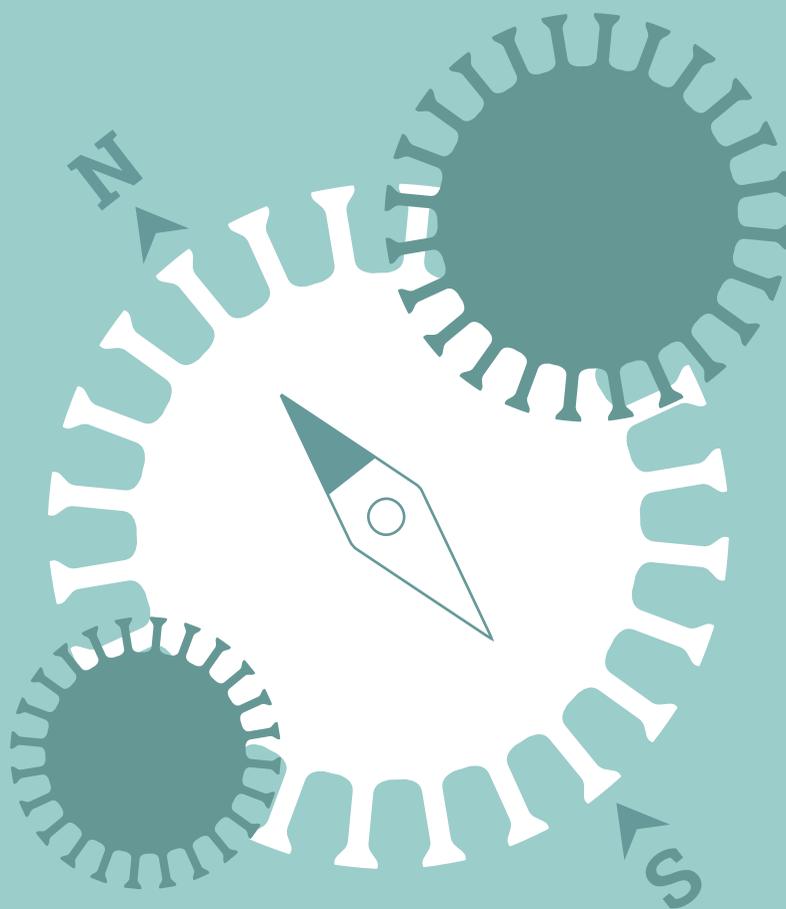


The COVID-19 pandemic is not just a health, economic and humanitarian crisis, it is laying bare some undeniable truths in societies worldwide.

By **Smaranda Boros, Anita Bosch** and **Yuliya Shymko**

North meets South: A call for inclusive global research



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The COVID-19 pandemic is emphasising the extent of *inequalities*, both between and within societies. In the dynamics between nations, these inequalities revolve around the reliance on international funding bodies for humanitarian aid – and what happens when these big funders withdraw their support.

It is exposing heightened territorial, *us-vs-them dynamics* of hoarding and a *crisis of global solidarity*. This is reflected on the one hand in acrimonious economic negotiations between the-haves and the-have-nots of the world, even when they reside under the same institutional umbrella, such as the European Union, but even more so when it comes to developing countries negotiating with international monetary funds for financial relief.

The response to the pandemic has also shown limited collaborative help in the distribution of medical equipment, staff and resources needed to operate, with a future worry about the possibilities and willingness of international sharing and distribution of a vaccine.

It reveals both the power of the state and the need for centralised and aligned policies and interventions and, at the same time, the limitations and boundaries of these interventions in the *absence of collaborative, grassroots community* efforts to address upcoming challenges.

At the same time we see, across the board, the difference that positive exceptions to these rules can and do make. It is more important than ever to learn from these positive events so that future policy interventions will support initiatives that are proactive, collaborative and creative rather than reactive and reparatory.

We need to learn not just how to correct mistakes but to strategically envision different ways of working and being together to build sustainable societies. This sustainability should manifest itself both in relation to nature and among people. Living and learning to be with each other has to be done in a more respectful and empathetic way rather than the current competitive, discriminative and resource-hoarding manner.

This is a difficult task, however, when knowledge is produced and reproduced within the same paradigms and theories and via the same systems of the “Global North” (we use the terms the West and Global North interchangeably in this text).

Throughout this pandemic, many voices have stressed that not all the basic WHO guidelines for the pandemic are applicable in the Global South – from the ability to practise social distancing to having access to water to maintain minimal hygiene. The colonialism of knowledge production enforces Western/Global North management discourse and practices on the lives and experiences of those in the non-West, dictating a Western tradition of managerial thinking that defines how and what should be studied and practised.

As a means of control, it detaches those in the Global South from their native condition and capacity for autonomous thought.

In the context of modernity, organisation studies rarely acknowledge non-Western experience and offer no alternative non-Western modes of managing and organising. The limited engagement with indigenous knowledge in the Global South has largely been categorised and determined through the gaze of the West.

As long as so many of the research studies that inform policies continue to be conducted in mainly Western settings and remain mainly deductive and based on theoretical models developed there, there will be no escape from this loop of inequality).

What we need, then, is:

more *inductive research* conducted in the Global South that transcends the “vulnerable populations” focus and framing; research that learns from local initiatives that tackle the aforementioned issues (inequality, us vs them dynamics and the absence of collaborative, grassroots community initiatives) and that portrays *local communities as agentic actors* instead of “targets of our benevolence” and wisdom and research that is open to learning about alternative sources of power (ie power that you don’t expect to see), alternative forms of community organising and radically alternative paradigms of operating (collaborative instead of competitive, focused on the good of the whole community instead of the individual, needs-based vs merit-based). In other words, we need to hear more from the Global South in the voice of the Global South.

Taking this a step further, research itself needs to transcend identity politics – Global North vs Global South, inductive vs deductive, quantitative vs qualitative – and, instead, builds on *hermeneutic models* that combine the general and the particular, the abstract principle and its contextual reality. Approaches that are collaborative at their core, instead of competing conceptualisations and methodologies.

We need truthful and relevant social research in societies everywhere, where researchers are enabled to address issues and not be prescribed what their research focus should be according to dominant Northern priorities and foci.

Or, in the words of Responsible Research in Business, we need “responsible science, producing useful and credible knowledge that addresses problems important to business and society. We are, after all, a single globe and contrary to current thinking, what happens in the South does impact the North in significant ways (the opposite of which is already an accepted fact).

In theory, relevant research is already the case. In practice, most of the recent calls for research proposals and all the money that comes with it will be granted mainly to organisations based in the Global North. This is because they know how to write compelling proposals and they have resources to hire researchers who have the “right” credentials to bring the desired weight and legitimacy to the proposal.

In practice, and illustrating the point, journals now calling for COVID-19-related papers and promising a *speedy publication process, will publish mainly quantitative research results*. Numerous surveys and two- to three-week online diary studies are now taking over the internet, and any researcher with half a day to spare has jotted down a “quick-and-dirty” design to make use of these opportunities because tenure tracks equal survival and promotion in academia.

The problem of *data collection being skewed and biased* (eg with respect to gender or the inclusion of the very poor and difficult to reach – especially in a pandemic where internet/telephone access is the condition for participation) has already been raised by international development organisations.





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Sadly, the research that we publish now will, in the near future, once again talk about the privileged and be used to inform policies that impact everybody, with a marked negative impact on those geographically and culturally far from the policy makers, as the findings are not based on the realities of their groupings and societies. This is particularly pertinent in business management, as businesses function at the intersection of local and global dynamics.

If ever there was a momentum to break this cycle of privilege reproduction and *be more inclusive in our research*, it is now.

It is time to give priority to international co-operation in research between the Global North and the Global South. Time to make room for more inductive and qualitative research to complement deductive and quantitative approaches.

But, more than ever, it is time to build bridges through co-operation between local communities and on-the-ground agents outside of academia and research groups.

Time to give voice to the voiceless and let them speak in their own way not just in the language of our theories and jargons.

Time to allow these voices to be heard and be genuinely considered in the policies to which they will be subjected.

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