

Research Areas in which AHSS can contribute to the ongoing COVID-19 Crisis

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Irish Humanities Alliance



About this statement

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis the [Irish Humanities Alliance \(IHA\)](#), a body representing humanities researchers across the island of Ireland, presents this short, indicative list of research areas in which the AHSS research community can make a major contribution to the investigation of all aspects of the COVID-19 crisis. The IHA is grateful to Professor Daniel Carey, Director of the [Moore Institute](#) NUI Galway, for first proposing these topics of inquiry.

Without arts and humanities research, attempts to understand and learn from the COVID-19 crisis will be incomplete and inadequate. Arts and humanities researchers, working in tandem with the sciences, healthcare, economics and social sciences, will enable us to document the implications of the COVID-19 crisis, learn from it and plan for the future. In this context, the IHA again reiterates its call for a stronger engagement between policy-makers and the broader AHSS research community on the Island of Ireland.

Research Areas in which the AHSS can contribute to the ongoing COVID-19 Crisis:

- **Documenting and writing the history of the COVID-19 crisis**
 - Archiving the pandemic for future researchers.
 - Conducting oral histories with key witnesses.
 - Re-examining the history of previous pandemics (such as the devastating flu of 1918–19 or the AIDS pandemic of the early 1980s), to understand how they were handled and experienced.
- **Analysis of the social, political, cultural, and economic impacts of this crisis and its aftermath**
 - Differences of political culture and how they have determined government responses to the crisis.
 - The perils of populism and the undermining of multi-lateralism.
 - Pandemics, the nation-state and globalisation.
 - The Global South: uneven and unequal impacts of the pandemic emergency across Africa, South Asia, Latin America, the Pacific exacerbated by pre-existing socio-economic and ecological vulnerabilities.
 - Remote-working, commuting, localisation, debates around hypermobility, frequent flying.
- **Information, truth and trust during the crisis**
 - How have 'trusted' news sources contributed to public discussion?
 - The renewed importance of television during the crisis.
 - The role of social media. COVID-19 as the first pandemic in the social media era. How have social media platforms circulated news, information, rumour and comment?
 - Analysis of the question of expertise. The public understanding and definition of "science" – what does it mean to "follow the science"?
 - Covid-19 and critical media literacy.
- **Ethics and data gathering during the crisis**
 - The ethics of contact tracing and other forms of data gathering.
 - Big data in the age of the pandemic.
 - Forms of reasoning from statistical information and the limits of data.

- Technological “solutionism” in the sphere of data gathering/contact tracing.
- Privacy and new articulations of public and private space during the pandemic.
- **Culture and well-being during the crisis**
 - The arts as a resource in isolation.
 - Definitions of culture deployed during the crisis.
 - The era of virtualisation and its impacts – how cultural communities (and communities generally) are finding new ways to connect in the virtual world.
- **Education and research in the crisis**
 - Home-schooling, social difference, access, underlying assumptions informing policy.
 - Higher Education during the crisis.
 - The space of the humanities in the research ecology and funding landscape of Covid-19.
- **Patterns of racism during the crisis**
 - The racialisation of discourses surrounding the ‘spread’ of the virus and the depiction of different national epidemiological management strategies.
 - Black Lives Matter: higher death rates in BAME communities.
- **The language and representation of Covid-19**
 - Metaphors, similes, comparisons.
 - Rhetoric of political speech making.
 - Graphs, charts, models as representations.
 - The communication of statistical information.
- **Attitudes to people during the crisis**
 - The elderly and those with ‘underlying conditions’ – the dispensable and indispensable.
 - Redefinitions of the essential and non-essential – “key” workers, activities, social priorities.
- **Perspectives from the environmental humanities**
 - Assessing the impact of the pandemic on climate degradation and proposed solutions.
 - Visualising threat, risk, and consequence – the visibility of the Covid-19 public health crisis compared to the longer-term environmental crisis.
 - Reconnections with nature in a time of crisis.
- **Perspectives from the medical humanities**
 - Testing regimes, social compliance, the standing of medical experts and advisors,
 - The public rationale for contact tracing.
 - Medical advice and expertise.
 - Practices of care and the social standing of “carers”.

- **Philosophy and the pandemic**
 - The framing of the crisis around trade-offs: the needs of the economy vs human casualties of the pandemic; the young vs the elderly; rural vs. urban.
 - Forms of probabilistic reasoning.
 - Phenomenologies of the crisis: temporality; nostalgia; public and private space.
 - Trust, trustworthiness, authority.
 - States of emergency and exception.

- **Geographies of the crisis**
 - The spread of information.
 - The role of borders.
 - The condition of precarity.
 - Differential impacts: socio-economic status, race, region.
 - National and regional differences in strategy (e.g. across Scandinavia; South and Southeast Asia; the UK and Ireland; the US example; states governed by “strong men”).

In Conclusion

The range of areas that need attention from humanities research is substantial. Insight into the crisis and lessons gained from this work must accompany the effort to identify antiviral treatment and vaccines, and social scientific analyses and interventions. We call for open and responsive policy-making and inclusive strategies by governments, funding bodies, and foundations to ensure a shared future in which we learn collectively from the crisis.

Relevant Links:

- British Academy, Funding Call-Special Research Grants: COVID-19, available at: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/funding/special-research-grants-covid-19>
- Dan Carey, 'Why we need more than just scientists to document the pandemic', available at: <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2020/0421/1132824-why-we-need-more-than-just-scientists-to-document-the-pandemic/>
- Dan Carey, 'What the Humanities Can Contribute to Covid-19 Research', available at: <https://www.irishhumanities.com/blog/what-the-humanities-can-contribute-to-covid-19-research/>
- EASSH papers: *Improving Research Impact Assessment in Horizon Europe: A Perspective from the Social Sciences and Humanities*; *FP9 's ambitious aims for societal impact call for a step change in interdisciplinarity and citizen engagement*; <http://www.eassh.eu/position-papers>
- EASSH papers: *'Mission Covid-19: Global problems need a research portfolio approach'*.
- IHA, *By Imagination We Live: A Strategy for the Humanities, 2020-2030* <https://www.irishhumanities.com/assets/Uploads/By-Imagination-we-live-FINAL.pdf>
- IHA Statement on COVID-19 Rapid Response Funding Opportunity, 2 April 2020, <https://www.irishhumanities.com/assets/Uploads/COVID-19-IHA-Statement.pdf>
- IHA Calls for a dedicated funding stream for AHSS research addressing the COVID-19 crisis, 1 May 2020: <https://www.irishhumanities.com/assets/Uploads/IHA-Calls-for-AHSS-Covid-19-Research-Funding.pdf>.
- IHA Statement, 'The Humanities and Covid-19: a strategic response', 1 May 2020: <https://www.irishhumanities.com/assets/Uploads/IHA-Covid-19-Response-1-May-2020.pdf>
- David Matthews, 'German humanities scholars enlisted to end coronavirus lockdown', available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/german-humanities-scholars-enlisted-end-coronavirus-lockdown>
- Juni Katrine Lie and Jeffrey Allan Lugowe, 'Are Measures Designed to Control the Spread of Coronavirus Working? And at What Cost?', available at: <https://www.oslomet.no/en/research/featured-research/are-measures-to-control-corona-spread-working>

Further information

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