

**COVID - 19 PANDEMIC  
A GAME CHANGER  
FOR CIVIC ACTIVISM  
IN SERBIA?**

Impact, consequences and changes  
in the activist realm

**PANDEMIJA  
COVID - 19  
FAKTOR PROMENE  
ZA GRAĐANSKI  
AKTIVIZAM  
U SRBIJI?**

Uticaj, posledice i  
promene u  
polju aktivizma

# IMPRESSUM

**Naslov:** Pandemija Covid-19 – Faktor promene za građanski aktivizam u Srbiji? Uticaj, posledice i promene u polju aktivizma

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**Štampa:** Donat Graf, Belgrade

**Mesto i godina izdanja:** Beograd, 2020

**Tiraž:** 100

**ISBN 978-86-80484-55-6**

Ova publikacija je nastala u okviru projekta pod nazivom “Angažuj, inspiriši, osnaži: Rizom angažovane demokratije“ koji realizuje Institut za demokratski angažman jugoistočne Evrope u partnerstvu sa Institutom za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju Univerziteta u Beogradu, uz podršku Fondacije za otvoreno društvo. Stavovi izrečeni u tekstu predstavljaju stavove autora.



FONDACIJA ZA OTVORENO DRUŠTVO, SRBIJA  
OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION, SERBIA

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# UVOD

**G**lobalna pandemija SARS-CoV-2 virusa prelila se u Srbiju početkom marta. Prvi zvanično potvrđen slučaj zaraze zabeležen je 6. marta, a četiri dana kasnije Vlada Republike Srbije je reagovala donevši „Odluku o proglašenju bolesti COVID-19 izazvane virusom SARS-CoV-2 zaraznom bolešću“. Prve mere sa ciljem sprečavanja daljeg širenja korona virusa preduzete su 12. marta, kada je ministar zdravlja doneo „Naredbu o zabrani okupljanja u Republici Srbiji na javnim mestima u zatvorenom prostoru“, koja je na javnim mestima u zatvorenom prostorima podrazumevala zabranu okupljanja više od 100 ljudi. Naredni korak, koji je najviše otežao tok regularnog života u Srbiji, otpočeo je 15. marta kada je proglašeno vanredno stanje, tokom kojeg je, tri dana kasnije, izdata „Naredba o ograničenju i zabrani kretanja lica na teritoriji Republike Srbije“. Ta Naredba je nakon donošenja doživela četiri izmene kojima su se na različite načine određivale mere ograničenja i zabrane kretanja građana. Pre prve izmene, građanima starijim od 65 godina (a u mestima sa manje od 5000 stanovnika, građanima starijim od 70 godina) bilo je u potpunosti zabranjeno kretanje van stanova i domaćinstava, dok je ostalim građanima kretanje bilo zabranjeno u vremenu od 20 do 5 časova. Izmenama su uvedene i povremene dozvole kretanja za najstarije, kao i za izvođenje kućnih ljubimaca, ali i dodatne, rigoroznije mere, poput zabrane kretanja u svim parkovima i na javnim površinama, ili potpune zabrane kretanja tokom vikenda

(od 13 časova subotom do 5 časova ponedeljkom). Zabrane kretanja pratili su i prekid javnog prevoza u Beogradu i u Srbiji, zabrana rada tržnih centara i ugostiteljskih objekata. Mere su u javnosti izazivale podeljena mišljenja, sve dok vanredno stanje nije ukinuto 6. maja. Usledilo je popuštanje ostalih mera, uprkos zabrinjavajućim statistikama o broju zaraženih i informacijama koje su nezavisni mediji iznosili o stanju na terenu, odnosno kolapsu zdravstvenog sistema u brojnim gradovima i opštinama Srbije. Deo javnosti tumačio je ukidanje vanrednog stanja kao neodgovornu političku odluku vlasti sa ciljem stvaranja uslova za održavanje planiranih parlamentarnih izbora i predizborne kampanje koja je podrazumevala mitinge i druge oblike javnog okupljanja. Deo opozicionih političkih partija pokrenuo je kampanju bojkota „lažnih” izbora, kako zbog epidemioloških, tako i drugih neregularnih izbornih uslova. Da se sumnja u neodgovornost vlasti tokom vođenja predizborne kampanje ispostavila opravdanom, pokazalo je istraživanje BIRN-a koje je objavljeno 22. juna, dan nakon izbora. U istraživanju su iznete informacije prema kojima je broj zaraženih od korona virusa bio višestruko veći od onog koji je zvanično iznet u javnost. Jedini komentari koji su ovim povodom stigli od strane članova Kriznog štaba ili Vlade, predstavljali su istraživanje kao puku teoriju zavere. Obelodanjivanje ovih informacija kao i reakcije vlasti, dodatno su poljuljali poverenje građana i uticali su na rast nezadovoljstva koje se ispoljilo na ulicama nešto više od dve nedelje kasnije.

## Društveno samoorganizovanje kao odgovor na društvenu krizu

**M**ere ograničavanja i zabrane kretanja, zatvaranje prodavnica i ugostiteljskih objekata, kao i prekid rada javnog prevoza, materijalno su pogodile veliki broj građana, a posledice čitavog perioda osećale su se i nakon prekida vanrednog stanja. Paralelno sa radom društvenih pokreta koji su na različite načine pokušavali da rade na umanjivanju negativnih posledica po najugroženije, razvijali su se i novi načini organizovanja.

Kao vrlo efikasan metod tokom trajanja zabrana kretanja, ispostavile su se grupe na društvenoj mreži Fejsbuk, poput grupe „Pomoć sugrađanima u karantinu – Srbija“ koja je pomagala samoorganizovanju građana spremnih da pomognu kupovinom hrane, higijene i drugih namirnica onima koji to nisu mogli sami zbog mera zabrane kretanja (poput građana starijih od 65 godina) ili drugih razloga. Na sličan način, nastale su i grupa „Radnici i radnice za pravedno društvo“ koja je služila kao kanal putem kojeg su radnici i radnice mogli da obaveštavaju jedni druge o kršenjima radnih prava na njihovim mestima, a potom i da konsultuju poznavaoce zakona ili pravnike, kao i grupa „Mali proizvođači hrane u Srbiji“ koja je poslužila malim proizvođačima hrane da svoje proizvode lakše predstavljaju zainteresovanima

Istovremeno, u pojedinim fabrikama u Srbiji dolazilo je do organizovanog odgovora radnika na nepoštovanje higijenskih uslova i propisanih mera bezbednosti. Javnosti najpoznatiji

slučaj izazvan ovim povodom desio se u preduzeću Jura, čiji su radnici i radnice, iz tri fabrike u Leskovcu, Nišu i u Rači, u dogovoru pokrenuli štrajk upozorenja odbijajući da uđu u fabričke hale dok ne budu sigurni da će u njima biti bezbedni od virusa. S obzirom na to da se sve dešavalo za vreme vanrednog stanja, kada su javna okupljanja zabranjena, došlo je i do privođenja jednog od najistaknutijih učesnika štrajkova upozorenja – Slaviše Pajovića. Slična situacija ponovila se i u preduzeću Magna Seating iz Odžaka, gde su radnici prve smene 10. avgusta stupili u jednočasovni štrajk upozorenja, zahtevajući sastanak sa poslodavcem, kao i obezbeđivanje PCR testiranja za sve radnike fabrike. Neposredan povod za štrajk bila je smrt dve radnice od posledica zaraze virusom COVID-19, nakon čega se među ostalim radnicima pojavila sumnja da je koronom zaraženo mnogo više radnika od zvaničnog broja koji je kompanija saopštavala.

Nezadovoljni opštim stanjem u koje je dovedeno zdravlje tokom pandemije, na okupljanje u neformalnu inicijativu odlučila se i grupa lekara. Okupljeni oko peticije pod nazivom „Ujedinjeni protiv kovida“ (koja je sakupila skoro 3000 potpisa) i uz otvoreno pismo, lekari su javno istupili tražeći rešenja za „zdravstvenu katastrofu“ u kojoj se država našla zbog virusa COVID-19.

Najširi odgovor društva na ponašanje države tokom celokupnog trajanja epidemije se pojavio u vidu višednevnih masovnih demonstracija u Beogradu i Novom Sadu, koje su kulminirale fizičkim sukobima demonstranata i policije. Neposredan povod za izbijanje demonstracija bila je najava predsednika Srbije Aleksandra Vučića, u obraćanju 7. jula, da će od narednog dana biti zabranjeno javno okupljanje za

više od pet ljudi, a da od 10. jula ponovo predstoji policijski čas u trajanju čitavog vikenda. Iste večeri, više hiljada građana se okupilo ispred Skupštine, protestujući protiv odluke o uvođenju policijskog časa, što se završilo neredima koji su trajali do iza ponoći. Tokom demonstracija koje su se nastavile i narednih dana, uhapšen je veliki broj ljudi koji su mahom po kratkom postupku osuđivani i prebacivani u zatvorske jedinice, što je izazvalo novi talas solidarnosti i nezadovoljstva. Pritiskom solidarnih građana, jedan deo uhapšenih demonstranata je oslobođen ili pušten da se brani sa slobode.

## Uzorak

Pismeni upitnik poslat je članovima pet društvenih pokreta iz Srbije: Ne davimo Beograd<sup>1</sup>, Združena akcija „Krov nad glavom“<sup>2</sup>, Pravo na vodu<sup>5</sup>, Vazduh nije roba<sup>3</sup> i Solidarna kuhinja<sup>4</sup>. Ispitanici su aktivni članovi navedenih pokreta, većinom delegirani za popunjavanje upitnika od strane kolektiva ili preporučeni metodom „grudve snega“, kao članovi koji su bili aktivni u radu pokreta za vreme vanrednog stanja. Društveni pokreti koji učestvuju u istraživanju, birani su prema temama koje pokrivaju (ekološki, socio-ekonomski, građanski), tipu aktivističkih praksi (direktne akcije) i aktivnosti za vreme

<sup>1</sup>Inicijativa Ne davimo Beograd je lokalni politički pokret koji okuplja veliki broj ljudi zainteresovanih za unapređenje uslova života i rada svih naših građana, unapređenje, očuvanje i pravično korišćenje zajedničkih i prirodnih resursa, izgradnju demokratskih institucija, održivi razvoj grada, urbane i kulturne politike i uključivanje građana u razvoj svog okruženja (preuzeto sa: <https://nedavimobeograd.rs/o-nama/>)

<sup>2</sup>Združena akcija „Krov nad glavom“ je samoorganizovani kolektiv koji okuplja ljude ujedinjene u borbi za pravo na dom (preuzeto sa: <https://zakrovnadglavom.org/onama/>).

<sup>3</sup>Vazduh nije roba je neformalni kolektiv iz Zrenjanina ujedinjen u borbi protiv zagađenja fabrike guma Linglong na životnu sredinu (preuzeto sa: <https://www.facebook.com/vazduhnijeroba>).



pandemije korona virusa (osnovani su pre pandemije i imali su promenjene i prilagođene aktivnosti tokom pandemije ili su osnovani tokom pandemije i interesuje nas njihovo aktiviranje u specifičnom kontekstu). Solidarna kuhinja<sup>4</sup> je kolektiv koji ne možemo nominalno svrstati u kategoriju društvenog pokreta na način na koji je to moguće učiniti za ostale aktivističke grupe u uzorku, ali je ovaj kolektiv odabran za učestvovanje u istraživanju, budući da je njegovo osnivanje reprezentativni primer samoorganizovanog solidarnog društvenog organizovanja „odozdo” u kontekstu pandemije korona virusa u Srbiji. Prvobitna namera bila je da uzorak obuhvati tri pokreta iz Beograda i dva pokreta iz drugih gradova Srbije. Budući da nismo dobili odgovor od predstavnika pokreta Odbranimo reke Stare planine, upitnik smo prosledili članici pokreta iz Beograda, Pravo na vodu, koji se bavi istom temom - borbom protiv izgradnje derivacionih mini-hidroelektrana na rekama Srbije i Balkana, tako da konačnu strukturu uzorka čine četiri pokreta iz Beograda i jedan iz Zrenjanina. Smatramo da ovakva struktura uzorka realnije oslikava situaciju sa neravnomernom zastupljenošću društvenih pokreta u gradovima Srbije i njihovom koncentracijom u glavnom gradu, a uzroke takve situacije prepoznajemo u migracijama stanovništva iz manjih gradova u Beograd, malom broju obrazovanog mladog stanovništva u drugim gradovima Srbije, nedostatku kapaciteta u pogledu socijalnog, kulturnog i ekonomskog kapitala i drugih resursa. Budući da uzorkom nisu obuhvaćeni gradovi koji su bili

<sup>4</sup> Solidarna kuhinja je nezavisni kolektiv koji obezbeđuje hranu i druge vidove pomoći onima kojima je ona najpotrebnija. Kolektiv Solidarna kuhinja je formiran iz potrebe da se na sveprisutne probleme siromaštva i gladi, koji naročito dolaze do izražaja u kriznim situacijama, odgovori solidarnošću i uzajamnom pomoći (preuzeto sa: <https://solidarnakuhinja.org/o-nama/>).

<sup>5</sup> Pravo na vodu je mreža koja okuplja organizacije i pojedince ujedinjene u borbi za pristup vodi, protiv privatizacije vode, vodnih dobara i izgradnje derivacionih mini hidroelektrana (preuzeto sa: <https://pravonavodu.weebly.com/o-nama.html>).

posebno ugroženi pandemijom, poput Novog Pazara, Tutina i Sjenice, smatramo da generalne zaključke koje izvodimo iz analize treba uzeti sa rezervom. Pokušali smo da jednako uključimo kako formalno registrovane organizacije u statusu NVO i udruženja građana tako i neformalne kolektive i neregistrovane inicijative. Pored okvirne podele na tematske celine koje društveni pokreti pokrivaju svojim radom, poput građanskih, socio-ekonomskih i ekoloških, bitno je istaći da izabrani pokreti adresiraju pitanja vezana za osnovne ljudske potrebe: vazduh, voda, hrana, dom, javni prostor.

## | Analiza

### 1. Društvena reakcija na mere Kriznog štaba i vanredno stanje

Svi ispitani društveni pokreti naglašavaju otežan rad prouzrokovan virusom COVID-19. Tako jedan od ispitanika smatra da je pandemija „*unela nesigurnost, konfuziju, strepnju*“, a drugi zaključuje da je samo „*organizovanje opalo posebno za one (pokrete, prim. aut.) koji inače ne baziraju svoj aktivizam na društvenim mrežama*“. Generalni stav koji dele ispitanici jeste da je pandemija izazvala pad organizovanja i preusmeravanje na online platforme (uglavnom u pogledu komunikacije, o čemu će biti reči u narednom poglavlju).

Ispitanici smatraju da je ključna društvena reakcija na pandemiju zapravo opšte nezadovoljstvo u društvu povodom mera Kriznog štaba/države, a koje je bilo dodatno produbljeno organizacijom izbora. Nekoliko njih kulminaciju

opšteg nezadovoljstva vidi u julskim protestima, naglašavajući njihovu spontanost („*najznačajniji odgovor društva se desio na julskim protestima koji nisu bili artikulisani od strane ni jedne organizacije, ali na kojima se manifestovalo opšte nezadovoljstvo merama države i novonastalom krizom*“), ali takođe i nejasno formulisane ciljeve. Jedan od ispitanika smatra da je bilo nekoliko glavnih reakcija: „*Neki su očekivali bolju organizaciju i jače mere, neki bolje sprovođenje postojećih mera i jednak tretman zatvaranja i za privatne firme, drugi su pak tvrdili da su mere usmerene ka disciplinovanju i autokratiji, treći su smatrali da je korona globalna zavera i da nema veze sa njima, te je potrebno da ih država ostavi na miru sa ‘svojim’ merama*“, a povodom samih protesta smatra da su oni neobično okupili sve gore navedene pozicije, te nije bilo jasno koji su ciljevi, a koji je poželjni ishod. Jedino je bilo jasno da je nezadovoljstvo u narodu ogromno. Nažalost, tako su se i završili - nejasno.“

Dodatno, kod svih ispitanika ističe se izostanak reakcije većih društvenih pokreta i organizacija i naglašava se uloga „*malih i najčešće neformalnih aktivističkih kolektiva*“ koji su bili „*daleko solidarniji, mobilizujući se u ad hoc grupe za pomoć direktno ugroženima (starijim sugrađanima, osobama sa invaliditetom, zdravstvenim radnicima, sakupljačima sekundarnih sirovina)*“.

Kada su u pitanju društveni problemi koje je pandemija istakla, svi ispitanici smatraju da je pandemija zapravo dovela do osvetljavanja već postojećih društvenih problema. S tim u vezi, jedan od ispitanika smatra kako je pandemija „*do kostiju ogolila razne sfere našeg društva i prikazala sistem u svoj svojoj slabosti. Zdravstvo, školstvo, socijalna*

*politika, sakaćenje prirodnih resursa, sve to je za aktuelni režim manje važno od kojekakvih megalomanskih projekata*". Kao posebno problematično područje ispitanici ističu institucije zdravstvenog sistema, sistema socijalne zaštite, kao i sistema obrazovanja.

Tema koju je pandemija dodatno istakla jeste pitanje zaštite životne sredine. Neki ispitanici ukazuju na problem upravljanja jednokratnim medicinskim otpadom, poput maski, rukavica, bočica itd. Dodatno, naglašavaju se štetne posledice lokalnog turizma. Jedan od ispitanika naglašava kako se pojavila *"briga za zagađenje prirode, svest o tome da gubimo i ta prirodna 'utočišta' od problema savremenog života, povezivanje fizičkog i mentalnog zdravlja sa životnom sredinom"*.

Zanimljivo je da ispitanici aspekt životne sredine dovode u vezu sa širim okvirom fizičkog i mentalnog zdravlja. Kako smatra jedan od ispitanika *„pandemija je dodatno ogolila i probleme u vezi sa usamljenošću, mentalnom higijenom i higijenom uopšte"*. Na taj način, pandemija je uticala i na društvene pokrete koji nisu prvenstveno ekološki, da se aktivnije bave pitanjem zdravlja i životne sredine.

## **2. Uticaj pandemije korona virusa na aktivizam i rad društvenih pokreta i organizacija, promene i prilagođavanja**

Jedno od ključnih pitanja jeste i kako su pandemija i državne mere povodom iste uticale na rad i delovanje društvenih pokreta. Glavni utisak ispitanika jeste da su državne mere povodom pandemije sa jedne strane otežale bavljenje

aktivizmom, a sa druge strane pokrenula nova društvena pitanja „na koje država nije adekvatno reagovala“. Stoga ne čudi činjenica da dolazi i do stvaranja novih društvenih pokreta - dvoje ispitanika deo su novih udruženja formiranih tokom same pandemije.

Tokom analize odgovora ispitanika uočava se da svi ističu nejasne informacije koje su dobijali od države. S tim u vezi, jedan ispitanik ističe da su mere države „*uticale zbunjujuće zbog nepreciznih informacija*“, kao i da su „*najveći problem u radu predstavljale nejasne i neblagovremene informacije Kriznog štaba*“.

Pandemija je dovela do nekoliko ključnih promena u radu proučavanih društvenih pokreta. Kod nekih društvenih pokreta dolazi do preusmeravanja na druge aktivnosti. Tako jedan od ispitanika naglašava kako „*neke od aktivnosti za koje imamo projektna sredstva su potpuno ispremeštane pa smo morali da se bavimo i administracijom i revizijom budžeta umesto aktivizmom*“, a drugi kako se „*aktivizam više usmerio na neke društvene probleme koji su pogoršani pandemijom, okretanje lokalnim problemima, jačanje aktivizma na polju životne sredine i čistog okruženja*“.

No, sa druge strane, kod nekih društvenih pokreta dolazi i do demotivacije, što se vidi u sledećem odgovoru ispitanika: „*Sem što nas je to demotivisalo, jer nismo bili sigurni da ćemo ikada moći ponovo da organizujemo, lokalni saradnici su se jako razočarali i neki čak okrivili nas da je trebalo da održimo događaj uprkos zavedenom lokalnom vanrednom stanju zbog pandemije.*“

Može se zaključiti da su društveni pokreti morali da se prilagode novonastaloj situaciji. Sa jedne strane pandemija je omogućila priliv novih ljudi u same organizacije ( „*više slobodnog vremena nego u normalnoj situaciji je dalo*

*ljudima prostor da se priključe različitim pokretima“), dok su sa druge strane državne mere u znatnoj meri otežale i donekle zaustavile rad proučavanih organizacija. Posebne teškoće u organizaciji rada uslovalo je uvođenje zabrane kretanja u popodnevnim časovima, što se najviše odrazilo na društvene pokrete koji su svakodnevno volontirali na terenu dopremajući namirnice i druge potrebe ugroženim građanima.*

### 3. Online aktivizam

Svi ispitanici ističu da su njihovi kolektivi u određenoj meri prešli na korišćenje online platformi, često isključivo u organizaciji online sastanaka, sa ciljem odgovornije međusobne komunikacije onda kada ona uključuje veći broj ljudi. Jedan ispitanik ističe i da je organizacija, čiji je član, uvidela potencijal premeštanja u online prostor pokretanjem sopstvene digitalne platforme: *„S obzirom na to da je bilo jasno da će naredni period naših života biti okrenut prvenstveno ka internetu, brzo smo pokrenuli našu internet platformu za participativno građenje politika od strane građana. Tamo smo diskutovali o raznim temama, što aktuelnim za situaciju koja nas je zadesila, što aktuelnim za situaciju koju živimo godinama.“*

Kao ključne prednosti „digitalizacije“ rada društvenih pokreta, ispitanici ističu brz protok informacija i olakšanu komunikaciju sa ljudima iz različitih gradova i širom javnošću. Budući da doprinosi većoj vidljivosti informacija i aktivnosti: *„lakše je dopreti do velikog broja ljudi i predstaviti svoju viziju i svoj program.“* Istovremeno, aktivisti ističu brojna ograničenja i nedostatke online komunikacije: *„Prilikom “digitalnog” organizovanja lakše dolazi do šuma u*

*komunikaciji i značajno se teže prave odnosi poverenja između aktivista, koji su neophodni za funkcionisanje kolektiva.”; „Čini mi se da je ipak živa reč nezamenjiva. Ako bih morao da biram online ili offline, to bi svakako bilo offline.”; „Neke grupe koje inače slabo koriste internet su prelaskom na online aktivizam još više izolovane i oduzet im je glas.”; „Grupa ljudi sa kojima saradujemo većinom ne živi u Beogradu, u proseku je sredovečna populacija i nije zainteresovana za webinare, Zoom sastanke, Skype, itd. pa je sa njima kontakt drastično proređen ili odražavan telefonom.“* Kao poseban problem „digitalizacije” aktivističkog rada ističe se pasivizacija ljudi: *„Ostavljanje komentara osude/podrške po društvenim mrežama doprinosi tome da se bunt/podrška često završi sa tim komentarima. Osoba ima lažni osećaj da je preduzela konkretnu akciju.”; „Pasivizuje ljude u smislu da se često aktivizam zadržava samo na digitalnim platformama i svodi na ‘kliktivizam’.”*

Ovim ispitanici upućuju na savremenu društvenu pojavu poznatiju i kao „hashtag” ili „e-aktivizam” koja kritički ukazuje na uticaj koji internet kampanje „podizanja svesti” (uglavnom vođene od strane javnih ličnosti) imaju na kreiranje lažnog osećaja učinka, realnog doprinosa zajednici ili rešenja određenog problema. Budući da je suština društvenih pokreta u njihovom aktivističkom radu koji podrazumeva direktne akcije u fizičkom prostoru (protesti, blokade, sprečavanje prinudnih deložacija, dopremanje namirnica ugroženim društvenim grupama), očekivano je da ispitanici kritički sagledavaju premeštanje aktivističkog rada u online prostore.

## 4. Aktivnosti za vreme pandemije

Svi intervjuisani ispitanici ističu da su njihovi kolektivi imali aktivnosti za vreme pandemije korona virusa i trajanja vanrednog stanja. Kao što smo prethodno naveli, dva društvena pokreta iz uzorka od ukupno intervjuisanih pet, su i nastala tokom vanrednog stanja, od kojih je jedan nastao kao direktan odgovor na nametnuta pitanja - pripremanja i dopremanja obroka i drugih namirnica za beskućnike i ugrožene porodice i pojedince. Aktivnosti su u slučajevima pokreta koji se bave socijalnim temama podrazumevale direktne akcije pružanja pomoći ugroženim građanima: „*Svaki dan smo nabavljali namirnice, pripremali i delili gotove obroke na punktu i nosili smo pakete sa namirnicama porodicama koje su imale mogućnosti da samostalno pripremaju oborke. Sve naše aktivnosti su bile direktno povezane za mere države.*”; „*Krov se tokom vanrednog stanja intenzivno bavio raznošenjem paketa pomoći (hrana, higijena, lekovi, odeća, obuća itd.) socijalno ugroženim pojedincima i porodicama, nehigijenskim i ostalim zapostavljenim naseljima, beskućnicima itd.*”

Takođe, akcije koje su neposredno vezane za kontekst pandemije i vanrednog stanja ističe i ispitanik koji je član intervjuisanog građanskog pokreta: „*Za ugrožene medicinske radnike, a potom i različite druge koji su na udaru (prodavce, apotekare, ali i solidarno za građane Zagreba koji su u tom momentu bili pogođeni i zemljotresom) pokrenuli smo lavinu aplauza svakog dana u 8 časova. Širili smo što više proverenih informacija o pandemiji, iskustva iz drugih zemalja, pozivali smo sugrađane da stave spremno obaveštenje u svoje ulaze i ponude pomoć starijim komšijama i komšinicama. Apelovali smo na odlaganje izbora. Na dan kad je prvobitno trebalo da budu održani*



izbori, 25. aprila, pozvali smo ljude da nakon aplauza za medicinske radnike upute glasan krik, naprave buku, puste muziku, kako bi iskazali nezadovoljstvo sa autoritarnim tendencijama koje je vlast pokazivala brutalnije nego ikada do sada, primer: hapšenje novinarka koja je pisala o stanju u bolnicama. Predlagali smo da se žute trake daju biciklistima, jer je i zdravije i veća je potreba usled pandemije.“

Aktivnosti ostalih pokreta variraju i uključuju raznolike akcije, indirektno uslovljene pandemijom, od: „direktno organizovana (re)akcija na politički donetu odluku da se zainteresovana javnost spreči da prisustvuje javnoj raspravi je bilo pomaganje okupljenim građanima da popune i na pisarnici lokalne samouprave ostave pisane primedbe povodom kršenja njihovih građanskih prava da se prisustvom javnoj raspravi odazovu zakonom zagaranovanim načinu učešća u procesima donošenja odluka” do aktivnosti „u vezi sa blokadom institucija zbog pandemije koje više nego inače negiraju odgovornost i odlažu odgovore (npr. o informacijama od javnog značaja), donošenje zakona, menjanje dokumenata, konstituisanje lokalnih skupština itd.” Jedna organizacija je „nakon brutalnog prebijanja i hapšenja demonstranata na protestima ispred Skupštine (...), organizovala više protesta na kojima su izneti zahtevi za oslobađanje političkih zatvorenika”, budući da su među uhapšenima bila i tri člana ove organizacije.

Možemo zaključiti da varijacije u aktivnostima društvenih pokreta za vreme vanrednog stanja ne zavise toliko od promena uslovljenih pandemijom, već zavise od varijacija u njihovim aktivnostima za vreme redovnog stanja, odnosno od tema koje pokrivaju i tipova akcija kojima su inače skloniji. Tako se performativne aktivnosti (aplauz i buka sa balkona, peticije, online kampanje) i u kontekstu korone vezuju za građanske pokrete, direktne solidarne akcije pomoći

ugroženima za socijalne, a one na nivou zagovaranja promena politika i regulacija za ekološke pokrete.

## 5. Solidarnost

Pojam solidarnosti ispitanici definišu na slične načine: „*Solidarnost je odgovornost ljudi u okviru neke socijalne zajednice (grad npr.) da priskoče u pomoć onom delu zajednice koji je socijalno ugrožen.*”; „*Solidarnost predstavlja uzajamnu pomoć članova društva koja nema za glavni cilj sticanje kulturnog i simbolčkog kapitala. Solidarni činovi, osim direktne pomoći pojedincima i grupama, stvaraju osećaj zajedništva i pripadanja jednom društvu.*”; „*Solidarnost za nas znači pružanje pomoći i podrške, bez ličnih interesa i/ili skrivenih agendi.*” Nekoliko ispitanika je istaklo razliku između „lažne” i „istinske” solidarnosti, koju mere direktnim akcijama, odnosno konkretnim činovima podrške i pomoći: „*Nažalost, termin solidarnost se često koristi i kao floskula i to najčešće baš u krugovima ljudi i organizacija kojima upotreba ovog termina služi za samopromociju i sopstveni interes. Prava solidarnost je istinsko pomaganje ljudima u zajednici, reagovanje na nepravdu i situacije koje ugrožavaju druge ljude i druga bića*”; „*Solidarnost je dobila obaveznu notu konkretizacije, akcije umesto dosadašnjeg apstraktnog tapšanja po ramenu koje više nije dovoljno.*”

Po pitanju odnosa ličnih činova solidarnosti i reakcije države na pandemiju, ispitanici se slažu u utisku da je društvo zamenilo državu solidarnošću „odozdo”.

„*Lični primeri solidarnosti su se pokazali kao jedini model*

na koji su pojedinci i aktivistički kolektivi mogli da se ugledaju i oslone. Ljudi su se najviše samoorganizovali i solidarisali bez podrške države i lokalnih vlasti.”; „Ljudi su za vreme vandrednog stanja pokazali visok stepen solidarnosti upravo na problemima gde je izostala adekvatna reakcija države. Najugroženiji članovi društva (beskućnici, neformalno zaposleni, višečlane porodice...) su dobili najmanje pažnje od strane države, a mere borbe protiv pandemije su njih najteže pogađale.” Nesolidarnost državne reakcije vide u insistiranju na održavanju parlamentarnih izbora u toku vanrednog stanja, optuživanju građana „od penzionera do studenata” za rasplamsavanje pandemije, te izostanku brige o najugroženijim članovima društva: „(beskućnici, neformalno zaposleni, višečlane porodice...) su dobili najmanje pažnje od strane države, a mere borbe protiv pandemije su njih najteže pogađale.” Mere koje je država sprovodila, a koje se mogu tumačiti kao solidarne (isplata jednokratne pomoći u iznosu od 100 evra punoletnim građanima i građankama, organizacija volonterskih službi na nivou lokalne samouprave), ispitanici razumeju kao populističke poteze vlasti u predizbornoj kampanji i kontraproduktivne pokušaje kooptiranja spontanog građanskog aktivizma: „u nekim gradovima su se građani preko društvenih mreža organizovali za pružanje pomoći starijim i ugroženim sugrađanima, pa su lokalni krizni štabovi intervenisali brendiranjem i uniformisanjem volontera, što je mnoge prvobitne volontere odvratilo od takvog vida organizovanog učešća u akcijama”. Na pitanje da li je i na kom nivou solidarnost bila podsticana i ometana, neki od ispitanika ističu da je država direktno ometala solidarnost uoči izbora „budući da je Krizni štab stao uz političke odluke da se predizborne aktivnosti nesmetano održavaju, uprkos svim indikatorima koji su pokazivali da

*virus još uvek cirkuliše među populacijom. Solidarnost je najviše ometala vlast, organizujući lažnu pomoć ugroženim sugrađanima, a potom ih vodeći na različite mitinge i kontramitinge.*“ Najvećeg krivca za dovođenje u opasnost kako medicinskog osoblja, tako i stanovništva, prepoznaju u Kriznom štabu, odnosno politizaciji njegovog rada koja je rezultirala oglašavanjem nepotpunih i netačnih informacija o broju zaraženih i dostupnim kapacitetima u pogledu tehničke opremljenosti zdravstvenih ustanova. Primere podsticanja solidarnosti „odozgo”, ispitanici ne prepoznaju. Zanimljivo je da je argument pandemije i zabrinutosti zbog širenja virusa među stanovništvom korišćen od strane vlasti onda kada je trebalo sprečiti okupljanja građanja organizovanih u borbi za svoja prava, npr. prilikom sprečavanja prisustva javnoj raspravi ili prilikom izlaska na proteste, a ignorisan prilikom organizovanja predizbornih aktivnosti, utakmica i samih izbora. Zanimljivo je i da se sama pandemija pokazuje istovremeno i kao podsticaj i kao prepreka solidarnosti, sa jedne strane usmeravajući ljude u zajednici jedne ka drugima, sa druge otežavajući to usmeravanje i bliskost, budući da su „izolovani bili još izolovaniji”.

## 6. Poverenje

Na pitanje gde prepoznaju „niše poverenja” u ukupnom kontekstunepoverenja u jugoistočnoj Evropi, dvoje ispitanika su odgovorili sa „ne znam”. Ispitanici koji na pitanje jesu odgovorili, jednoglasno ističu da se poverenje prepoznaje na lokalnom - mikro nivou, jedinstvenim „*alternativnim mestima*”, „*budžacima*”, da je „*svako našao svoju nišu poverenja*”. Ovo nam pokazuje da se poverenje tumači relativno, da su prostori poverenja personalizovani i

subjektivni, dok se o poverenju u institucije, državu, vlast, tradicionalne kolektive i makro strukture ne govori. Poverenje prepoznaju „na istom mestu gde možemo govoriti i o istinskoj solidarnosti među građanima i građankama: u zgradama, komšilucima, na lokalnu, novim lokalnim organizacijama i pokretima koji oslušuju potrebe ljudi i deluju prema tome zajedno sa njima.“

Svi ispitanici ističu da društveni pokreti imaju izrazito veliku ulogu i značaj u podsticanju solidarnosti i poverenja u društvu. U pogledu načina na koji je ove ideje moguće pretvoriti u društveno i političko poverenje kao osnove solidarnosti u društvu, slažu se da je takav poduhvat moguć, s tim da jedni ističu da takav rad iziskuje dugotrajan proces, puno strpljenja, dobru strategiju, drugi komunikaciju i koheziju među već postojećim akterima, a treći smatraju da bez izgradnje „političkog aktera koji radi na artikulaciji ideje i praktičnoj izgradnji solidarnosti među ljudima nije moguće da se postigne nivo solidarnosti koji je u stanju da se izbori sa potrebama društva i da zameni narativ i zadovolji potrebe kojima državni sistem nije sposoban da izađe u susret.“ Zanimljivo je da se iskrenost i konkretne akcije, kao specifična osobina i politički pojam ponavlja u odgovorima ispitanika: „lični primer, direktne i konkretne akcije, tako da narod prepozna iskrene namere“. Upravo se iskrenost u pogledu namera ističe kao ono što čini razliku između tradicionalnih političkih partija, institucija u koje ljudi gube poverenje sa jedne, i društvenih pokreta i lokalnih inicijativa sa druge strane: „Društveni pokreti moraju popuniti ulogu tamo gde su tradicionalne političke partije zakazale. Nepoverenje svakako jeste jedna od osnovnih odlika koje narod gaji prema političkim akterima, sa punim pravom, iz višedecenijskog iskustva obmanjivanja i stezanja

*kaiša, a bogaćenja pojedinaca. Društveni pokreti tu nastupaju iskrenošću, povezanošću sa ljudima iz zajednice, povećanom participacijom i brigom. Iz brige i načina odlučivanja unutar samih društvenih pokreta, rađa se i veća solidarnost ka ugroženim društvenim grupama.”*

## **7. Vizije budućnosti**

Na pitanje kako vide „aktivizam budućnosti”, odnosno promene u društvenom organizovanju uzrokovane pandemijom korona virusa, ispitanici su saglasni u tome da suštinskih promena neće biti. *„Osim toga što je pandemija ogolila sistem, i navela ljude da razmišljaju o većem sopstevnom angažovanju, mislim da se sami vidovi aktivizma neće menjati, već će postojeći načini samo biti pojačani i vidljiviji”; „(...) ne mora nužno da se promeni.”; „Ne mislim da će aktivističke grupe značajno da promene način funkcionisanja usled direktnih posledica pandemije”; „Aktivizam će se prilagoditi i uvek postojati, ali uživo udruživanje i direktna akcija nikada neće biti prevaziđeni. Digitalizacija je samo alat.”*

Ono što ispitanici primećuju kao novo je rast društvenog aktivizma u pogledu lokalnih pobuna, borbi, ali i zajedničkog solidarnog samoorganizovanja: *„Ljudi vide da smo nakon svega osuđeni jedni na druge, da moramo da gajimo odnose sa našim komšijama, da je važno da možemo da se oslonimo na nekog u blizini. Deluje da svest ljudi o lokalnim pitanjima krucijalnim za svakodnevni život raste, te da se sve veći broj uključuje u razne lokalne inicijative i grupe. Ljudi počinju da shvataju da je sve to politika, od parkića ispred zgrade, do nekih ‘većih’ tema.”*

Takođe, prevaziđenim ističu *„tradicionalna udruživanja u*

*dugoročne saveze sa složenim procedurama i mehanizmima odlučivanja”, dok očekuju da će biti „više direktnog pomaganja ljudima koji su socijalno ugroženi, dok je sasvim izvesno da će biti sve više borbi protiv zagađenja životne sredine i protiv represivnih sistema, a to sve može da iznedri neke potpuno nove načine organizovanja.“* Zanimljiv je i odgovor ispitanika koji upućuje na suprotan zaključak: *„među ljudima će postojati izvesna rezervisanost da učestvuju u npr. bliskom radu sa socijalno ugroženim ljudima”,* usled straha od širenja virusa direktnim kontaktom ili psihičke barijere uzrokovane dugotrajnim socijalnim distanciranjem u fizičkom prostoru. Neki od ispitanika ističu i nepredvidivost u obliku, ali izvesnost društvenog aktivizma u budućnosti, kako u Srbiji tako i globalno, budući da pored zdravstvene krize društvo očekuje i udar ekonomske krize i velike recesije.

# I ZAVRŠNA RAZMATRANJA

Globalna pandemija korona virusa od marta ove godine ostavlja brojne posledice po srpsko društvo u celini. Mere nastale kao odgovor države na pandemiju, poput uvođenja vanrednog stanja, ograničavanja i zabrane kretanja, zatvaranja radnji, pogodile su veliki broj građana. Društveni pokreti imali su aktivnu ulogu u pokušaju smanjivanja posledica pandemije po najugroženije društvene grupe, a između ostalog došlo je i do razvoja novih načina organizovanja. Stoga ne čude rezultati istraživanja koji ukazuju da su ispitani društveni pokreti uspeli da se brzo i efikasno prilagode promenjenoj društvenoj situaciji.

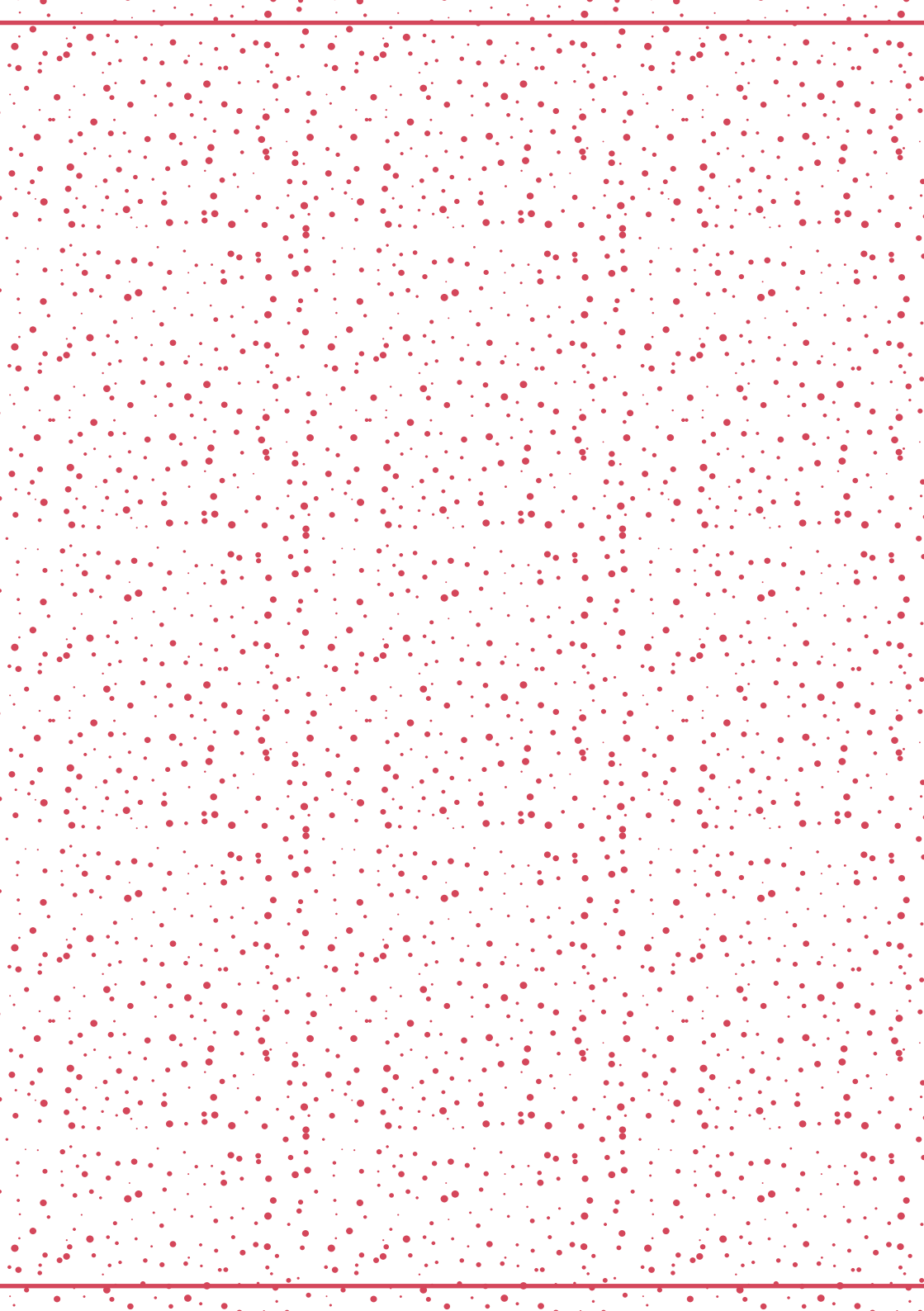
U ovoj studiji, fokus proučavanja bio je usmeren na nekoliko ključnih tema: odgovor društvenih pokreta na pandemiju i državne mere, prilagodljivost promenama i online aktivizam, aktivnosti za vreme pandemije, stavovi društvenih pokreta po pitanju solidarnosti i poverenja kao i načini na koje oni sagledavaju buduće mogućnosti organizovanja.

Uviđamo da je pandemija ostavila veliki uticaj na rad proučavanih društvenih pokreta u Srbiji u ovom periodu. Neki su uspeli da se prilagode izmenjenoj situaciji, dok je kod drugih došlo do javljanja demotivisanosti usled otkazivanja brojnih unapred pripremljenih događaja. Pokretima je onemogućeno dugoročno planiranje aktivnosti usled državnih mera, a štaviše i usled promenljivih i nejasnih informacija koje dobijaju od države. Prilagođavanje je bilo dvojakog karaktera. Sa jedne strane, društveni pokreti menjali su čak i formu svog delovanja (usled nemogućnosti da obavljaju svoje standardne akcije), a sa druge strane, bili



su prinuđeni da se donekle okrenu online platformama. Iako su svi društveni pokreti obuhvaćeni istraživanjem preselili aktivnosti u online prostor, digitalne platforme koristili su najčešće isključivo za međusobnu komunikaciju. Zanimljivo je i da su svi ispitani društveni pokreti (i oni koji nisu prvenstveno ekološki) počeli da se aktivnije bave pitanjem zdravlja i zaštite životne sredine. Društveni pokreti uspeali su da se prilagode novonastaloj situaciji, prvenstveno zasnivajući svoj aktivizam na konkretnim potrebama društvene zajednice. U pogledu tipova aktivnosti, zaključujemo da se one razlikuju u zavisnosti od uobičajenih aktivističkih „preferencija” datih pokreta, odnosno da aktivnosti po svom karakteru nisu značajnije izmenjene pod uticajem pandemije: pokreti skloniji direktnim akcijama praktikovali su direktne akcije i za vreme vanrednog stanja. Pojmove solidarnosti i poverenja ispitanici tumače na slične načine, ističući nepoverenje u nesolidarne državne institucije i vlast, dok „niše poverenja” prepoznaju u solidarnim lokalnim zajednicama, pokretima i inicijativama koje konkretnim akcijama „odozdo” daju svetle primere iskrene solidarnosti.

Ovi podaci samo donekle osvetljavaju mehanizme kojima su društveni pokreti u Srbiji odgovorili na pandemiju. Kako bi se stekla potpunija slika organizovanja društvenih pokreta tokom pandemije, neophodno je proširiti ispitivani uzorak na ostale delove zemlje. Takođe, rano je za zaključke iz „post corona” perspektive, budući da se udar trećeg talasa epidemije u Srbiji svakodnevno iščekuje. No, opšti rezultati studije svakako ukazuju da perspektive budućnosti aktivizma nakon pandemije u Srbiji ostaju, sa jedne strane, nepredvidive u pogledu potencijalnog javljanja određenih akcija i reakcija, njihovog karaktera i oblika, ali, sa druge strane, i izvesne u pogledu „preživljavanja” društvenog aktivizma i njegovog jačanja.



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**COVID - 19  
PANDEMIC  
A GAME  
CHANGER  
FOR CIVIC  
ACTIVISM  
IN SERBIA?**

Impact, consequences and  
changes in the activist realm

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# INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic of the SarsCov2 virus spilled over into Serbia in early March. The first officially confirmed case of infection was recorded on March 6, and four days later, the Government of the Republic of Serbia reacted by passing the “Decision on declaring the COVID-19 disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus a contagious disease.” The first measures aimed at preventing further spread of the coronavirus were taken on March 12, when the Minister of Health issued an “Order banning gatherings in the Republic of Serbia in public places indoors,” which included a ban on gatherings of more than 100 people in public places. The next step, which made the course of regular life in Serbia the most difficult, began on March 15, when a state of emergency was declared, during which, three days later, an “Order on restriction of free movement of persons on the territory of the Republic of Serbia” was issued. After its adoption, the Order underwent four changes, which in various ways determined measures of restriction and prohibition of movement of citizens. Prior to the first change, citizens over the age of 65 (and in places with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, citizens over the age of 70) were completely prohibited from leaving their households, while movement for all other citizens was prohibited from 8 pm to 5 am. The amendments also introduced occasional movement permits for the oldest, as well as pets owners, but conversely also more rigorous measures, such as a ban on entering parks and public areas, or a complete curfew on weekends (Saturday at 1 pm to Monday at 5 am). The prohibition was accompanied

by interruption in public transport in Belgrade and Serbia, closure of shopping centers and catering facilities. The measures provoked divided opinions in the public, until the state of emergency was lifted on May 6.

Other measures were eased, despite worrying statistics on the number of infected and information provided by independent media about the situation on the ground, i.e. the collapse of the health system in numerous cities and municipalities in Serbia. Part of the public interpreted the lifting of the state of emergency as an irresponsible political decision of the authorities with the aim of creating conditions for holding the planned parliamentary elections and the pre-election campaign, which included rallies and other forms of public gatherings. Some opposition parties launched a campaign to boycott the “fake” elections, due to epidemiological concerns, but also other irregular election conditions. A suspicion of government irresponsibility during the election campaign proved to be justified, according to a BIRN survey published on June 22, the day after the election. The research presented information according to which the number of people infected with the corona virus was many times higher than the one that was officially released to the public. The only comments received on this occasion by members of the Crisis Team or the Government, presented the research as a mere conspiracy theory. The disclosure of this information, as well as the reactions of the authorities, additionally undermined the trust of the citizens and increased dissatisfaction that manifested on the streets a little more than two weeks later.

## Social self-organization in response to a social crisis

Measures restricting and prohibiting free movement, closure of shops and catering facilities, as well as the interruption of public transport, affected a large number of citizens, and the consequences of the entire period were felt even after the state of emergency was terminated. In parallel with activist groups that tried to work in various ways to reduce the negative consequences for the most endangered, new forms of social organizing were developed.

Groups on the social network Facebook turned out to be a very effective method during the lockdown. For example, the group “*Assistance to fellow citizens in quarantine – Serbia*” which provided self-organization of citizens ready to help buy food, hygiene products and other necessities to those who were affected by the prohibition (such as persons over the age of 65). Similarly, the group “*Workers for a Just Society*” served as a channel through which workers could inform each other of violations of labor rights and consult legal experts. Or indeed the group “*Small food producers in Serbia,*” which marketed small food producers’ products.

In some factories, there was an organized worker response to companies’ non-compliance with prescribed hygiene and safety measures. The best-known case was the company Jura, whose workers launched a warning strike across three factories (in Leskovac, Niš, and Rača), refusing to enter the factory halls until they were sure they would be safe from

virus. Considering that all this was happening during a state of emergency when public gatherings were banned, one of the most prominent participants in the warning strikes – Slaviša Pajović – was taken-in to custody by the police. The situation repeated in the company Magna Seating from Odžak, where the day-shift workers went on a one-hour warning strike on August 10, demanding a meeting with the company heads and PCR testing for all factory workers. The immediate reason for the strike were the deaths of two workers from the COVID-19, after which, there was a suspicion among other workers that many more of them were infected than the official number announced by the company.

Dissatisfied with the general position into which healthcare system was brought during the pandemic, a group of doctors decided to organize an informal initiative. Putting forward a petition that collected almost 3,000 signatures, the group of doctors, “*United Against Covid*,” addressed an open letter looking for solutions to the “health catastrophe” in which the state found itself due to the COVID-19 virus.

However, the most prominent response to the state’s handling of the epidemic came in the form of several-day, mass demonstrations in Belgrade and Novi Sad, culminating in physical clashes between demonstrators and the police. The immediate reason for the outbreak of the demonstrations was the announcement of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, in his July 7 address that public gatherings of more than five people would be banned starting the next day, and that a curfew lasting the entire weekend would begin again on July 10. That same evening, thousands of citizens gathered in front of the Assembly building to protest against the introduction of

the curfew, which ended in riots lasting until after midnight. The demonstrations continued in the following days, and a large number of people were arrested and convicted by expedited process and transferred to prison. This in turn caused a new wave of dissatisfaction in solidarity with the arrested. Under pressure from the public, some of the arrested demonstrators were released entirely or on bail.

## Sample

The written questionnaire was sent to members of five activist groups from Serbia: *Don't Let Belgrade D(rown)*,<sup>1</sup> *Joint Action: Roof over the Head*,<sup>2</sup> *Right to Water*,<sup>5</sup> *Air is not a commodity*,<sup>3</sup> and *Solidarity Kitchen*.<sup>4</sup> Respondents were active members of these groups, mostly delegated to complete the questionnaire by the collective or recommended by the snowball method as members who were active in the group during the state of emergency. The activist groups participating in the research were selected according to the topics they covered (environmental, socio-economic, civic), type of activist practices (direct actions), and activities during the corona virus pandemic. We included both

1 "Don't Let Belgrade D(rown)" is a local political movement that brings together a large number of people interested in improving the living and working conditions of all our citizens, improving, preserving and fair use of common and natural resources, building democratic institutions, sustainable city development, urban and cultural policy and citizen involvement in the development of their environment (taken from: <https://nedavimobeograd.rs/o-nama/>)

2 "Joint Action: Roof over the Head" is a self-organized collective that gathers people united in the fight for the right to housing (downloaded from: <https://zakrovnadglavom.org/onama/>).

3 "Air is not a Commodity" is an informal collective from Zrenjanin united in the fight against the pollution of the Linglong tire factory on the environment (taken from: <https://www.facebook.com/vazduhnijeroba>).



organizations founded prior to the pandemic that adapted their activities for it, as well as those established during the pandemic. Solidarity Kitchen is a collective that cannot be classified as an activist group (in a way that is possible for other activist groups in the sample), but was selected anyway because its establishment was representative of self-organized solidarity “from below” in the context of the corona virus pandemic in Serbia. The original intention was for the sample to include three groups from Belgrade and two from other cities in Serbia. Since we did not receive an answer from the representatives of the group *Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina*, we addressed the questionnaire to a member of the Belgrade *Right to Water*<sup>5</sup> group, which deals with the same topic – the fight against the construction of mini hydroelectric powerplants across Serbia. The final structure of the sample consists of four activist groups from Belgrade and one from Zrenjanin.

We believe that this sample structure more realistically depicts the situation of uneven representation of activist groups in Serbian cities and their concentration in the capital. We recognize the causes of such a situation in population migrations from smaller cities to Belgrade, smaller numbers of educated young people in other Serbian cities, and their lower levels of social, cultural, and economic capital and other resources. It must be taken

4 “Solidarity Kitchen” is an independent collective that provides food and other forms of assistance to those who need it most. Solidarna kuhinja collective was formed out of the need to respond to pervasive problems of poverty and hunger, especially pronounced in crises, through solidarity and mutual assistance (taken from: <https://solidarnakuhinja.org/o-nama/>).

5 “The Right to Water” is a network that brings together organizations and individuals united in the fight for access to water, against the privatization of water, water resources and the construction of derivation mini hydroelectric powerplants (downloaded from: <https://pravonavodu.weebly.com/o-nama.html>).

into consideration that the sample did not include cities that were particularly affected by the pandemic, such as Novi Pazar, Tutin and Sjenica. We tried to include equally formally registered NGOs and citizens' associations, as well as informal collectives and unregistered initiatives. In addition to the framework division into thematic units that activist groups cover with their work, such as civic, socio-economic and environmental, it is important to point out that the selected groups address issues related to basic human needs: air, water, food, shelter, public space.

## | Analysis

### **1. Social reaction to the Government Crisis Team measures and state of emergency**

All surveyed activists groups emphasize the impaired functioning caused by the COVID-19 virus. Thus, one of the respondents believes that the pandemic “brought insecurity, confusion, anxiety,” another concludes that their organization “has declined especially for those (groups, ed.) who otherwise do not base their activism on social networks.” The general view shared by respondents is that the pandemic has caused a decline in organization and a shift to online platforms (mostly in terms of communication which will be discussed in the next chapter).

Respondents believe that the key social reaction to the pandemic is actually general dissatisfaction in society regarding the measures of the Government Crisis Team/ State, which was further deepened by the organization of elections. Several see the culmination of general

dissatisfaction in the July protests, emphasizing their spontaneity (“the most significant response of society occurred at the July protests which were not initiated by any organization, but showed the general dissatisfaction with state measures and the new crisis”), but also vaguely formulated goals. One respondent felt that there were several main reactions: “some expected better organization and stronger measures, some better implementation of existing measures and equal treatment of closures for private companies, others claimed that measures were aimed at discipline and autocracy, others thought that corona is a global conspiracy and has nothing to do with them and it is necessary for the state to leave them alone with ‘its’ measures.” Regarding the protests themselves, he believes that *“oddly, they gathered all the above positions, and it was not clear what the goals and sought outcomes were, the only thing that was clear was that the dissatisfaction among the people was huge, unfortunately that is also how they ended: unclear.”*

In addition, all respondents emphasize the lack of reaction of major activist groups and organizations and emphasize the role of “small and mostly informal activist groups” who were “far more supportive, mobilizing in ad hoc groups to help the directly vulnerable (senior citizens, people with disabilities, health workers, collectors of secondary raw materials).”

When it comes to the social problems highlighted by the pandemic, all respondents believe that the pandemic has actually brought to light already existing social problems. In this regard, one of the respondents believes that the pandemic “exposed the various spheres of our society and showed the system in all its weakness.” “Health, education, social policy, destruction of natural resources,

all this is less important to the current regime than some megalomaniacal project.” Respondents point out the institutions of healthcare, the social protection system, as well as education as particularly problematic areas.

The issue that the pandemic additionally exposed is environmental protection. Some respondents point to the problem of disposable medical waste management such as masks, gloves, bottles, etc. In addition, the harmful consequences of local tourism are emphasized. One of the respondents notes pollution as their concern, aware that we are losing these natural “shelters” from the problems of modern life, the connection of physical and mental health with the environment.

Interestingly, respondents relate the environmental aspect to a broader framework of physical and mental health. According to one of the respondents, “the pandemic has additionally exposed the problems related to loneliness, mental hygiene and hygiene in general.” In that way, the pandemic also caused activist groups that are not primarily ecological to deal more actively with the issue of health and the environment.

## **2. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on activism and the work of activist groups and organizations; change and adaptation**

One of the key questions is how the pandemic and state measures affected the work and activities of activist groups. The main impression of the respondents is that the state measures regarding the pandemic, on the one hand, made

it more difficult to engage in activism, and on the other hand, raised new social issues “to which the state did not adequately react.” Therefore, it is not surprising that new activist groups are being created – two respondents are part of new associations formed during the pandemic.

Analysis of the respondents’ answers showed that they received unclear information from the state. In this regard, one respondent says of the state’s measures “had a confusing effect due to inaccurate information,” as well as that “the biggest problem in the work was unclear and untimely information from the Government Crisis Team.”

The pandemic led to several key changes in the work of these activist groups. In some, there was a redirection to other activities. Thus, one of the respondents emphasizes that “funds for some activities have have been completely re-allocated, so we had to deal with administration and budget revision instead of activism;” another said that “activism focused more on some social problems exacerbated by the pandemic, turning to local problems, strengthening activism in the field of environment.”

On the other hand, however, some activist groups were demoralized, which can be seen in the following answer: “Apart from the fact that it demoralized us, because we were not sure that we would ever be able to organize again, local associates were very disappointed and some even blamed us for holding events against emergency rules.”

The conclusion drawn is that activist groups had to adapt to the new situation. On the one hand, the pandemic enabled an influx of new people into the organizations themselves (“more free time gave people space to join various movements”), while on the other hand, state measures significantly hindered and somewhat stopped

the work of the studied organizations. Particular difficulties were caused by the introduction of the afternoon curfew, which mostly affected the organizations whose work was quotidian, delivering food and other necessary items to vulnerable citizens.

### 3. Online activism

All respondents point out that their teams have, to some extent, switched to the use of online platforms, largely but sometimes exclusively for meetings, i.e. with the aim of more responsible internal communication that involves a larger number of people. One respondent points out that his organization saw the potential in moving online by launching its own digital platform: “Since it was clear that the next period of our lives will be focused primarily on the Internet, we quickly launched our online platform for participatory building policy by citizens. It allowed us to discuss various topics, both current for the situation that befell us, and current for the situation we have been living in for years.”

As key advantages of “digitalization” of activist groups, respondents point out the rapid flow of information, easier communication with people from different cities and the general public, as it contributes to greater visibility of information and activities: “it is easier to reach large numbers of people and present our vision and program.” At the same time, activists point out a number of limitations and shortcomings of online communication: “in ‘digital’ functioning, it is easier to have problems in communication and it is significantly more difficult to build trust between activists, which is necessary for the functioning of the

collective;” “it seems to me that speaking in person is irreplaceable;” “if I had to choose online or offline, it would definitely be offline;” “some groups that otherwise use the Internet poorly are even more isolated and deprived of their voice by switching to online activism;” “The group of people we work with mostly do not live in Belgrade, and are in general middle-aged and uninterested in webinars, zoom meetings, Skype, etc., so contact with them has drastically thinned or reflected by phone.” A particular problem of “digitalization” of activist work is the pacification of people: “leaving comments of condemnation/support on social networks contributes to rebellion/support often ends with those comments. The person has a false sense that they have taken concrete action;” “It makes people passive in the sense that activism often stays only on digital platforms and comes down to ‘clicktivism’.”

Respondents refer to a contemporary social phenomenon also known as “hashtag-” or “e-activism,” which critically considers the impact that internet “awareness-raising” campaigns (mostly led by public figures) have had on creating a false sense of agency, real contribution to the community or solving a particular problem. Since the essence of activist groups is their activism, which includes direct action in physical space (protests, blockades, prevention of forced evictions, delivery of food to vulnerable social groups), respondents are expected to be critical in considering moving activist work to online spaces.

## 4. Activities during a pandemic

All interviewees point out that their collectives were active during the coronavirus pandemic and throughout the state of emergency. As we mentioned earlier, two of the five examined activist groups even arose during the state of emergency; one was created as a direct response to the issues presented – preparation and delivery of food to the homeless and vulnerable families and individuals. In the case of groups dealing with social issues, activities included direct action to provide assistance to vulnerable citizens: “Every day we procured groceries, prepared and distributed ready-meals to the checkpoint and brought packages of groceries to families who had the opportunity to prepare their own meals. All our activities were directly related to the state measure;” “During the state of emergency, *Krov* intensively distributed aid packages (food, hygiene and medical products, clothes, shoes, etc.) to socially endangered individuals and families, going into unhygienic and other neglected settlements, the homeless, etc.” There was also activity directly related to the pandemic and the state of emergency : “For vulnerable medical workers and various others who are under attack [merchants, pharmacists, but also in solidarity with citizens of Zagreb affected by the earthquake at that moment] we started an avalanche of applause every evening at 8 o’clock. We disseminated as much verified information as possible about the pandemic, experiences from other countries, we invited our fellow citizens to put a notice in their building entrances to offer our help to older neighbors. We appealed for the postponement of elections. On April 25, the day the elections were originally scheduled for, we called on people



to applaud medical workers, shout loudly, make noise, play music to express dissatisfaction with the authoritarian tendencies that the government had shown more brutally than ever before. For example, the arrest of a journalist who wrote about the situation in hospitals. We suggested that yellow vests be given to cyclists, because it is healthier and there is a greater need due to the pandemic.”

The activities of other groups varied, indirectly conditioned by the pandemic. There was “a (re)action to the political decision to prevent the public from attending an open debate: collecting citizens’ objections regarding the violation of their civil rights to attend the legally guaranteed manner of participation in the decision-making processes by attending the public hearing;” along with activities “related to the blockade of institutions due to a pandemic that more than necessary deny responsibility and postpone answers (e.g. on information of public importance), passing laws, changing documents, constituting local assemblies, etc.” One organization, “after the brutal beating and arrest of the demonstrators at the protests in front of the Assembly (...), organized several protests at which demands were made for the release of political prisoners,” since three members of this organization were among those arrested.

The variations in activities among groups during the state of emergency depended less on the pandemic, and more on the differences in work in regular conditions, i.e. the issues covered and types of actions conducted. Thus, more civic-minded groups opted to conduct performative actions (applause and noise from the balcony, petitions, online campaigns); while groups dealing with environmental issues and advocating policy change opted for direct solidarity actions for the vulnerable.

## 5. Solidarity

Respondents define the concept of solidarity in similar ways: “solidarity is the responsibility of people within a social community (a city, for example) to come to the aid of that part of the community that is socially endangered;” “solidarity is mutual help of members of society that does not have as its main goal the acquisition of cultural and symbolic capital. Solidarity acts, in addition to directly helping individuals and groups, create a sense of community and belonging to one society;” “for us, solidarity means providing help and support, without personal interests and/or hidden agendas.” Several respondents pointed out the difference between “false” and “true” solidarity, which is measured by direct actions, i.e. concrete acts of support and assistance: “Unfortunately, the term solidarity is often used as a cliché; most often by people and in organizations where it serves self-promotion and self-interest. Real solidarity is truly helping people in the community, reacting to injustice and situations that endanger other people and other beings.”

Regarding the relationship between personal acts of solidarity and the reaction of the state to the pandemic, the respondents agree on the impression that society has replaced the state with solidarity “from below.

“Personal examples of solidarity have proven to be the only model that individuals and activist groups could emulate and rely on. People were mostly self-organized and showed solidarity without the support of the state and local authorities;” “during the state of emergency, people showed a high degree of solidarity precisely where

there was no adequate reaction from the state. The most vulnerable members of society (homeless, informally employed, large families...) received the least attention from the state and the measures to combat the pandemic hit them hardest.” Activists see the non-solidarity of the state in insisting on holding parliamentary elections right after the end of the state of emergency, accusing citizens “from pensioners to students” of causing a pandemic, and lack of care for the most endangered members of society: “(homeless, informally employed, large families) received the least attention from the state and the measures to fight the pandemic hit them hardest.” Measures taken by the state that could be interpreted as solidarity (one-time assistance in the amount of 100 Euros to every adult citizen, organization of volunteer services at the local government level), are understood by respondents as populist moves by a government running an election campaign, and counterproductive attempts to co-opt spontaneous civic activism: “in some cities, citizens organized through social networks to provide assistance to elderly and vulnerable fellow citizens, so local government crisis teams intervened by giving volunteers uniforms and badges, which deterred many original volunteers from this kind of organized participation in actions.” When asked whether and at what level solidarity was encouraged or hindered, some respondents pointed out that the state directly obstructed solidarity before the elections, “since the Government Crisis Team supported political decisions to allow campaign activities, despite all indicators that the virus was still circulating among the population. Solidarity was most hindered by the government, organizing false aid to endangered fellow citizens, and then leading them to various rallies and counter-rallies.” The biggest culprit for endangering both medical staff

and the population is considered the Crisis Team, i.e. the politicization of its work, which resulted in presenting incomplete and inaccurate information on the number of infected and technical equipment in available facilities. Examples of encouraging solidarity “from above” are not recognized by the respondents.

It is interesting that the ‘pandemic’ argument and concern of virus spread was used by the authorities only when it was necessary to prevent gatherings of citizens fighting for their rights, i.e. when preventing public debate or protest. It was ignored for campaign activities, football matches and the elections themselves. It is interesting that the pandemic itself proves to be both an incentive and an obstacle to solidarity: on the one hand directing people in the community towards each other, while on the other making it more difficult to bring together and be close, leaving “the isolated even more isolated.”

## 6. Trust

When asked where they recognize “trust niches” in the overall context of mistrust in Southeast Europe, two respondents answered “I don’t know.” Respondents who answered the question, unanimously point out that trust is recognized at the local – micro level, specific “alternative places,” “corners,” that “everyone has found their own niche of trust.” This shows us that trust is interpreted relatively, that spaces of trust are personalized and subjective, while trust in institutions, the state, government, traditional collectives and macro structures is not discussed. They recognize trust, “in the same place where we can talk about

true solidarity among citizens: in buildings, neighborhoods, locals, new local organizations and groups that listen to people's needs and act accordingly together with them.”

All respondents point out that activist groups have a very large role and importance in achieving solidarity and trust in society. Regarding the way in which these ideas can be turned into social and political trust as the basis of solidarity in society, they agree that such an endeavor is possible, with some emphasizing that such work requires a long process, a lot of patience, a good strategy; others cite communication and cohesion among existing actors; while others still believe that without building “a political actor working on the articulation of ideas and practical building of solidarity among people, it is not possible to achieve a level of solidarity that is able to cope with the needs of society and replace the narrative and meet the needs that the state system isn't able to meet.” It is interesting that sincerity and concrete actions, as a specific feature and a political concept, are repeated in the answers of the respondents: “personal example, direct and concrete actions, so that the people recognize sincere intentions.” It is honesty about intentions that stands out as the difference between traditional political parties – institutions in which people have lost trust – and activist groups and local initiatives, on the other: “activist groups must play a role in which traditional political parties have failed. Mistrust is certainly one of the basic qualities that the people cultivate towards political actors, with full right from the decades-long experience of deceiving and tightening their belts, but enriching individuals. Activist groups occur here with honesty, connection with people from the community, increased participation and care.

From concern with and the way of decision-making in the activist groups themselves, greater solidarity towards vulnerable social groups is born.”

## 7. Visions of the future

When asked how they see “activism of the future”, i.e. changes in social organization caused by the corona virus pandemic, the respondents agree that there will be no substantial changes. “Apart from the fact that the pandemic has exposed the system, and made people think of greater self-engagement, I think that the very forms of activism will not change, but the existing ways will only be strengthened and more visible;” “(...) not necessarily change;” “I don’t think activist groups will significantly change the way they function due to the direct consequences of a pandemic;” “activism will adapt and always exist, but live association and direct action will never be overcome. Digitization is just a tool.”

What the respondents notice as new is the growth of social activism in terms of local uprisings, struggles, but also joint solidarity self-organization is that: “people see that we are directed towards each other, that we must cultivate relations with our neighbors, that it is important for us to rely on someone nearby. It seems that people’s awareness of local issues crucial to everyday life is growing, and that an increasing number are getting involved in various local initiatives and groups. People are starting to realize that it’s all politics, from the park in front of the building, to some ‘bigger’ topics.” They also point out “traditional associations in long-term alliances with complex procedures and decision-making mechanisms” as

outdated, while they expect that there will be “more direct assistance to people who are socially endangered, while it is quite certain that there will be more and more struggles against environmental pollution and against repressive systems, and all this can give rise to some completely new ways of organizing.” The following answer of one of the respondents is also interesting, pointing to the opposite conclusion: “there will be a certain reserve among people willing to participate in, for example, close work with socially endangered people,” due to fear of the virus spreading by direct contact or even psychological barriers caused by long-term social distancing. Some of the respondents point out the unpredictability of form, but nevertheless the certainty of social activism in the future, both in Serbia and globally, since in addition to the health crisis, there is an expectation of an economic crisis and great recession.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The global corona virus pandemic since March this year has had numerous consequences for Serbian society as a whole. Measures created in response to the pandemic, such as the state of emergency, restrictions and prohibition of free movement, and the closure of shops, affected a large number of citizens. Activist groups played an important role in trying to reduce the adverse effects of the pandemic for the most vulnerable social groups, and in the process, new ways of social organizing were developed. Therefore, it is not surprising that the results of the research indicate that the activist groups in question managed to adapt quickly and efficiently to the novel social situation.

This study focused on several key topics: the response of activist groups to the pandemic and state measures, adaptability to online activism, pandemic activities, the groups' attitudes towards solidarity and trust, and ways in which they consider future opportunities for social activism.

Notably, the pandemic greatly impacted the work of the studied activist groups in Serbia in this period. Some managed to adapt to the new situation, while others were demoralized due to the cancellation of numerous events. The groups are still prevented from long-term activity planning due to state measures, and even more so due to variable and unclear information they receive from the state. The adjustment was twofold: activist groups changed the form of their actions (due to the inability to perform their standard ones), and they were forced to turn to online platforms. Although all the activist groups covered by this research moved their activities online, they used digital



platforms almost exclusively for mutual communication. It is also interesting that all the examined activist groups (even those not primarily ecological) started dealing more actively with the issue of health and environmental protection. Activist groups managed to adapt to the new situation, primarily basing their work to the specific needs of the community. In terms of activity types, we concluded that they differed depending on the usual work “preferences” of each given group, i.e. that the character of activities did not significantly change in the pandemic: groups performing direct action continued doing so in the state of emergency.

Respondents interpreted the notions of solidarity and trust in similar ways, emphasizing distrust in non-solidary state institutions and the government. They also recognized “niches of trust” in solidary local communities, movements and initiatives that offer bright examples of sincere solidarity with concrete actions “from below.”

This data only shed a little light on the mechanisms with which activist groups in Serbia responded to the pandemic. In order to get a more complete picture of the organization of activist groups in a pandemic, it is necessary to expand the examined sample to other parts of the country. Also, it is too early to draw conclusions from a “post-corona” perspective, since the impact of the third wave of the epidemic in Serbia is expected any day. However, the general results of the study certainly indicate that the prospects for the future of activism after the pandemic in Serbia remain, on the one hand, unpredictable in terms of possible occurrence of certain actions and reactions, their character, and form; but, on the other hand, certain in terms of “survival” and even strengthening of social activism.

**BEOGRAD, NOVEMBAR 2020**