

# **REPORT OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE WCAA GLOBAL CULTURAL POLICIES TASK FORCE IN THE YEAR 2023**

## **1. Publication of thematic Issue: Anthropological Perspectives on Covid-19**

This thematic volume of the journal *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* originated from a panel entitled “Anthropological Perspectives on the COVID Pandemic: Impacts on Society, Culture, Public Policy and Governance, and Lessons for the Future”, which was part of the 2021 IUAES Yucatan Congress, held in Mexico.

The Congress, on the theme of “Heritages, Global Interconnections in a Possible World”, was held online from 9 to 13 November 2021. It was jointly organized by the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) and the World Anthropological Union (WAU), and hosted by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).

The open panel on which this special issue is based (Panel 45) was entitled “Anthropological Perspectives on the COVID Pandemic: Impacts on Society, Culture, Public Policy and Governance, and Lessons for the Future”, and was co-organized by Thomas Reuter, Soumendra M. Patnaik, Fadwa El Guindi, Vesna Vučinić Nešković, and Carmen Rial. The panel was sponsored by the World Anthropological Union (WAU), the IUAES Commission on Anthropology, Public Policy and Development Practice, and the WCAA Global Cultural Policies Task Force.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a highly disruptive global crisis, touching nearly all aspects of human existence and changing many policy assumptions in transnational perspectives. Anthropologists witnessed these impacts first hand across many countries, while mainstream media reports focused primarily on the spread of the disease, public health measures and the impact on economic life in western countries. Other dimensions of the pandemic such as the emergence of new socialities and inequalities, social disarticulation, the changing role of family and kinship and the transformed domestic and professional spaces mediated through technology, especially in developing countries, were largely ignored. The panel critically reflected on the experiences of people in multiple locations and from diverse anthropological perspectives to extract lessons for future crises. Participants examined the impacts the pandemic had and the structural injustices that were revealed by it. They looked at ways it transformed the family, community, social and cultural lives of those affected, as well as their perceptions of the sustainability crisis, climate change, food security, education, politics and public policy. The studies aimed to inform more balanced policies and public debate on how to meet this and other potential crises, bringing anthropological insights to bear on the challenges humanity is set to encounter in the future.

The originality of the papers and the lively discussions during the panel inspired a collaborative publication. The co-editors of this thematic issue, namely, Vesna Vučinić Nešković, Thomas Reuter and Soumendra Patnaik, took the lead and invited all panel

participants to contribute to this collective effort, which was supported by the editors of the journal *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology*, Dragana Antonijević and Ivan Kovačević.

This volume includes six out of eleven studies presented in the aforementioned panel. The texts published here are revised versions of the original panel presentations, incorporating feedback from blind peer-reviewers and the editors of this thematic volume.

The thematic volume incorporated the following texts: (1) *Why Social Justice is the Most Effective Disaster Impact Mitigation: Lessons from the Pandemic*, by Thomas Reuter, (2) *A Cross-Cultural Study of Mask-Wearing During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Comparing China, Japan and the USA*, by Gordon Mathews, (3) *Learning from Rituals: Covid-19 Public Health Measures and Messaging in Timor-Leste*, by Susanna Barnes, (4) Lourdes Arizpe in her text *Perceptions of the Impact of Covid-19 in Tepoztlan, Mexico: A Focused Ethnographic Study*, by Lourdes Arizpe, (5) *Managing the Disaster of Covid-19: An Analysis of Public Policy in Odisha on India's East Coast*, by Soumendra M. Patnaik, and (6) *The World Upside Down: The Pandemic Redefines Globalization*, by Fadwa El Guindi.

In conclusion, this thematic issue provides a range of perspectives and insights into the diverse impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on different societies and cultures globally. They underscore the importance of taking into account social, cultural, economic, and political factors in understanding the management of disasters, and provide a valuable comparative perspective on how different communities and governments have coped with the pandemic. The texts also highlight the significance of interdisciplinary approaches that integrate insights from anthropology, social psychology, and public policy analysis in formulating effective strategies for disaster management. In particular, they underscore the need for policies that address economic inequality, cultural beliefs, and local community participation in disaster management. Overall, these studies suggest that managing disasters requires a holistic and nuanced approach that takes into account the diverse needs and perspectives of different communities and individuals, and that collaboration across disciplines and cultures is crucial to building effective and resilient disaster response systems. The pandemic has been a wake-up call for the world, and these studies offer valuable lessons on how we can build a more just, equitable, and sustainable future in the aftermath of this crisis.

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A short summary of this publication is given in the **WCAA Newsletter, vol. 18 (May 2023), pg. 6.**

### **Ethnology and Anthropology:**

#### **Anthropological Perspectives**

#### **on the COVID Pandemic**

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A special issue of *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology*, themed "Anthropological Perspectives on Covid-19" came out a few days containing papers that were presented at the 2021 IUAES Yucatan Congress. The panel—Anthropological Perspectives on the COVID Pandemic: Impacts on Society,

Culture, Public Policy and Governance, and Lessons for the Future—was sponsored by the WAU, the IUAES Commission on Anthropology, Public Policy and Development Practice, and the WCAA Global Cultural Policies Task Force. The co-editors of this volume were: Vesna Vucinic Neskovic, Thomas Reuter, and Soumendra Patnaik. It features six articles from around the world. Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology is a Serbian open access journal (of the Dep. of Ethnology and Anthropology, University of Belgrade) with international visibility.

You may see this thematic volume at the Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology website here:

<https://www.eap-ica.org/index.php/eap/issue/view/62>

## **2. IUAES-WAU World Congress: Organization of a Roundtable “How can the World Anthropological Union contribute to the UNESCO-BRIDGES Coalition in developing humanities-led sustainability science?”**

Having initiated this roundtable, Vesna Vucinic Neskovic only later found out that WAU has started to negotiate partnership with the UNESCO-BRIDGES Coalition. We hope that this event will give an opportunity for a more direct discussion about possible collaborations and some concrete proposals for action.

**Short Abstract:** This round table aims to explore creative ways in which anthropologists can contribute to the UNESCO-BRIDGES Coalition in developing and applying approaches to sustainability issues that are based on human sciences.

**Long Abstract:** This round table aims to explore creative ways in which anthropologists can contribute to the UNESCO-BRIDGES Coalition in developing and applying approaches to sustainability issues that are based on human sciences. The first part will be devoted to the presentation of the BRIDGES’ aims and activities. The Founding Executive Director of the BRIDGES Coalition will discuss the challenges and opportunities of integrating humanities, social sciences, and local and traditional knowledge perspectives into research, education, and action for global sustainability. Then, the Director of UNESCO-BRIDGES UK Hub will share examples of successful collaborations among social and human scientists, artists, education specialists, and civil society in sustainability research. In the second part, the WAU anthropologists will engage with the BRIDGES representatives by responding to the following questions: (1) How have creative pedagogies that integrate fieldwork research and learning helped students to engage with complex social and environmental challenges which put human security at risk? and (2) How have anthropologists reached out to policymakers and promoted the use of anthropological research in crafting policies? The round table discussion is premised on trust that world anthropologies can contribute to global sustainability efforts in two complementary ways; first, by performing on the ground context-specific research, and second, by promoting the traditional sustainable practices and incorporating novel ones into daily life in ways that do not disrupt socio-cultural continuity of local communities. In the final part, the panel will explore possibilities of how IUAES and WCAA, with their specific structural and membership frameworks can collaborate with the UNESCO-BRIDGES Coalition in confronting global socio-economic, cultural, and environmental challenges.

**Key words:** WAU, UNESCO-BRIDGES Coalition, humanities and social sciences, anthropology, sustainability sciences.

**Round table convenors:** Vesna Vucinic, U. Belgrade (WCAA Global Cultural Policies Task Force Chair) and Luci Attala, U. of Wales Trinity Saint David (UNESCO-BRIDGES UK Hub Director)

**Discussants/Panelists:** Steven Hartman, Arizona State U. (UNESCO-BRIDGES Coalition Founding Executive Director), Luci Attala, U. of Wales Trinity Saint David (UNESCO-BRIDGES UK Hub Director), Vesna Vucinic, U. Belgrade (WCAA Global Cultural Policies Task Force Chair), Fadwa El Guindi, UCLA (El Nil Research), Thomas Reuter, U. Melbourne (Anthropology, Public Policy and Development Practice Commission Deputy Chair), Soumendra Patnaik (Anthropology, Public Policy and Development Practice Commission Chair), and Noel Salazar (IUAES Secretary-General).

**Supporting organizations:** WAU and UNESCO-BRIDGES Coalition.

**Round table time slot:** 90 minutes (possibly a plenary session)

**Mode:** face-to-face

The Roundtable proposal has been accepted, and may be found at the World Congress website as R13: <https://iuaes2023delhi.org/panelabstractdetail.aspx?pid=246>