

Narratives on face mask wearing from members of Navigating Knowledge Landscapes Network - the contribution No. 22

Country: **SWEDEN**

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Being situated at the Risk and Crisis Research Centre at Mid Sweden University, I have had the opportunity to think about face masks a great deal lately, particularly in relation to risk. According to the Public Health Agency in Sweden, people are not obliged to wear face masks in public places. Emphasis is instead on keeping distance and washing hands. Living in the northern parts of Sweden (where the population density is 2.65 inhabitants per square kilometer!), at least the first recommendation is rather simple to adhere to.

So far, I haven't encountered anyone wearing a face mask. Still (or maybe just because of this), I note a collapse between the status of *being at risk* and *being a risk* (Hilgartner 1992; Lupton 1993; Boholm and Corvellec 2011). The face mask, I realize, signals both positions, at the same time as it doesn't provide a definite answer: are you the risk object or the object at risk? Saying this, my individual attitude towards face masks cannot be pried apart from the social acceptance and use of the same. As long as the non-use of face masks constitutes the norm, I will most likely interpret the usage as deviant and worrying. On the other hand, if the vast majority of the Swedish population would wear face masks, I would most likely start wearing a face mask as well. Here, the mass effect kicks in. This speculative reasoning of this text is in itself interesting. The habitual non-use of face masks, at least in the northern parts of Sweden, makes the above question almost a non-question, which – I know – is far from the case.

References

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