

CRISIS MANAGEMENT, SURVEILLANCE, and DIGITAL ETHICS IN THE COVID-19 ERA

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Covid19 Crisis

- The Covid19 crisis disrupts societies, challenging its social and political infrastructures. This global crisis can be framed as a high impact, slow burning and institutional crisis, which will have a long-lasting impact on societies worldwide.
- The Covid19 crisis revealed both societal resilience as well as vulnerability.
- Containment measures (physical distancing, isolation/quarantine, and testing), are critical to slow down the spread of virus, but they can expose citizens to invasive surveillance.

Policy window

- The Covid19 crisis provides legitimation for authorities, often in coalition with the private sector, to collect new and use existing citizens' data on a large scale (including mobility, contact, social media data).
 - Extensive surveillance is justified as a necessary “trade-off” for public health and security in exchange for a certain loss of privacy and civil liberties.
 - Framed as important conditions under which societies can “re-open” again, allowing for a loosening of lockdowns.
- Health related emergency measures may remain in place for a long time.

Two fields are colliding

- The current Covid19 crisis management 'cries' for information to understand and control the crisis: common information spaces ('Covid19 dashboards'; 'Corona Apps') can improve coordination and exchange of information, situation awareness, and communication with the public.
- Containment measures have become an integral part of the surveillance society. Such surveillance society is characterized by increased investments in bureaucracies and techniques to systematically - and over longer time-periods - collect, store and use information for the purpose of controlling behaviours and situations. Topic example – function creep.

Challenges and relevant questions

- Related to the crisis information systems: the 'disruptive' nature of innovation reveal challenges, such as information overload, difficulties of translating data into actionable knowledge, new liabilities and responsibilities, technology dependence.
- Related to surveillance and ethics: digital technologies and policies have the potential to increase surveillance of citizens and responders alike, and may also enable new forms of social sorting, profiling and discrimination.
- Special issue in Journal of Crisis and Contingency Management; guest editors Kees Boersma, Monka Büsher, Chiara Fonio
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14685973>