Iva Paska

Zagreb, Hrvatska
paska.iva@gmail.com

Bits and Pieces: Experiences of Social Reality in the Midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Abstract

Covid19-pandemic has had a profound impact on the way we live and on the social reality in the world around us. Except for the enormous strain on public and health of individuals, it has affected social functioning to great extent, at least temporarily. It has sped up digitalization and forced social activities to transfer to the digital realm to an unprecedented level. It has simultaenously confined social actors to their geographical localities. In all of this, it has offered an opportunity of different observational point of human being in the world in the context of late modernity. It is possible to assume that this kind of social situation has the potential to affect the sense of ontological security of social actors, as well as their experience of space. The contradictory implications of the transfer of the social activitiy to the digital communicative spaces to current extent are also discussed.

Key words: *pandemic, ontological security, late modernity, digital media.*

The COVID19-pandemics functions as the situation which throws us out of the ordinary social functioning. With its massive shutdown of social activity, its disruption of the functioning of the interconnected expert systems basic to social functioning in late modernity, as well as its transference of social activity to the sphere of digital communication channels it disrupts the usual social routines that are constitutive of our social reality. It can therefore affect our sense of ontological security. This can be connected to the rise of the feelings of anxiety. What we rely on for our everyday functioning is a sense of ontological security - Anthony Giddens posits this sense as a sense of stability and continuity felt by the individuals.[1] Giddens links trust directly to the sense of ontological security through the evolvement of the safe environment created by the habit and routine and emotional investment of our caretakers in early childhood which further transforms into a sense of protective cocoon that makes human beings feel safe later in life – what he calls „ontological security".[2] For the understanding of how current lockdown can impact the sense of ontological security, it is important to especially emphasize here that Giddens, building on the work of psychoanalysts, closely connects everyday routine to the feelings of ontological security and that this sense of order is further maintained by the routines that accompany everyday social functioning in later phases of life of human beings. As Giddens notes, the robustness of the shared social reality is conveyed by the high level of reliability of the contexts of day-to-day social interaction.[3] Ontological security functions like an envelope that shields human beings from their awareness of those questions of existence, which, if one was to ponder them all the time, would produce paralysis, Giddens notes, or the feelings of engulfment.[4] This envelope keeps existential anxiety at bay, anxiety which can be triggered by things that we do not usually ponder about in our everyday reality but they have to do with the basics of our human existence. These questions concerning the existential structure of human existence beyond our everyday lives are what existential philosophers and psychotherapists have called existential givens - various philosophers have interpreted them differently but they are all those things that the human condition will inevitably contain, such as bodily existence, aloneness, illness or death. Anthony Giddens sees those as questions of time, space, continuity, and identity.[5] To be able to function on an everyday level in our human lives, it is necessary to bracket these things and this is what ontological security contributes to[6]. In the course of everyday life, individuals do not usually ponder about things that could endanger them existentially on a day-to-day basis. Giddens explains how day-to-day routines together with the practical consciousness help bracket such anxieties because of their constitutive role in organizing an „as if" environment concerning these issues of existence and provide modes or orientation which serve as cognitive and emotional answers to these questions[7]. He proposes that the maintenance of habits and routines provides a

1   Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity*, Polity press, London, 1991., p. 3
2   Ibid, p. 3
3   Ibid, p. 36
4   Ibid.
5   Ibid, p. 37
6   Ibid, p. 36
7   Ibid.

"formed framework" which is a crucial bulwark against threatening anxieties.[8] It is usually only in the cases of encounter with happenings that bring to one's awareness the possibility of endangerment of one's existence, such as in an encounter with an accident, that this bulwark can thin out.[9]

It can be argued that this is precisely what is happening within the COVID-19 pandemics. An encounter with a possibly life-threatening virus not yet sufficiently researched with potential deadly consequences and virulency is enough in itself to affect the sense of ontological security since it presents precisely such encounter that Giddens posits as the events that bring to our awareness the possibility of a threat to our very existence. Added to that, the imposed lockdown measures are disrupting shared daily social routines due to the shutdown of the shared social activity to great extent, from the work-routines to educational activities. Some of the routines can be transferred online, but most social activities in physical spaces that allow for shared social framework are discontinued due to the fear of contagion. It can be argued that replacement activities in the isolation of private households or the ones in the digital communicative spaces can only partly replace daily routines of social actors happening within the shared social settings which are, as explained before, constitutive of our sense of ontological security. All of this can thus affect the sense of ontological security. The sense of ontological security can become unsettled in the wake of the lack of the shared social activities that contribute to its maintenance. Ontological security is a concept of well-being in the world that is rooted in a sense of order in one's social and material environment - in a qualitative grounded theory, thematic analyses indicated that the markers of ontological security were, for example, constancy, routine, and control.[10] We can see how these markers could be disrupted in times of COVID19-pandemic. When the number of those infected with the COVID-19 virus is measured daily and unpredictably varies, therefore causing measures to be introduced to capriciously fluctuat, a shared social reality is created that does not have an emphasis on constancy. Furthermore, the discontinuation of the aforementioned routines that constitute a shared social framework and can cause a rip in the social reality. It can potentially disturb the modes of orientation usually provided for social actors through social activities. To put this into metaphor, it is as if social actors get bits and pieces of their usual social routine and shared social framework. For example, qualitative research of the experiences of young adults in Portugal with COVID-19 has shown that many participants reported exprience of abrupt changes to major events, as well as lack of stimulation and the absence of a structured routine, further noting felt loss of contacts, increases in distrust of others and the experience of a loss of social competences through reduced interactions with others and shared social activities.[11] It can be proposed that this

8   Ibid, p. 39
9   Ibid, p. 40
10   Benjamin, Henwood, Brian Redline, Sara Semborski, Harmony Roades, Eric Rice and Suzanne L. Wenzel, "What's next? A grounded theory of the relationship between ontological security, mental health, social relationships, and identity formation for young adults in supportive housing", *Cityscape*, 20(3/2018), p. 87-100.
11   Catia Branquinho, Colette Kelly, Lourdes C. Arevalo, Anabela Santos, Margarida Gaspar de Matos, „Hey, we also have something to say": A qualitative study of Portugese adolescents' and young people's experiences under COVID-19", *Journal of Community Psychology*, 22(5/2020).

kind of experience can put great pressure on the sense of ontological security, and can provide a fertile ground for the disturbance in the sense of ontological security of social actors. This kind of rip in social functioning can bring individuals into greater proximity to the so-called existential givens. Usual continuity of social activity and daily routines produce a sense of being-in-the-world[12] whose felt sense is immersion which prevents one from thinking about existential questions and enables the social actor to take social and existential reality for granted. The discontinuation of the social activity to the current extent due to measures against the spread of COVID-19 can unsettle this. It has the potential of making social actors fall out of this immersion and bring them into contact with the existential structures beneath this sense of immersion. It can, in other words, bring into awareness the possibility of existential threats that are inherent in human existence. Consequently, there is a risk of the flood of existential anxieties kept at bay by social activities[13] that constitute usual social functioning. This can manifest as a variety of changes in the experience of bodily existence, perception of time and space or one's relation to the world. For the social actors unaware of the ontological nature of these processes, but even to those aware of it, this can have an unsettling effect.

What also creates potential conditions for unsettlement on the collective level is the lack of the possibility for the ascription of meaning to events of COVID19-pandemics within the confinements of the system of technological rationality whose principles are prevalent in the social system of today. Pandemic is namely on the social level interpreted within the discourse of technological rationality, which is the principle underpinning the management of the social system in contemporary society. Social system based on technological rationality has from the time-period of industrialism[14] continued functioning on these principles also in the age of late modernity. Such a system manages social organization on the principles of calculability and utility.[15] This is happening also with the management of the social crisis caused by the COVID19-pandemics. It is reflected in the areas that it handles, but also in the kind of narrative that it uses. The areas it handles are the ones of the instrumental rational action, while the language of this kind of narrative is technical and is reflected in terms used in public discourse to handle the crisis, such as "social distance", "numbers of the diseased", "number of the deceased". Such a language is oriented towards measurements. It reduces social handling of this crisis to the principles of calculability and utility, as Adorno and Horkheimer have noted that principles of technological rationality tend to do.[16] Such a narrative can be equipped to address the technical dimension of the COVID19-pandemics, but its potential to address the emotional and symbolic dimension of the experience is limited. Phrases such as „social distancing"

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12 Martin Heidegger, *Being and time*, Harper&Row, New York, 1962.

13 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity*, Polity press, London, 1991., p. 39.

14 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno: Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical fragments: Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002.

15 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno: Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical fragments: Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2002., p. 3.

16 Ibid.

are devoid of human content, as Adorno and Horkheimer have posited about the principles of pure reason[17] guiding contemporary systems of technical management. The dealing with the crisis that is concerned with purely managerial aspects of the crisis handling does not include understanding of the consequences felt after the isolation or the need for human touch that people lack during the lockdown. These needs are of no concern to the system of technological rationality. Technological management of the crisis is not capable of offering the meaning or a point for social actors to orient themselves to during the handling of the crisis, beyond instructions of technological rationality. These instructions do not concern themselves with the needs regarding the sociability, emotional or symbolic needs. They reveal the full extent to which such a system of technological rationality is lacking when it comes to handling the human needs beyond those of practical functionality. Emotional or symbolic needs are left for the individuals to handle themselves. This is in line with the principles guiding the age of individualization which deem systemic problems to be dealt with in an individualized manner.[18] However, in the times in which social support is minimized and the social activity is significantly reduced, in times in which the access to the shared social routines is to great extent disenabled, it is questionable whether such handling of the COVID-19 pandemic can create sufficient support to handle experiences of loneliness and anxiety potentially created by isolation and ontological insecurity that the COVID19-pandemic threatens to unleash on a collective level. The social conditions in which the disruption of social activity which contributes to preventing existential anxiety is extreme enough to bring the sense of instability to the forefront of human experience, accompanied by the lack of meaning-making symbolic narratives does not seem supportive of the sense of psychological stability of the social actors participating in it.

It is no wonder that in such social circumstances there is a danger of mental health crisis ensuing. The studies that have documented the extent of the mental health crisis following the pandemics or being linked to pandemics are numerous and growing. Anxiety, loss of identity, disruption in usual activity, increases in feelings of loneliness are some of the experiences related to the COVID-19 imposed quarantine[19] reported by the social actors on a global scale. Further, a longitudinal research in the UK during the three waves of the lockdown has shown that the 21% of the general population experienced above the cut-off point for moderate or severe levels of symptoms of anxiety and that the rate of suicidal ideation felt by young adults increased.[20] The study predicts the effects on mental health to be profound and long-lasting, while especially impacting the mental health of women, young people those from more socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with pre-

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17 Ibid, p.71

18 Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Gernsheim-Beck: Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences, Sage Publications, London, 2001.

19 Samanta K Brooks, Rebecca K Webster, Louise E Smith, Lisa Woodland, Simon Wessely, Neil Greenberg, Gideon James Rubin, "The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence", *The Lancet*, 10227(395/2020), p. 912-920.

20 Rory O'Connor, Karen Wetherall, Seonaid Cleare, Heather McClelland, Ambrose Melson, Claire Niedzwiedz, Ronan E. O'Caroll, Daryl B. O'Connor, Steve Platt, Elizabeth Scowcroft, Billy Watson, Tiago Zortea, Eamonn Ferguson and Kathryn A. Robb, "Mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: Longitudinal analyses of adults in the UK COVID-19 Mental Health & Wellbeing Study", *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 2020.

existing mental health problems.[21] Another study in Germany found increased levels of psychosocial distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, irritability, and a decrease in overall well-being, sense of coherence, sexual contentment, and sleep quality.[22] It can be suspected from these findings that there can be a mental health crisis following the current modes of social functioning within the COVID19-pandemic. Perhaps it is also important to note that the research has shown that actual and perceived social isolation are in general both associated with increased risk for early mortality.[23] This should be taken into account upon crafting the measures to prevent contagion.

In an attempt to further explore the lived experience of the pandemic, it is interesting to note how the transfer of social activity to the digital communicative spaces has the potential to affect the social experience of time and space of social actors. Manuel Castells noted that the space is in contemporary society becoming less important due to the development of what he terms the „space of flows", based on the understanding of the space in terms of experience and social actions, which is a new type of space – the material support of simultaneous social practices communicated at a distance.[24] Separation of time and space is noted as crucial to the dynamism of the process of disembedding in late modernity by Anthony Giddens; the separating of time and space into standardized dimensions cut through the connections between social activity and its „embedding" in the particularities of time and space.[25] This can be noted in the "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts and their re-articulation across indefinite tracts of time-space.[26] Furthermore, in late modernity, the influence of distant events on the proximate ones as well as on one's self becomes more commonplace.[27] This is enabled by the ICT-supported digital communication channels. Breaking free from local practices and habits is what can be recognized as one of the implications of this process. These processes have accelerated with the rapid technological development at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. However, the current organization of everyday life during the COVID19-pandemics where the social activity is increasingly situated within the communicative realm of digital communication channels further accelerates the transfer of social activity to the digital communication realm. What happens is an incrementation of time at home and increased communication and relationship-maintenance through digital devices[28]. The imposed social isolation measures due to the risk of contagion have fostered the use of digital

21 Ibid.

22 Stefanie Jung, Jonas Kneer, Tillmann H.C. Krüger, "Mental Health, Sense of Coherence, and Interpersonal Violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown in Germany", *Journal of Clinical Medicine* 9(11/2020) .

23 Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy B. Smith, Mark Baker, Tyler Harris, David Stephenson, „Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review",*Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 10(2/2015), 227-37.

24 Manuel Castells*, The Rise of the Network Society, Volume I: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010., xxii.

25 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity press, Stanford, 1990, p. 20.

26 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity*, Polity press, London, 1991, p. 18.

27 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity*, Polity press, London, 1991.

28 Valeria Saladino, Davide Algeri and Auriemma Vincenzo, "The Psychological and Social Impact of Covid-19: New Perspectives of Well-Being", *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11/2020.

communication in everyday lives of people at an unprecedented level in modern history. There is observed change in the noticeable increase in digital communication – the research from the USA shows that during the COVID19-lockdowns 43% of respondents used text messaging more often, while voice calls increased for 36%, social media use for 35%, video calls in 30%, almost a quarter of people used email more frequently (24%).[29] They have also forced some people to use new digital practices for the first time.[30]

This is bound to be felt in the experience of time and space of social actors. It can be proposed that the increased organization of social activities through the digital communication realm further lessens the importance of space which was already taking place in late modernity. During COVID-19 pandemics most social events are held online due to the measures of social distancing intended to prevent the contagion. It is thus now possible to attend a conference or to see a theatre-play anywhere in the world, to attend class or hold a meeting from one's living room. The increase in the social and digital practices during the COVID19-pandemics has, in other words, enabled social actors to attend an event without being physically present – it has further freed social actors of their physicality as precpondition for the participation in social activity. Giddens's consequences of modernity in terms of disembedding of events from their local context[31] seem to be even more radicalized. It seems that space is due to the measures imposed on the social gatherings and consequently the transfer of all events online, becoming even more irrelevant. Human beings are now able to participate in an event held anywhere in the world, which constitutes a new lived experience of the globalized shared social reality with people in different geographical locations worldwide. This novel situation has the opportunity to turn the world into McLuhan's global village unlike ever before.[32] Global happenings on digital applications are currently held daily on Facebook and are attended by the participants on the global level. In the COVID19-lockdowns, most social activities transcend the scope of the nation-state and turn into a stream of events in the digital realm. Physical presence is during the COVID-19 pandemic being erased as the condition necessary to one's attending of an event to such an extent on a social level that it is becoming the norm. Another example of this is the phenomenon of "remote work"; significant scope of labor activities are being transferred to the digital communication realm and at distance from the actual working location. This phenomenon is during the COVID19-pandemics being normalized to such an extent that it has the potentiality of becoming the usual form of the social activity of work[33], at least partially.

29 Minh Hao Ngyuen, Jonathan Gruber, Jaelle Fuchs, Will Marler, Amanda Hunsaker, Eszter Hargittai, "Changes in Digital Communication During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic: Implications for Digital Inequality and Future Research", *Social Media + Society* 6(3/2020).

30 Eszter Hargittai, Minh Nao Nguyen, Jaelle Fuchs, Jonathan Gruber Will Marler, Amanda Hunsaker and Gökce Karaoglu, Marco Gui, Tiziano Geroza, Elissa Redmiles, Marina Micheli, John E. Evans, Kerry Dobransky, *Covid – 19 Study on Digital Media and the Coronavirus Pandemic, Internet Use and Society Division*, Institute of Communication and Media Research, University of Zürich, 2020, available at: http://webuse.org/covid/.

31 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity press, Stanford, 1990.

32 Marshall McLuhan*, Understanding media: The extensions of man,* Mc Graw-Hill, London i New York, 1964.

33 Rahul De, Neena Pandey and Abhipsa Pal: "Impact of digital surge during Covid-19 pandemic: A viewpoint on research and practice", *International Journal of Information Management*, 55(2020).

What is happening is a kind of a workplace displacement or its disembedding from the working place and re-embedding into the private household or the location freely chosen by the social actor. In all of these aspects, it indeed seems that the significant aspect of the COVID19-pandemic is that physical space is becoming even more increasingly irrelevant in the context of social activity than it was at the advent of late modernity. However, social phenomena are rarely one-dimensional. Instead, they often contain inherent contradictions. Manuel Castells recognized the contradiction inherent in the supposed lessening of the relevance of the space in the conditions of contemporary society - it is reflected in the fact that while the world is constructed around the logic of the space of flows, people still make their living in the space of places.[34] This contradiction can be seen as the contradiction inherent in the general feature of the digital communication realm, which is its divorce from the material and physical aspects of the social reality, as well as the its features determined by those aspects. This contradiction is becoming palpably accentuated during the current COVID19-pandemics. Social actors are increasingly spending their time in the realm of digital communicative spaces, relying on them to maintain their everyday social functioning. This current situation, however, simultaneously reveals the extent of their constraints by the physicality and spatiality in terms of material practices and social support in the local social context to which social actors have or lack access to. Digital communication channels are enabling the continuation of those social practices that can be maintained only through the communicative aspect online. However, the satisfaction of the parts of social practices that require embodiment within digital communicative spaces is questionable. For example, a birthday or Christmas party thrown over Skype makes for a different experience than the birthday party in physical presence, which is reflected in the uncanny feeling when participants having to provide their drinks and food themselves and send gifts per post. The usefulness of the digital communicative spaces during the lockdown is indisputable, since they allow for at least partial continuation of the social activity. It is the phenomenological quality of those activities that is explored here. The absence created by the lack of the possibility of embodiment of symbolic social practices during digital communication point us to the limitations that the digital communicative spaces have for the replacement of the multifaceted nature of the human social activity. If there is a need for care by a certain social actor it becomes palpably evident that the task can be performed only by those living in the geographical proximity. It can be seen as revealing of how the material practices that support the survival of our bodily existence as well as determine it to some extent in the social sphere, such as in the cases of material support needed for basic care or human contact needed for social support, resist the transfer of the social activity to the digital realm. When borders between geographical areas were closed for the prevention of contagion in Croatia at certain points during the lockdown, the digital communicative realm had difficulties compensating for the lack of physical geographical locality and its social and material circumstances. However, here it should be warned against, as Eva Illouz calls, „the paradigm of

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34 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society, Volume I: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010., xxxix.

pure critique" and what she calls its „longing for purity" and its requirement for the evaluation of certain cultural practices progressive or regressive in their totality.[35] The aim of this paper is not to discard or undervalue all the aspects of digital communication practices. It is needless to say that the possibilities of continuation of communicative aspects of social practices offered by digital communication channels enable at least partial social functioning and partial retaining of the social routines during the ongoing pandemic. Furthermore, it is also evident that the stretch of the events beyond their geographical localities to the global sphere of digital communicative spaces can be beneficial for the social actors of late modernity. At least in the communicative aspects and in relation to education and exposure to new influences, this can be advantageous for social actors. The aim of this paper is not to undervalue the extent of the opportunity of these practices to further lift social relations out of local context at least partially regarding the spread of the knowledge and reach. The aim is instead to use the opportunity that was granted by the transition of social activities online to this extent due to the COVID-19 pandemic – to explore the implications of the transference of the social practices online for the lived experience of social actors. Eva Illouz advocates for the critique to leave the area of purity and try to understand certain cultural practices from the perspective of their participants.[36] Building on this, to explore this further, an insight into how participants themselves see digital communicative spaces during COVID-19 would be required – an inquiry into how they experience these practices as a tool for relationship-maintenance during pandemic and to which extent the lack of the possibility of the embodiment of the social practices through digital channels affects the very social activities maintained through them. Namely, there is an intimation of a special type of exhaustion that is felt after participation in social activities online, which differs from the fatigue felt within embodied communication in physical reality. This exhaustion could point to the human physicality as understood by Maurice Merleau-Ponty[37], where the spatiality of the phenomenal human body takes hold of the space and social situations through the objects it touches and stimuli it anticipates in the space, thereby creating situational intentionality necessary to make full sense of social situations. To what extent can this intentionality be engaged when the only points of access to the communication process are a voice and picture of another person on a computer screen instead of other bodies? One is in contact only with the picture and the voice of the person we are communicating with, bits and pieces, but the body's inclusion in the process is limited. It is as if one gets only the communication aspect of the multifacetedness of the embodied social situations – these are felt intimations of the experience of the lack of embodiment of social practices online, after what is currently almost a year-long transfer of digital practices online and lack of shared physical social activity. There are also some intimations of the difference in the phenomenological experience between face-to-face and online communication given that the research has pointed to the face-to-face communication being associated with lower levels of

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35   Eva Illouz, *Hladne intimnosti: Oblikovanje čustvenega kapitalizma*, Založba Krtina, Ljubljana 2010., p. 112.

36   Eva Illouz, *Hladne intimnosti: Oblikovanje čustvenega kapitalizma*, Založba Krtina, Ljubljana 2010., p. 112-114.

37   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, The Humanities Press, New York, p.100.

loneliness and higher life satisfaction in comparison with online communication.[38] Given such possible implications that point to the different phenomenological experience of the face-to-face encounter and consequently shared social activities in comparison to online communication there is a need for further discussion on this matter.

Furthermore, it has to be noted that the sudden transfer of social activity to the digital realm to the current extent is bound to have implications for social marginalization. Digital inequality research has documented how the internet use functions according to the patterns of inequality correlated to different educational, race, and age backgrounds which may then influence the benefits one can get from the use of the internet.[39] The internet is mostly used as a resource of support by those with greater Internet experience and skills, while people who lack digital skills or access to digital technologies are less likely to receive digital support since they have fewer resources of support for establishing new ways of communicating – those are older people or those with lower Internet skills, who are according to the research more likely to reduce digital communication in times of COVID-19 pandemic.[40] In this way, the transfer of the social activities to the digital realm of the internet can deepen already existing social inequalities. This is especially troublesome when it is considered that digital communication is related to the building of certain kinds of capital: economic, social, cultural, political, and civic.[41] Due to the extent to which social activity is transferred online in times of COVID-19 pandemics the maintenance of the social capital is to a large extent also transferred to the digital realm and that this can have implications for further widening of already existing social inequalities. Marginalized social groups can experience hardship in the request to maintain social activities and routines through the digital communication realm if they possess no access or lack of high-quality equipment needed to engage in them and/or the lack of the skills needed for the engagement. Data shows that those with lower internet skills, as well as older people, are more likely to reduce digital communication during the pandemic, which might add to their disconnection from society.[42] When social activities are to large extent moved online, the exclusivity of access to them is based on the premises of digital skills and/or digital access to the extent unknown before. This further brings us back to the necessity of material practices that digital communicative spaces require for their functioning and their consequent inherent physical aspect. It seems that so-called virtual reality is still determined by the physical one to great extent.

38 Donghee Yvette Wohn, Wei Peng, Doug Zytko, „Face to Face Matters: Communication Modality, Perceived Social Support, and Psychological Wellbeing", ResearchGate, available at: file:///C:/Users/paska/Downloads/2017-chi17-facetofacematters.pdf

39 Paul DiMaggio, Eszter Hargittai, Coral Celeste, and Steven Shafer (2004). Digital inequality: From unequal access to differentiated use, in K. Neckerman (Ed.), *Social Inequality*, Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 355-400.

40 Minh Hao Ngyuen, Jonathan Gruber, Jaelle Fuchs, Will Marler, Amanda Hunsaker, Eszter Hargittai, "Changes in Digital Communication During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic: Implications for Digital Inequality and Future Research", *Social Media + Society* 6(3/2020).

41 Ellen Helsper, *Digital inclusion: an analysis of social disadvantage and the information society*, Department for Communities and Local Government, London, 2008.

42 Minh Hao Ngyuen, Jonathan Gruber, Jaelle Fuchs, Will Marler, Amanda Hunsaker, Eszter Hargittai, "Changes in Digital Communication During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic: Implications for Digital Inequality and Future Research", *Social Media + Society* 6(3/2020).

In general, it can be noted that the implications of COVID19-pandemic are contradictory. On one hand, they force social actors to transfer the activity online and render space more irrelevant. In this sense they offer new opportunities for global interconnectedness, rendering physicality as unnecessary precondition for attendance of social activity. However, in the context of accompanying lockdowns they simultaneously also enforce the return to the spatial confinements of social material reality and physical bodily existence. They reintroduce social actors to the material reality of the social reality that the digital realm has trouble overcoming – the local economic and social context we have increasingly started to believe that we were in the process of abandoning by the possibilities of distanced social activity through digital communicative spaces and the increased mobility in the age of late modernity and globalization. It is almost as if the COVID19-pandemic functions as the reminder of the importance of the physicality of social space that human beings inhabit despite the space becoming more irrelevant due to technological advancements of late modernity. This is happening in the advent of late modernity which, building on the legacy of modernity stemming from the Enlightenment as well as the processes of individualization, has started taking self-determination and bodily autonomy for granted, expanded further by the possibilities of self-exploration offered by the increased mobility and digital communicative spaces. In this context, the return to the confinements determined by geographical spatiality and its social and material constraints might come as a shock.

What can be noted by now in general is that the pandemic has interupted the framework of the shared social practices. They are now engaged in partially and to great extent in digital communicative spaces which functions as bits and pieces of the shared offline social reality in pre-COVID19 times. In this manner the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the routines needed for the maintenance of the sense of ontological security of social actors. This pandemic can also be seen as a forced re-encounter with the spatial nature of human existence. It has seemingly freed us from the restrictions of physicality by removing the physical presence as the necessary condition for the social encounter and rendering physical locality as irrelevant to the unfolding of social activity. However, it has simultaneously revealed the extent to which digital communicative practices have trouble following material and spatial determinants of our social localities. The ultimate implications of the COVID19-pandemic on social and individual functioning are complex and yet unclear. Since the pandemic is still ongoing, their extent and shape is yet to be assessed.

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Dijelići i komadićci: Iskustva društvene stvarnosti usred pandemije Covid-19

Sažetak

Pandemija uzrokovana koronavirusom imala je dubok utjecaj na načine na koji živimo, kao i na društvenu stvarnost u svijetu oko nas. Osim ogromnog opterećenja na javno zdravstvo te pojedinačna zdravstvena stanja, utjecala je na čitav niz promjena vezanih uz socijalno funkcioniranje. Ubrzala je digitalizaciju i prijelaz društvenih aktivnosti na digitalno područje u dosad neviđenom opsegu, a s druge strane je ograničila društvene aktere na lokalna zemljopisna područja. U svemu tome pružila nam se prilika da zauzmemo novu točku promatranja ljudskog bivanja u svijetu kasne modernosti. Moguće je pretpostaviti da navedena društvena situacija posjeduje potencijal utjecaja na osjećaj ontološke sigurnosti društvenih aktera, kao i na njihovo iskustvo prostora. Kontradiktorne implikacije prijelaza društvene aktivnosti na digitalne komunikativne prostore u trenutnom opsegu također se promišljaju.

Ključne riječi: pandemija, ontološka sigurnost, kasna modernost, digitalni mediji.