

EDITORIALE

LEADER

by

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THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE BLACK SWAN

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives and our socio-economic system, and it has confronted policy-makers with painstaking choices and actions on the global, European, and national scale. It has perhaps been the worst “black swan” that we could fear in terms of global impact on our risk society.

As with all the big crises that have occurred in the history of the world, Covid-19 has elicited profound critical reflections on the dominant socio-economic models, but these reflections go well beyond the scope of a scientific journal such as IJEGE.

Nevertheless, I deem it useful to dwell on some aspects that concern the relations between science, society, and policy-makers, as well as the issue of risk assessment and proper risk communication through the various channels.

In the first place, never over the recent decades of globalisation has the public shown such a high confidence in science and a willingness to listen to experts.

In particular, we have been impressed by the huge demand for knowledge about the evolution of the pandemic, assessments, analyses, and scenarios. At the same time, we have witnessed another important phenomenon: anti-vax movements and positions generally contrary to or sceptical about the benefits of the scientific approach in medicine and public health (just as in other scientific domains) proved to lack serious and well-founded arguments, falling in some instances into ridicule.

In the second place, there emerged a different attitude and relationship among and between policy-makers and scientists and, once more and to a much larger extent than in the area of natural risks, the absolute need for sharply separating the role and the area of competence of the scientific community from those of policy-makers. Sometimes we witnessed strong disputes, and at other times dialectic and constructive dialogue;

at yet other times, to a certain extent, science had the better of politics.

We might elaborate on the actions of the various political leaders. One thing is certain: on the one hand, we had the sad sight of rough and superficial populism, with 180-degree changes in pandemic response policies in a matter of a few days, in response to both people’s demands and scientists’ recommendations; on the other hand, we realised the difficulty in having access to transparent and certain data in countries with authoritarian regimes or very weak democracies.

These difficult situations were in sharp contrast with the efforts undertaken by political leaders with robust scientific knowledge.

These efforts, supported by good health care organisational models, successfully met people’s expectations and effectively countered the pandemic.

Finally, another noteworthy aspect is that those nations (and societies) that had already experienced pandemics (e.g. SARS and avian influenza) proved to be more prepared and more effective in containing the spread of Covid-19, primarily Taiwan and Korea. It is true that prior experience increased the awareness of and preparedness for new epidemics, but it is also true that the social and cultural organisational model of Asiatic people is probably more appropriate for responding to such pandemics.

In the societies of western countries, the role of the individual is unquestionably dominant whereas, in the eastern world, this role is more subject to collective rules and relations.

As the global population of the human species will soon reach eight billion, it is high time to carry out an in-depth reflection on these social models and on their future relations.