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*Book review. COVID-19 in Italy Social Behavior and Governmental Policies, by Lucia Velotti, Gabriella Punziano, Felice Addeo, Routledge, London 2022*

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The book, edited by Lucia Velotti, Gabriella Punziano and Felice Addeo illustrates and examines people's perception of risk, their willingness to trust the sources and channels of information available to them and their attitudes towards protective behaviors by analyzing different aspects of the Protective Action Decision Model (PADM) during the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy.

Among the main premises for reviewing this highly stimulating volume there are the location and timing issues. The centrality of Italy, the first patient-nation in the Western world to face the pandemic and its crisis with the delicate management between the transition from Phase 1 to Phase 2.

From a sociological point of view, it poses the pandemic as a major epistemological challenge for the social sciences both for the so-called pandemic social practices (Werron & Ringel, 2020), i.e. social practices that emerged and continued during the pandemic, and for the possibility of a positive scenario envisaged by Amartya Sen in making opportunities emerge from the crisis.

In addition, this volume presents a really fitting research design with data collection through an online survey with a two-stage sampling, and a combination of analytical techniques aimed at creating effective typologies to interpret the behavior of the individuals surveyed.

The book consists of four main and interdependent sections:

1) The background of the administration of the COVID-19 in Italy is provided in Chapter 1. 2) The theoretical framework and methods of the study are provided in Chapters 2 and 3. 3) The results of the study are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. 4) Conclusions pointing the way to live in a post-pandemic world in Chapter 6.

The book has the merit of considering theoretical aspects that, since the first chapter, offer a wide and rich overview of the management of the COVID-19 crisis in Italy. In fact, in addition to a background on previous pandemics that have affected humans and the Earth, it discusses elements that in the Italian case have made the management of the crisis even more difficult. The authors narrate how aggravating the problem was a crisis of governance and leadership generated by the dual and conflicting involvement of both the central and regional levels of the Italian government.

Moreover, in the first chapter the authors create an outline in detail of a temporal sequence of events in Italy based on the phases of the management of the crisis, a reconnaissance work not yet present in the thematic literature and of certain relevance for the categorization of events related to the Pandemic:

1. Sense making and decision making of the COVID 19 crisis (January 2020 to February 2020);
2. Decision making and meaning making (March-April 2020): Phase 1 – From regional to national lockdown;
3. Terminating the crisis and learning from it (May-September 2020): Phase 2- Staged reopening;
4. Sense making and decision making (September-November 2020): The second pandemic wave and staged lockdowns;
5. Terminating the crisis and learning from it (December 2020-January 2021): Phase 3 – The vaccine campaign.

The second section, with Chapters 2 and 3, describes the pieces of that mosaic that discuss the study's theoretical background and research methodology. A sociological intrigue and difficult to summarize. The second chapter explains what motivates people's adoption or support of new behaviors and policies by introducing the following key elements for research purposes: the social construction of reality and behavioral change, risk communication, and protective action models in disaster science.

The authors' careful reconstruction addresses the concepts of socially constructed reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966) and ontological safety (Giddens, 1984) in an interesting way.

The study assumes «...different profiles/groups of people adhere to different constructions of social reality. Depending on how reality is socially constructed, people will experience intense feelings of imbalance regarding the previous way of living their lives and making sense of themselves and the social and physical reality surrounding them. People will try to restore the feeling of security by adopting or not adopting new behaviors and attitudes. » (pp.40). From here, the book lends itself to several possible reading levels with arguments that go through the major sociological theories. The authors also specify that beyond the epidemiological aspects of COVID-19, there is also a dimension of the social construction of the pandemic to be considered and, they introduce the concept of "(in)ontological security" to answer the basic question around which the discussion is structured. The main questions in this chapter are "how does behavioral change occur? What motivates change?».

The importance of understanding what motivates people's protective behaviors, and their support of government regulations becomes particularly important in a context such as that generated by COVID-19. The book chronicles and emphasizes how in a crisis the importance of the relationship between the micro (individual) level and the macro (societal) level influence each other in determining distinctive behavioral patterns (actions), as in the case of engaging in protective behavior.

In the conceptual baggage of this chapter, we find what I believe is the heart of the book, with the integration of a particular model of protective action communication, Lindell and Perry's (1997, 2012) Protective Action Decision Making (PADM) model<sup>1</sup>, with the concept of ontological insecurity.

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<sup>1</sup> The PADM model outlines the following five phases:

1. Processing of information derived from social and environmental signals with messages that social sources convey through communication channels to at-risk individuals;
2. Pre-decisional processes consisting of exposure, attention, and understanding of the warning;

I find encapsulated in this requirement the authors' true scientific innovation. The PADM model aims to describe how people process information (considering sources, channels, and reliability), take protective actions, and/or adopt protective behaviors and it is possible to understand and predict how behavioral responses are produced in risk situations. All of this is complemented by the concept of ontological (in)safety as an element that motivates people to protect themselves and others and is used as a starting point to understand people's motivation to change behavior or attitude and sustain it over time (not temporary but long term). The central concept of ontological (in)security, trust, has been operationalized by the authors in the three dimensions of the physical environment, the social environment, and the personal sphere by expanding them to concepts related to the PADM model. Having then outlined the current scenario, in the third chapter the volume presents the methodological organizational choice adopted to support the entire study with the main objective of understanding if and how ontological (in)security and cultural worldview can impact (1) risk perception, (2) adoption of protective measures and (3) support for government regulation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The method chosen by the authors was an online survey using CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) administered to individuals aged 18 and older in Italy during Phase 2<sup>2</sup>. The authors frame the major categories addressed in the questionnaire with concepts such as 1) Sociodemographic for characteristics of individual respondents 2) Information and media for consumption and evaluation of sources and information during the pandemic crisis 3) Values for respondents' cultural worldviews, political orientation, and religious beliefs 4) The Risk Profile (involving aspects such as (1) Experience of contagion (2) protective behaviors adopted by respondents or noted by them in their social contexts; and (3) the degree to which respondents agreed with the regulatory provisions that were examined at various stages of the crisis).

A thorough and detailed work of data analysis rich in intellectual references conducted by applying three types of multivariate statistical techniques (PCA, MCA, CIRCA) closes the second section. The interweaving of plans of analysis with a mix of methods of investigation has allowed an extensive collection of information and a cross-reading of valid data is reassembled to illustrate the third section. The authors, in the fourth and fifth chapters, address respectively the private sphere and the public sphere, successfully dialoguing in systematic terms with conceptual frameworks and empirical findings. The last two sections have a narrative structure that develops through a constant overlapping of the planes of research and theoretical reflection. It should be noted that Chapters 4 and 5 follow a similar structure, presenting a conceptual exposition organized in detail, both from a theoretical and empirical point of view. Around the theoretical framework of reference, the authors organize a lively, stimulating, and aggressive analysis without leaving anything to chance. Velotti, Punziano and Addeo cleverly use the dimensions of the PADM model (Lindell & Perry, 2012) to explore the factors that influence the private sphere, hence, the adoption of protective behavior by individuals, and, the public sphere

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3. Fundamental perceptions, such as threat perceptions, protective action perceptions, and stakeholder perceptions;

4. Protective action decision-making;

5. Behavioral response, which refers to three main behaviors: information seeking, protective response, and emotion-focused coping.

<sup>2</sup> Administered at various collection points on social media between May 11, 2020 and June 3, 2020

where information processes, risk communication, and responsible actors play a key role.

The authors use multidimensional and cluster analysis techniques to identify three macro-groups of ontological profiles for both the private and public spheres. It is worth mentioning the main characteristics of the two areas:

1. First group, average ontological (in)security. The personal sphere presents groups in which characteristics such as medium-high perception of experiential proximity of the virus, medium knowledge and awareness, high perception of fear and self-efficacy, and robust adoption of protective behaviors are associated. While for the public sphere, the sample is characterized by a high degree of recourse to authoritative sources of information, trust in science, and official information.

2. Second group: medium-high ontological (in)security is characterized in the private sphere by a high tolerance of risk. Here, the authors intuitively relate the propensity to accept an elevated level of risk to professional motivations that counterbalance the perception of risk. For the public sphere, they emphasize the lack of trust in official information, institutions, and science in favor of informal networks and information channels.

3. Third group: ontological security where, for the personal sphere, there is little knowledge and awareness and a more distant perception of risk (perhaps due to geographical distance from the spread of the virus). For the influence of the public sphere, they place themselves hybrid in the middle, placing media trust in science, official information, and informal networks, and relying on institutions (mostly local ones recognized at the regional and municipal government level).

The fourth section with chapter 6 is an “*Ode to Joy*” for Social Research. The authors discuss the vision of a future free from COVID-19 in Italy both at an individual and collective level.

It is a book that offers a relevant contribution to sociological but at the same time interdisciplinary reflections, representing an essential point of reference for those who want to develop a research program on relevant and innovative topics such as behavioral patterns, communication studies, and in particular risk communication or new sustainable lifestyles post-pandemic. And this could already be enough to signal the volume as a reading to be included among those planning for an advanced or non-advanced course in social research and health studies such as epidemiology of social phenomena. The book offers a fascinating opportunity to see how much more and how different they can understand phenomena that certainly in the pandemic era have created more problems. I emphasize how the authors deliver what they promise, all brilliantly and lucidly with a flowing writing style, arguing with bibliographical references and analysis to support all the theses supported chapter by chapter. Together with all the elements evoked in the last section, a picture is drawn of a society, of a population, that finds itself facing crucial challenges and, to face them, will inevitably have to change. And it is for this reason that I consider reading it to all those who wish to be better informed about the challenges that await our World.

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