



# Social Environmental Inequalities in France When Facing Covid-19 Health Crisis

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## Short Letter

The worldwide health crisis of SARS-CoV-2, the so-called Coronavirus, is a strong transdisciplinary exercise due its multisectoral societal actors that are involved in giving perspectives to build accurate responses for that. When facing this challenge of health crisis by getting close to a particular data, information or statistics that concerns the disease itself, we find that a health crisis is not a simple health problem, but health is also a matter of access to a healthy environment and it is about social issues as well. We cannot treat ecosystem in a reductionist perspective anymore, because the problems are not isolated, but on the contrary, they are inter related to each other. From now on, we are invited to consider the great interdependence of different systems of thinking and action. A Science that looks beyond the disciplines themselves. Alternatively, we could say an “ecological thinking” (Morin, 2020, p.35 [1]), in the sense that the ecological problem is not just about our relation with nature, but also the relations with ourselves.

According to Barton, H. and Grant, M. (2006 [2]): “The links between health and settlements are often indirect and complex. A tool to improve understanding and foster collaboration between planning and health decision-makers is badly needed”. For that, the authors have developed a health map that represents the complexity of socio-ecological systems, in which the category of “people” is centered positioned and simultaneously surrounded by several layers, like lifestyle, community, local economy, built environment, natural environment, and global ecosystems. If we take the centrality of people for our analyses in the context of France during the period of major demand of health care in the first half of the year of 2020 still in the first coronavirus wave in Europe, we will find many social environmental inequalities in the access of this care.

From ecological political studies, Machado (2020, p.29 [3]) points out that one third of the world human population is under social isolating measures and two thirds of world human population is under the yoke of

injustices and inequalities. Moreover, that great part of these two thirds is directly in the effort of survival measures, risking themselves and families in the front line activities because they have to maintain their ordinary jobs and lifestyles in order to keep their minimum conditions of life. Therefore, it is more than a rational statistic overview, it is a matter of human ethics and solidarity to fight against those inequalities and look for scientific analyses which will help us to include the ones who are apart of the access of health in a broader sense of the term. Like the French Professor Florent Pasquier (2020, p.8 [4]) remind us: “The virus (...) is a revelation of our ways of doing things, of acting, of thinking, of existing. In this bad game, there are only two losers: the individual in particular and the human species in general.”

Those inequalities are worldwide felt and this is not different in France. About the social inequalities existing in this country, the dossier “Les inégalités sociales face à l’épidémie de Covid-19” presents a very extensive and profound study in this sense. A group of researchers coordinated by Claire-Lise Dubost, Catherine Pollak, and Sylvie Rey (2020 [5]) analyzed past scientific literature that has already highlighted the presence of social inequalities in other epidemics. It is mentioned the “inequalities in the face of exposure risk, vulnerability to infection, and the lack of access to health care”. Those characteristics are also present when facing COVID-19 and the fact that this particularly disease has rapidly happened it highlights even more the social environmental inequalities already present in different communities.

The study of (Dubost, Pollak and Rey, 2020) presented that territorial analysis reveals mechanisms of accumulation of difficulties when facing Covid-19. Other studies at the level of the Lyon metropolitan area or the Île-de-France region (Mangeney, 2020 [6]) show that the populations in suburbs and working-class neighborhoods more often present risk factors. That is because they are also more often affected by poor housing conditions, as well as by the need of maintaining a professional activity that requires the use of public transportation. In the research conclusions of Claire-Lise Dubost, Catherine Pollak, and Sylvie Rey (2020) there is the indication that the virus differently touched urban and rural areas in France. The more dense populated areas are in addition to bad live conditions it led to more deaths, on the other hand, less populated areas in rural surrounds may had to face the difficulty to access health care. Beyond territorial issues to approach inequalities, the authors also mention the populations considered in vulnerable situations, like elderly people living in medical institutions, homeless people, handicapped ones who are more expose to the risks of contamination.

In addition to those social inequalities marked by territorial differences, working condition and vulnerable situations, we will find many other, like the differences in access to internet and digital technologies, which will touch the educational maintenance of youth during confinement period. In France, in 2019, 12.0% of the people do not have Internet access at home (Dubost, Pollak and Rey, 2020 [5]). We have also to mention the increase of domestic violence in French houses during the confinement, estimated in 36% in the zone of Paris by the Ministry of Interior and reported in Le Figaro newspaper in March 2020 [7].

One of the lessons that we take from this health crisis due to COVID-19 is that the problems are all interconnected, and for that, transdisciplinarity analyses will be more and more needed to face it as well as a transdisciplinary pedagogical approach that might help us to connect the dispersed knowledge. Besides that, the virus comes with a strong pedagogy in itself that remind us the social inequalities presents in society. Moreover, those social inequalities cross several layers of a health map, touching environment, education, relations, community and so on. In the direction of a transdisciplinarity education, Pasquier (2020 [4]) evokes that “it is more urgent than ever that transdisciplinary education truly transmit in a lively way the human values and not just the humanistic ones”. In a sense that help us “to look for ways of doing things that are fair, that is to say that are in the correctness of the action, correctness that we will define by: an appropriate approach, carried out in the right moment, in good proportions and for a good duration”.

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