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes, Friedrich Nietzsche and many others I do not admire and enjoy only the interesting and valuable content of their writings, but – regardless of complex terminology – also the literary nature of their texts, including their vivid, literary and rich, sometimes very personal language and its beauty.
- ³ In the current situation, particularly the sources available online.
- ⁴ Considering a huge number (tens, in some cases hundreds) of consulted relevant text and video posts, news, reports, articles and comments available on all webpages of cited media, particularly public broadcasters and news agencies, we decided to cite in the text and bibliography only their main webpages, where using search engines and keywords specific relevant posts can be found.

- ⁵ The listed national political leaders could be considered the most vocal and blunt in their statements, often using inflammatory language. However, the list of politicians and political leaders that underestimate the Covid-19 pandemic and spread fake news could be very long.
- ⁶ Considering a huge number (hundreds) of relevant references, scholarly and research articles, papers and reports published on the webpages of cited scholarly journals, we decided to cite in the text and bibliography only their main webpages, where using search engines and keywords specific relevant posts can be found.

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