


Chapter 12

Academic Work and Life of Public Administration Students During the COVID–19 Pandemic in Slovenia

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically transformed the lives of people, including higher education students. Thus, the main aim of the chapter is to present the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on academic work and life of public administration students in Slovenia compared with their counterparts from other fields of study. The analysis is based on 1,049 Slovenian respondents, covering 211 students from public administration and 838 students from other fields of study. The results show that at the time of the lockdown public administration students were the most satisfied with real-time online lectures, followed by asynchronous forms of lectures. Compared with the students from other fields of study, they were in general more satisfied with provided course assignments and feedback on performance but less satisfied with lecturers' response, openness, and information. They also found it more difficult to focus, adapt, and achieve better performance in the online environment and were in general less confident in computer skills compared to their counterparts from other fields of study.

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INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 has completely shaken the world. The pandemic has affected everything, how we live and work, communicate and interact with each other, and how we move around and travel. It has impacted every aspect of our lives and every person on the planet. The shocking aftermath of this pandemic is now apparent in a historic recession in the world's most developed regions. The GDP of the United States plummeted annually by 32.9% in the second quarter of 2020, according to an early assessment (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2020). Likewise, GDP in the euro area plunged 12.1% and in the European Union (EU) 11.9% over the previous quarter (Eurostat, 2020).

This coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has affected the health of all age groups, with the worst symptoms and highest death rates found among older adults and those with comorbidities (Goldman, 2020; Mamun et al., 2020). Alongside many health concerns, the Covid-19 pandemic has created several unexpected disruptions to society and the economy (Cao et al., 2020; Eurofound, 2020; Rajkumar, 2020), like other pandemics earlier in history. Previous pandemics (the bubonic plague, the Spanish flu, Ebola, SARS, influenza A (H1N1) etc.) led to significant changes in geopolitical and demographic situations and impacted patterns of travel, trade, migration, urbanisation, and technology use (McMichael, 2004). A few months into the pandemic, it is clear the corona crisis will last for a long time with numerous impacts on all levels, affecting our lives for many years to come. The challenges brought by the virus will in one way or another influence the well-being of everyone in society (Brooks et al., 2020; Eurofound, 2020; ELF, 2021).

Students are generally excluded from any specific risk group in terms of the risk that being infected by the virus will cause serious health consequences. Still, students are one group in the population that has experienced substantial effects of the Covid-19 pandemic's first wave in the first 4 or 5 months of 2020, which are still present, and hence great changes to their everyday lives. Perhaps even more alarming are the possible impacts on their prospects for their immediate and distant future (Aristovnik et al., 2020a).

To curb the spread of Covid-19, educational institutions around the world moved rapidly to transfer various courses from on-site to on-line, with online learning (e-learning) thereby becoming one of their mandatory teaching and learning processes (Aristovnik et al., 2020a). Work at universities and schools proceeded remotely as far as possible in 2020, except for scientific research work, such as laboratory and other practical exercises from May on, which were possible in educational institutions upon strict adherence to protocols to ensure protection from infection (MMC, 2020a). Consequently, most Slovenian students (studying outside their place of residence) left the study centres. The Slovenian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport directed all students to move out of the dormitories. Meanwhile, an additional big shock was the decline in student work. It fell by 50% in the second half of March and in April, while the overall market of student work was growing only slowly, still around 40% lower in May and 30% lower in June compared to the year before. The supply of student work nose-dived by 90% in the second half of March and in April. This means many students have been left without their most important income source because the income from student work is three times greater than scholarship funding. Students had to accept distance learning and encountered a lack of social contacts, with many not even knowing their classmates. Successful distance learning also requires different skills than are needed in a normal academic year (ŠOS, 2020a).

The main aim of the chapter is to examine the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic's first wave in early 2020 on the academic life of higher education students (hereafter HESs) in public administration in comparison to students in other fields of study. This contribution is based on data from a global student

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