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Editorial Note

The COVID-19 pandemic shows no signs of slowing down at the time of release of the most recent issue of *IAPSS Politikon*. In fact, considerable research on the pandemic itself is now available, and we can also observe the first submissions addressing phenomena related to the pandemic among the manuscripts received by *IAPSS Politikon*. This fact reflects the interest of a range of prospective authors in the current developments. If it continues, it is likely to result in an array of articles and other forms of publication in the journal pertaining to the pandemic.

Another consequence of the need to adapt to the pandemic is that a range of activities, including research and education, have been moved into the 'online world'. The full consequences of this transformation cannot be anticipated. Nevertheless, it is worth listening to and interacting with experts who have specialised in online education and research (particularly data collection) using online tools long before the COVID-19 outbreak. This is why, as part of *IAPSS Politikon's* initiatives, the journal organized a webinar on 12 June 2020 titled 'Research and Education in Times of Pandemic' (see IPSA 2020). The webinar, convened by Andressa Costa and Dana Rice, featured presentations by Ruth Kerr (Federica Weblearning, University of Naples Federico II) and Dr Bojana Lobe (University of Ljubljana).

Highly relevant for conducting research that might result, among others, in journal manuscript submissions, was Lobe's presentation on 'online qualitative data collection' (see also Lobe, Morgan and Hoffman 2020). A few insights from this presentation can be summarised as follows:

- Online data collection can be synchronous or asynchronous. The former resembles 'real time data collection', resulting in a high degree of responsiveness and interactivity, but also carrying the risk of quicker, more superficial answers and blurred lines between responding to the message and sending the message in text-based formats. The latter is characterised by a time lag between the researcher(s) posing a question and the respondent's reply. Represented by mailing lists, social networking, blogs and fora, among others, it can facilitate more exhaustive and reflective answers but is more time-consuming than synchronous methods.
- Online focus groups can gather respondents from different locations that would be very difficult to bring together in person. When conducted online, the groups must be smaller than in-person. It is not advised to create groups larger than ten, groups of four to six are generally preferable for low engagement and two to four for high engagement. For synchronous text-based groups, the preferred size range is between three to five participants.

It is essential, same as with physical focus groups, that an atmosphere conducive to open responses is established, in which everyone is entitled and encouraged to share their views.

- Online ethnography involves, same as its offline variant, learning the vocabulary and glossary, observation, participation in the daily discussions of community, informal and in-depth interviewing online and offline, collection of blogs and screen shots and other methods in lieu of studying the production of meaning in online contexts through interaction and communication.

- Both these and other online data collection methods pose ethical questions that need to be addressed. For instance, in focus groups, it has to be ensured that none of the participants record the meeting without all participants' consent. Informed consent by the respondents remains required, and it is highly advisable to take particular care to ensure that the data are stored securely in forms that were agreed upon between the researcher(s) and the participants (see Association for Internet Research 2019).

With the right preparations and understanding, online data collection can be particularly empowering for those who might not have the opportunity to collect the data offline for the subject of their choice given limited resources.

The presentation by Ruth Kerr looked at the other arm of academia, that of education, via examining the sharp increase in popularity of the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) during the early stages of the pandemic. At this time, the combination of the absence of a range of opportunities combined with the greater (though far from absolute) accessibility of the internet made the MOOCs particularly attractive for those wishing to broaden their horizons or increase their qualifications and skills during the challenging times. Kerr identified additional reasons for the popularity of the MOOCs, such as quality (in many MOOCs learners benefit from some of the most renowned and knowledgeable scholars in the world), flexibility (quality MOOCs are designed such that individual modules can be used separately, enabling targeted learning) as well as accessibility (MOOCs are available on online platforms, meaning they can be integrated into existing courses, thus providing valuable materials at a time when in-person education cannot take place). These trends are not new but they have been accelerated by the pandemic. The 'tale of the MOOCs' promises to be an important one to follow for those interested in advanced in education and using modern technologies.

Turning to the content of the present issue, although most of the manuscripts published in this issue result from research conducted before the outbreak of the pandemic, they, as usual for *IAPSS Politikon,* speak to contemporary puzzles that will hardly become insignificant in a post-COVID world. The first half of the issue consists of two articles employing interpretive methods

(Ceren Çetinkaya) and critical theory (Ander Arredondo Chopitea). Çetinkaya studies one domain of the Turkish government's efforts to reconstruct 'a neo-Ottoman identity', that of Ottoman-themed soap operas, juxtaposing this reconstruction to Turkey's European identity that seeks affinity between Turkey and the European Union. She finds soap operas as an influential platform to present the Ottoman Empire in a generally positive light, as distinguished from the rest of Europe. To the extent the soap operas she analyses are exported to other countries, they may also contribute to perception changes beyond Turkey. According to Çetinkaya, this identity reconstruction might further decrease the domestic demand for Turkey's EU membership.

Arredondo Chopitea contributes with an article asking whether development policies, in fact, can meet their intended aims to contribute to equality and global justice. Using a Marxist approach, he finds these policies to be linked both to capitalism and to Western dominance, leaving sparse room to accommodate local demands. Although surrounded by a discourse of justice conceptualised via progress, sustainability or gender equality, their day-to-day operation, Arredondo Chopitea argues, furthers capitalism via a web of capitalist institutions, which he, referring to recent scholarship, calls the 'non-profit industrial complex'. The idea of progress through development is fostered via a 'charity discourse' as the ideological underpinning of the operation of development policies. Rather than offering concrete solutions, the article invites further critical scrutiny that fosters more in-depth understandings of seemingly self-evident processes and may be the starting point for rethinking them.

Subsequently, Volume 46 features Hakan Sönmez's analysis of how various democracy indices (*Freedom House, Polity, V-Dem, and Economist Intelligence Unit*) examine and capture democratic backsliding. Sönmez argues for approaching democracy indices with caution since they are based on complex measurements entailing a range of conceptual and methodological choices. Creating rankings of countries based on democratic quality merely based on a difference of very few units is therefore not advisable. At the same time, the indices are broadly consistent in displaying that the present is not the best time for democracy's thriving, even though it is also not the time to declare the coming demise of this regime type. Hence, we should take democratic backsliding seriously based on the combination of the established indices, and use the indices as motivation for understanding the causes behind these tendencies.

The issue closes with Chetan Rana's book review of an edited volume analysing the status quo and prospects for the 'Indo-Pacific axis'. The review finds the volume valuable in its definitional clarity and contribution to better understanding of the economic and security challenges in the region and India's role in particular. However, Rana sees the volume falling short of covering some

key policy areas with dynamic developments before the date of publishing of the book, and sidelining the role of regional institutions, ASEAN in particular.

Let us close with three final announcements. First, the editorial team has seen a few changes. We welcome Andrea Bregoli and Tobias Scholz as Editorial Assistants, and Jesslene Lee as Editor. We bid farewell to Bruna Veríssimo who contributed significantly over more than two years, and wish her success in further career. Second, as of the present issue, *IAPSS Politikon* is indexed in ERIH Plus which will further increase the impact of the published manuscripts. Third, our readers might look forward to the next issue which is scheduled to feature a special section focusing on climate justice.

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