EDITORIAL

Reflections on the impact of coronavirus on public affairs

As the editorial team considered how we might best mark the 20th anniversary year of the publication of the Journal of Public Affairs and reflected on what significant developments have occurred in the world of public affairs over the past two decades, none of us around that table could have possibly imagined how the world of politics and society as a whole could and would change in just a few short months. Yes, we all witnessed the horrible effects of Ebola in Africa and of SARS in the Far East and in the United Kingdom we experienced the nationwide lockdown of countryside during the infamous foot and mouth disease that ravaged the countryside in 2001. However, devastating each of these disease outbreaks that we might think of as contagions have been, none can really compare or have prepared us fully for a the rapidity and impact that the recent coronavirus pandemic has had across the world, not only in terms of the scale of the infection rising death rate, but in the profound impact it has had on the economy and on people’s lives and livelihoods. Moreover, at the time of assembling this issue of the Journal of Public Affairs, we are perhaps still on the edge of what could be a major economic abyss with rising unemployment worldwide, vastly disrupted supply chains and sectors such as aviation, tourism and leisure, and retail to name but three, virtually brought to a standstill. As we approach the end of May 2020, just over 5 million cases of coronavirus been officially reported worldwide with over 328,000 deaths attributed to the disease. However, these global statistics tend to cloak wide variations in the reported incidents of and deaths attributed to coronavirus across the world which do not simply represent differences in population size, but appear to some extent, to reflect the relative effectiveness of individual governmental responses to the virus. Inevitably, in those countries worst affected by the virus, which includes United Kingdom, a battle is already emerging between political parties over who is to blame for the failure to get to grips with suppressing the virus more quickly than has been the case. In the United Kingdom for example, opposition parties and the media focused on the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the shortcomings of the virus testing system not only for NHS workers and patients, but particularly for care workers and care homes dealing with the elderly, where the virus has had a devastating effect. Although reported new cases of the virus, hospital admissions, and deaths attributed to the virus have begun to plateau in many of the countries worst affected such as Italy, France, Spain and the United Kingdom, the spectre of a second wave of outbreaks is forcing authorities in all these countries to only cautiously lift the stringent lockdown measures that have had such a devastating impact on each country's economy.

Although there has been a degree of cooperation across the world particularly in terms of the search for a vaccine, it is notable that governments have largely operated independently in their response to the onset of the virus rather than working collaboratively. Thus, for example, in Europe there has been a lack of coordinated European wide measures to combat the virus with governments implementing differing policies according to the severity with which they have been affected and competing with other nations for supplies of PPE and other equipment. Notably, the Swedish government chose not to adopt the stringent lockdown policy found in other European and Nordic countries, rather allowing the virus to spread within the population in an attempt to achieve a "herd immunity" outcome. However with Sweden’s average deaths per million rate rising to the highest in Europe (rising to 6.25 per million), the Swedish government has come under intense attack from many sections of society for its failure to adopt the stringent lockdown measures adopted elsewhere in Europe.

At the time of writing the focus in the United Kingdom and elsewhere is understandably directed to the challenge of "defeating the virus," but it is generally acknowledged that this will be a long-term battle and society as a whole will have to learn to accommodate living with coronavirus and suppressing its impact over time. As we begin to emerge from the peak effects of the virus the economic and behavioural impact of the virus on society across the world is likely to be profound, with economists predicting one of the worst recessions on record. The next challenge will clearly be governments individually and collectively to look to rebuild the shattered industries and economies left in the wake of this virus. Governments around the world have incurred huge indebtedness in attempts to prop up some of the most badly affected industries and maintain jobs. The challenge going forward will be to try to find policies that will help rebuild individual economies but also trade worldwide. The danger is that the aftermath of this economic as well as health crisis may herald a new era of isolationism as individual governments come under increasing pressure to preserve the jobs and livelihoods of their own citizens.

For observers and students of public affairs, the next few years are likely to be a fascinating time to observe how governments and industry interact within individual countries, as well as on a...
pan-European and global scale. We are already witnessing the growth of a number of articles submitted to JPA touching on issues relating to the impact of coronavirus, and we expect that the number of such studies may grow significantly in the coming months and might well become the focus of a special issue of the *Journal of Public Affairs*.

If you do have an interest in developing an issue of the JPA on the Implications of Coronavirus Public Affairs Management and Practice do please let us know.

However, before finishing this editorial, we would like to remind readers that this is the journal’s 20th anniversary year, which will be marked by a reflective special issue on the journal to conclude the year.

This issue of the *Journal of Public Affairs* incorporates two articles to help us reflect and celebrate our 20 years as a journal the first is by Henry Sun the international businessman, academic and commentator and is entitled “Mao’s Art of Propaganda” and the second is by Robert Ormrod of Aarhus University, Denmark and is entitled “Political Exchanges of Value and the Stakeholder Concept: Implications for Public Affairs.” We then include a Special Issue and collection of papers edited by Professor Øyvind Ihlen of the University of Oslo, Norway on “Lobbying, the Public Interest and Democracy: Communication Perspectives.” There then follow four commentary papers from Africa, South America and Europe and then seven practitioner papers from Africa, Asia and Europe. This is then followed by our general issue which includes over 30 articles from around the world that comprises a variety of and extremely interesting set of articles that reflect the increasing world-wide interest in the study and practise of public affairs and modern policy making and communication.

Phil Harris¹
Danny Moss²

¹Business Research Institute, University of Chester, Chester, UK
²Business School, University of Chester, Chester, UK

**Correspondence**
Phil Harris, Business Research Institute, University of Chester, Churchill House, Queens Park, CH4 7AD, Chester, England, UK
Email: p.harris@chester.ac.uk