

IFCU IRGs joint session February 2022, Paris
**“Preparing for the Covid 19 World: challenges and opportunities in
community, governance, and education.”**

Introduction:

The covid 19 pandemic has been a major crisis of worldwide range and consequences. Its impacts have proven to be not only deep but multidimensional, affecting as diverse fields as health, social, economic, psychology, education, politics, travel... In this context, IFCU International Research Groups are convening a joint session on a crisis which, from a scientific perspective, resonates in multiple academic fields. The proposed theme of this conference is:

***“Preparing for the Covid 19 World: challenges and opportunities in
community, governance, and education.”***

This conference seeks to bring together the various IRGs of IFCU for a collective meeting to examine the effects of the pandemic in the recent past and the present moment and to look toward the prospects of tomorrow. Thus, the goals of this meeting include the following:

- To jointly explore challenges and opportunities
- To reflect on lessons learned
- To inspire and implement creative solutions

More specifically, the IRGs joint session shall be devoted around three topics in the following order:

- Community and Social fabric
- Governance and democracy
- Education

Topics are to be developed in an inter / pluri disciplinary perspective.

In presentations, experience can be shared.

The added value from Catholic Universities is also to be underlined.

Theme 1: Effects on Community and the Social Fabric

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only represented a worldwide health crisis but it has disrupted almost all spheres of living and functioning. Economies have been

disrupted, jobs have been affected, work at home has often been the rule, the delivery of pedagogy had to be quickly transformed, traditional learning was compromised; and decision-making by communities and governments, striving to quickly roll out efficient responses sacrificed consensus and weakened more democratic decision-making. But perhaps the most significant impact of the pandemic has been on our collective humanity, sense of community and common purpose. As social beings, arguably the gravest toll of the virus has been in the disruption of community, the thinning and even tearing of our very social fabric that binds societies, organizations and institutions together.

In this spirit, this proposed conference will explore the following research questions:

- Which lessons can be drawn from the covid crisis about what makes a community?
- After such crisis, how to rebuild the balance between the individual and the community?
- How can we develop relevant research, prevention and intervention strategies to address the health and wellbeing in our respective communities?
- How do we ‘care’ for the communities of our students, staff, faculty and administrators in transitioning from relative isolation and confinement to (re)integration?
- How do we facilitate the subjective, spiritual and faith needs of our communities during times of uncertainty, great change and solitude?

Theme 2: Governance & Democracy: the challenge of the balance between efficiency and inclusiveness

Responsible management of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a major challenge for democratic governments around the world. Striking a balance between efficient management and consensual and democratically respectful decision-making has proven difficult. As Professor Mukherji (2020) points out, it has raised concerns about the weakening of democratic standards not only in the decision-making process but also in its concrete consequences for the citizens’ rights and way of living in States from both the Northern and the Southern hemisphere.

Christensen and Laegreid (2020) point to the example of Norway's crisis management, as a model of success thanks to the combination of a well-organized bureaucracy, committed citizens, proficient politicians, a strong state with a healthy economy, but also a country with a low population density.

What is the balance, and how can it be found, between the requirements of an efficient State management of the crisis and the respect for democratic standards? Such debate raises multiple questions such as:

- Following IRG Peace & Conflict Studies, what has been the impact of the pandemic and the resulting emergency health measures on public freedoms and democratic institutions?
- To what extent can the basic freedoms of citizens be dispensed with, even without parliamentary control?
- As underlined by the IRG AI, numerous governments developed apps based on machine learning and AI tools to track individuals and trace possible contagion outbreaks. In this respect, how should democratic societies balance the demands of constitutional rights (such as rights to privacy and due process) with public health?
- Are we heading towards a new model of governance, perhaps more effective, but where democratic controls are not fully assured or, on the contrary is it a wakeup call for a more participative democracy?
- In this perspective, is the urgency of the crisis becoming the rule rather than the exception?
- At the crossroad of these questions lies the call for the redefinition of the role of public authorities.

Theme 3: which challenges and opportunities in Education?

For countless parents, children, and college-age adults, some of the most pronounced disruptions of the COVID-19 concern education. In this part of the proposed conference, we seek to take stock on the educational impacts of the pandemic and, importantly, to chart a path forward, more specifically in three perspectives : education and technology, education and methodology, psycho-socio impact and education. The following are suggested areas for analysis and discussion.

Education and technology:

- What is the appropriate role of AI and automated decision making in throughout the learning process, from kindergarten to high school to advanced university degrees?

Education and methodology:

- What specific aspects of education (and what subjects) lend themselves to distance learning and automation and what areas (and subjects) do not?
- How can distance learning be integrated with traditional, embodied education to strengthen learning and personal development?

Psycho-socio impact and education:

- Assuming that distance learning will continue to play a role in education, and given the now-exposed inequalities in access to technology and appropriate distance learning environments, what should be done to lessen the disproportionate impact on the least advantaged?
- What will be the lasting effects of this isolation and ‘disembodied’ learning?
- How should schools address worsening mental health issues, and weakening social ties, in the return to “normal” or hybrid educational models.