

**EDITORIAL - PART 2: THE UNEVEN GEOGRAPHIES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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This issue of ERDKUNDE is the second part of a double special issue on the uneven geographies of the COVID-19 pandemic (first part: ERDKUNDE Vol. 76 (2)). At the end of the pandemic's third year, the special issue compiles geographic contributions on the uneven distribution of the effects of COVID-19.

Early in the pandemic, virology, immunology, epidemiology, and similar medical disciplines, had to understand the new virus' characteristics. This resulted in the proliferation of knowledge from such experts to decision makers and the development of vaccines. In this early phase geographers contributed with spatial models on the distribution of the virus (PLÜMPER & NEUMAYER 2020, SCARPONE et al. 2020, FORTALEZA et al. 2021, KULU & DOREY 2021) and also engaged in the debate on potential consequences of lockdowns and the closing of borders (SPARKE & ANGUELOV 2020, ROSE-REDWOOD et al. 2020, WEBER & WILLE 2020).

At the same time geographers also began systematic research of the direct and indirect consequences of the pandemic – and this research is still ongoing. While many societies have entered a so-called 'new normal', which superficially seems to differ not much from the 'old normal', the scientific understanding of this caesura and its cascading effects is still in an early stage. As the DFG (German Research Foundation) commission on pandemic research highlights: "Research into the pandemic must not finish when the pandemic 'comes to an end': the long-term effects of this watershed moment also have to be recorded and integrated into strategies to prepare for future pandemics. There is still a need for long-term research in almost all research fields so as to analyse the consequences of the pandemic for healthcare systems worldwide, the education sector, the manufacturing economy, trade and indeed society as a whole" (ICPR 2022: 6).

Against this background, this special issue's objectives are to compile a first collection of original

empirically rich studies as well as to present thorough debates on pandemic dynamics and trends regarding spatial and social inequalities in order to stimulate conversation within and beyond geography. Given the urgency to communicate and contribute in-depth insights to the ongoing discussions of mid-term and long-term pandemic consequences and ways forwards, the articles we received were distributed over two ERDKUNDE issues in line with the date of the receipt of the articles and speed of the review processes.

The open call for submissions yielded a variety of topics focused on the uneven geographies that have emerged after two years into the pandemic. Following the first five contributions of special issue 1, which dealt with topics such as urban health disparities (SANTOS et al. 2022), social unrest (HAFERBURG et al. 2022), travel attitudes (ZELKOVIC 2022), restaurant industries' resilience (VERFÜRTH et al. 2022), and effects on municipal planning (HASSE & SCHARFENORT 2022), the contributions of this issue centre on discursive productions of 'pathogenicities', the relation of perceived individual health to regionally differing pandemic measures, and the pandemic's effects on deepening inequalities related to care and care work. The articles within this issue utilize methods and approaches such as discourse and narrative analysis, interview data interpreted through a phenomenological approach, and theoretical development and discussion of a feminist care ethics. They point to three different but interlinked geographical concepts and make suggestions on why, how, and where to research them: cities, public places, and socio-spatial relations.

In particular, DZUDZEK & FÜLLER (2022) ask how cities are imagined as part of the problem or part of the solution against public health threats such as the COVID-19-pandemic. Focusing on the discursive production of 'problematizations', the authors detect two main narratives – focussing on Germany – through discourse analysis. The first

narrative highlights the importance of density and social interactions and problematises isolation and social distancing. The second ‘de-densified ecologies’ narrative, however, advocates a turn away from planning goals such as the compact city and is more in line with modernist planning ideas such as those from the Charter of Athens. This approach to density as a form of pathogenicity, as DZUDZEK & FÜLLER (2022) point out, seems to be a particular feature of the German public debate during the pandemic compared to other countries.

STADLMEIER et al. (2022) focus on how social routines and individual relations to place changed during lockdown mandates. Capitalising on qualitative interview data from Germany, the authors show how people struggled personally to square public health regulations with their own perceived health needs, for example avoiding the risk of viral infection while caring for their mental health. This negotiation was spatialised to the extent that public health regulations was largely interpreted as a new dichotomy of safe/unsafe spaces: outside vs. inside, public vs. private space. In unpacking the individual strategies in coping with lockdown restrictions further, the authors cluster coping strategies into individual, social and environment-related practices. They conclude that coping strategies are inherently place-bound and that regulations and the compliance to rules are crucially negotiated on an individual level.

From a feminist care ethics point of view, SALTIEL & STRÜVER (2022) argue that we need to attend to the vulnerabilities and interdependencies in the context of care. Engaging with the works of authors such as Fraser and Tronto, they carve out the relationality of care-giving and -receiving. Within capitalist social relations, care is reduced to ‘second shift’ private household activities as well as commodified underpaid and precarious work. Care in this way becomes a gendered, classed and racialised field that produces hierarchies and precarious vulnerabilities. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors argue that the pandemic did not only expose and thrive within these inequalities but even exacerbated them, since the management of the pandemic followed established neoliberal forms of austerity politics. The authors conclude that „a radical transformation and democratisation of care“ is needed, guided by the recognition, acceptance and enjoyment of „people’s interdependencies“ (SALTIEL & STRÜVER 2022: 168).

We hope that the eight papers of this collection will contribute to the understanding of the spatial unevenness COVID-19 produced and/or aggravated.

As such, we see the special issue as a contribution to a still evolving field: our scientific understanding of the multiple and far-reaching cascading effects of the pandemic. This is still in a nascent stage – despite the understandable ‘Pandemiemüdigkeit’ of the public that contributed to side-lining the topic in mainstream discourses.

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