

Narratives on face mask wearing from members of Navigating Knowledge Landscapes Network - the contribution No. 1

Country: **ALBANIA**

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Received May 16th, 2020

Following the pandemics of COVID 19, Albania has seen a very high usage of facemasks in outdoor settings.

It started suddenly like sirens of an alarm: at that time (beginning-midst of March 2020) the country had very scarce provisions of masks. People were trying to improvise one at all ways. Some were even using shawls tightly surrounding face, mouth and shoulder; the more improvised the thing, the less effective the covering of the face.

Regulatory bylaws were slowly adapted and it required at least one month formalizing practices. Nowadays mask usage is obligatory only indoor (inside institutions that still function, or that are turning back to normality).

Ethical and moral dilemmas have already risen, especially in countries where Muslim minorities live. If you ban a burka covering the face due to security reasons, how would you deal with massive usage of facemasks?

After the first two-three weeks of improvisation, and even speculation with the price of masks that were compulsively requested in the pharmacies until stocks depleted, an interesting phenomenon became visible. Masks gradually became customized: everyone chose its predilected form, color and people even started combining face masks with their own shirt, jacket or hat.

The massive use of the masks among Albanian citizens is of today is not mandatory outdoor. But it has become a normal well adopted ritual of surviving, implemented as of a social significance for “not letting the virus in”. This social cohesion on the intrapersonal view as “to scare the virus” and “fear of an enemy”, comes close to a group approach of “control and stability”. This ritual of social cohesion vis-à-vis the “fear of death” or “fear of

the unknowing” is a similar to a psychological regression, when the individual survival depended largely from the herd.