

Constructions of the state before and during the Covid-19 pandemic: private sector viewpoints

Brajdić Vuković Marija, Peternel Lana (Institute for Social Research in Zagreb)
Doolan Karin (University of Zadar)
Švajda Marija (Croatian Institute of Public Health)

— The post-pandemic world:

A bad picture or a good opportunity? —



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb



- The social resilience of Croatian society in the midst and aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic (SOCRES), Croatian Science Foundation (principal investigator Dr Branko Ančić, Institute for Social Research in Zagreb);
- What determines social resilience? Social relationships and network structures, knowledge, narratives and media frames, social metabolism and institutional capacities;
- How private sector entrepreneurs construct the state's role before and during the pandemic? The role of the state as resilience booster?
- Preliminary insights.

The state as a construct

- Dunn (2010): the state as a discursively produced structural/structuring effect that relies on constant acts of performativity to call it into being (i.e. not an essentialised entity);
- The state as a sociocultural phenomenon, as constructed in the thinking and actions of individuals, rather than an independent reality (Mitchell 1991);
- Lynteris (2013): “the materiality of the state as a social relation is rooted in its being performed by and between humans in everyday life”, “the state exists only to the extent that we are constantly making the state”;
- But not reduced to subjective belief - also represented and reproduced in visible forms: legal practice, policing borders, imposing lockdown;
- Schmidt (2007) - sketches the dominant (convergence) discourse on the changing role of the state: demise of the nation state as a result of Europeanisation and internationalization, general retreat of the state in capitalism.

Title

Authors



Edward Bernays
University College
Communications | Tourism



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb



Interviews

COMMUNICATION
MANAGEMENT
FORUM2021

- 9 semi-structured interviews carried out in February/March 2021: micro (up to 10 employees – dominant in the Croatian context) and small entrepreneurs (up to 50) in Zagreb and Split;
- Owners of a fitness studio, fruit and vegetables shop, cake shop, crafts shop, brewery, restaurant, physiotherapy salon;
- Difficulties encountered during the pandemic, how they addressed them, what role the state had in this process and what role would they have liked the state to have;
- Identifying discourses about the state in (non)crisis times;
- Foundation for a survey.

Title

Authors



Edward Bernays
University College
Communications | Tourism



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb

institut zaturizam
institute for tourism

Constructions of the state (nation state re-emerges as a "cultural container")

COMMUNICATION
MANAGEMENT
FORUM2021

- The state as a coherent, reified object;
- The state constructed as a necessity before and during the pandemic (post-socialist legacy, but also crisis necessity): "In Finland, political parties across the political spectrum as well as other social forces have agreed that it is the role of the state to pull the nation through the crisis" (Moisio 2020);
- The neoliberal theory position that the best government is the least government not upheld in crisis times;
- The state as powerful before and during the pandemic: The state has taken centre stage during the crisis: changes to the legislation which enables the state to prohibit or curb public and private gatherings, gives power to the State inspectorate to discipline and (financially) punish (Law on protecting people from infectious diseases, December 2020), allocation of funds.

Title

Authors



Edward Bernays
University College
Communications | Tourism



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb



Constructions of the state (Lynteris 2013)

COMMUNICATION
MANAGEMENT
FORUM2021

- Construction of the state as:
- An internal, inescapable trait of “human nature”, necessary for species survival (rather than superfluous);
- “an external agentive totality whose power of sovereign decision lies radically and fundamentally outwith everyday life”, which is imposed from above on human life (rather than being (re)constructed through the meanings people attach to it);
- Events such as pandemics, earthquakes, floods, droughts: “ultimate validations of the phantasmic reality of the “internal necessity” and the “external totality” of the state.

Title

Authors



Edward Bernays
University College
Communications | Tourism



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb

institut zaturizam
institute for tourism

Constructions of the state

COMMUNICATION
MANAGEMENT
FORUM2021

- The state as carer during the pandemic (financial aid packages, how to protect the economy) “even the hardest protagonists of the politics of austerity have accepted these financial methods (*state financial aid packages to pull private firms through the economic hardship caused by the epidemic*) as an absolute necessity” (Moisio 2020);
- Mixed feelings about the packages (gratitude, uneasiness about receiving support, dissatisfaction) (Poslovni FM, Equestris 2020: 61% applied for state help: the majority for salaries, almost half satisfied with government policies to support the economy, 32% dissatisfied);
- The state as responsive during the pandemic (accepted demands made by an emergent group: Voice of entrepreneurs);
- The state as a poor advisor and role model during the pandemic (unclear directions, contradictions);
- The state as intimidating (and absurd) inspector.

Title

Authors



Edward Bernays
University College
Communications | Tourism



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb

institut zaturizam
institute for tourism

Constructions of the state

COMMUNICATION
MANAGEMENT
FORUM2021

- The state as suffocating (levies);
- The state as insensitive (blind to individual needs);
- The state as incompetent, inefficient and untrustworthy enactor (though the financial aid packages were distributed efficiently): “In the tradition of neoclassical economic theory, the state is seen as normally incompetent or corrupt” (Weiss 2010).

Title

Authors



Edward Bernays
University College
Communications | Tourism



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb

institut zaturizam
institute for tourism

The state as resilience booster?

COMMUNICATION
MANAGEMENT
FORUM2021

- Return to how things were, to “normalcy” as unsatisfactory;
- The pandemic as an opening, new imaginings of the role of the state?
- Reliance on the state in crisis times, undermining calls for a minimalist state;
- The state as a generous patron that is light in its demands?;
- As a source of capital (Bourdieu 1984): economic (in varied forms), social (partnerships), cultural (educational, knowledge and skills), but also freeing enterprises from regulations and high taxes.

Title

Authors



Edward Bernays
University College
Communications | Tourism



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb

institut zaturizam
institute for tourism

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

— The post-pandemic world:
A bad picture or a good opportunity? —



Edward Bernays
University College
Communications | Tourism



Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb

institut zaturizam
institutefortourism