

Narratives on face mask wearing from members of Navigating Knowledge Landscapes Network - the contribution No. 19

Country: **SLOVENIA**

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The Slovenian government institutionalized measures against the spreading of coronavirus by mandatory measures, articulated by the National Institute of Public Health (the Slovenian initials being NIJZ). Medical face masks have been determined as the obligatory means in the closed public spaces, and as unavoidable medical protection for the health professionals, and the infected individuals. This instruction accompanied by some other ones (disinfection of hands, physical, i.e. “social” distancing, protection against transmit of viruses by coughing in the sleeve) was widely promoted in public, even at the entrance of every shop, at post offices etc.

As regards the usage of masks one could observe great differences from geographical perspective. In the capital city Ljubljana respectful attitude towards the compulsory mask wearing was detected, while the coast and Istrian area seems more relaxed, most people using the face mask only in food shops, post offices, and banks, i.e. where the control was strict.

The majority of news media have not question the general protective functionality of the mask, yet the types of face masks were often compared. On the other hand, public and even experts’ opinion have been and still is far from unified regarding the protection capacity of masks. After the cargo of the imported masks was inquired into because of the suspicion of corruption in the domain of governmental nomenclature, the public put another stress on the political implications of the whole anti covid-19 governmental measures.

The NIJZ prescription allowed the substitution of a face mask by a scarf, and this was the solution used much more often at the beginning of the national “COVID-9 regime”. Later on different designs of the medical masks provided for the variety of the face coverage, and even put a touch of fashion on it. Some people, myself among them, chose to keep wearing scarf not for the sake of image, but for health reasons as it is much easier to breath under lighter material, especially when days are becoming warmer. For us it was soothing to read that one of the

medical news confirmed the advantages of such protection, saying that face masks could worsen the condition of infected people, and make healthy people more ignorant of the other protection measures.

The syntagm social distancing is problematic because it symbolically transform the rule of physical distance into the subversion or de-construing of social ties. Face masks are strongly related to this implicated meaning. The human estrangement as a part of the “COVID-19 regime” is the reason I have been more annoyed by some people strongly emphasizing the need for masks and physical distance than by those exhibiting the lack of interest for the personal protection against the infection.