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Anna Visvizi · Orlando Troisi ·
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Editors


Research and Innovation Forum 2021

Managing Continuity, Innovation, and Change
in the Post-Covid World: Technology, Politics
and Society

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Preface

Research and Innovation Forum 2021: Managing Continuity, Innovation, and Change in the Post-Covid World: Technology, Politics, and Society

The **Research and Innovation Forum** (Rii Forum) is an annual conference that brings together researchers, academics, and practitioners in conceptually sound inter- and multi-disciplinary, empirically driven debate on key issues influencing the dynamics of social interaction today. Technology, innovation, and education define the rationale behind the Rii Forum and are at the heart of all discussions held during the conference. The COVID-19 pandemic and its social, political, and economic implications had confirmed that a more thorough debate on these issues and topics was needed. For this reason, the Rii Forum 2021 was devoted to the broadly defined question of the short- and long-term impact of the pandemic on our societies. Indeed, the Rii Forum 2021 served as a virtual arena for debate on how sophisticated information and communication technology (ICT), including artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, big data, cloud and edge computing, 5G, Internet of Things (IoT), and social networking, could help stakeholders to manage continuity, innovation, and change in the post-Covid world.

As an inter- and multi-disciplinary conference that offers a broad view on the issues and topics related to advances in ICT, the Rii Forum 2021 sought to encourage insights from a range of research domains and academic disciplines. For this reason, the conceptual foundations of the Rii Forum 2021 were drawn from social sciences, management science, computer science, as well as education science and humanities.

Rii Forum 2021 was organized under conditions of immense uncertainty driven by the ever-changing dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications. Indeed, COVID-19 has redefined not only the way business is conducted, but also how culture is “delivered” to entire societies. The pandemic and the quarantine that the majority of our societies were subjected to altered several social interactions, in many ways fostering a new quality of human–computer interactions. For these reasons, the Rii Forum 2021 aimed at stimulating a discussion on the multiple

facets the pandemic's impact on technology, the society, the business sector, and the art of management as well as on political systems, including democracy.

In the original open call for panels and papers, the following topics and issues were highlighted as of particular interest of the steering and the program committees: the establishment and consolidation of alliances among diverse stakeholders; the use of data and data-driven strategies to inform policy-making at local, regional, national, and global levels; COVID-19 driven new divisions between the Global North and Global South; social implications of the COVID-19 pandemic: migration, exclusion, and poverty; a weakening of democracy, transparency, and civic and human rights; the management of pandemics and their implications through the use of AI, and its value in health care, education, smart cities, economics, and foreign policy. A closer insight into the actual application of technology was also encouraged. The topics of particular interest included: blockchain and its application to the post-Covid world; social networking sites and digital space vs politics, economics, and business; information management in times of uncertainty; COVID-19 and the international economy in the AI-era: crisis, rupture, and new opportunities. In response to the initial call for panel and paper proposals, the following panels were proposed and successfully executed.

- Panel 1: Technology, education and online learning in times of the pandemic
- Panel 2: Immersive technologies as a tool for coping with COVID-19 in higher education
- Panel 3: Health and well-being in smart cities: urban design and urban planning in the COVID-19 era
- Panel 4: Smart Cities in the COVID-19 era: SDGs and resilience
- Panel 5: Smart cities, public health and infectious diseases
- Panel 6: Cultural heritage and ICT
- Panel 7: Depopulation, the global competition for talent, and the digital diaspora
- Panel 8: Democracy in the post-Covid world
- Panel 9: AI in the international and global perspective
- Panel 10: Data-driven decision making and strategy in business
- Panel 11: Human–human and human–machine interaction amid the COVID-19 pandemic

Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic persisted throughout 2020, and in early Spring 2021 only few travel restrictions were lifted, the **Rii Forum 2021** was held online, i.e., via a specialized online communication platform. Once again, the Rii Forum 2021 conference attracted delegates from nearly all continents, including North and South America, Asia, the Arab Peninsula, Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa. The conference was held on April 7–9, 2021, and consisted of sixteen panel sessions. In addition, two keynote speeches were delivered, and a roundtable discussion was held. With regard to the keynote speeches. On April 7, 2021, the Rii Forum 2021 delegates had the opportunity to listen to Professor Erkki Ormala, Senior Fellow, Innovation Management, School of Business, Aalto University. The title of his speech was “Successful innovations drive economic growth”. On April

8, 2021, the Rii Forum 2021 delegates were invited to join the keynote speech, titled “Bottom-Up Culture Creates Born Global Success Stories: The Case of Helsinki Uusimaa Region”, by Mr. Ari Huczkowski, the CEO of LUMINTEL. The roundtable debate held on Friday, April 9, 2021, was organized jointly by Rii Forum and the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). The topic of the roundtable discussion was “Global democratic trends before and during the COVID-19 pandemic” [1]. The speakers, and corresponding titles of the opening presentations, included:

- Alberto Fernandez, IDEA, “Taking stock of global democratic trends before and during the COVID-19 pandemic,”
- Lucy J. Parry, Ph.D., Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance, University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia & Webster Vienna Private University, Wien, Austria, “Democracy in flux: a systemic view on the impact of COVID-19” [2], and
- Miguel Angel Lara Otaola, Ph.D., IDEA, “Elections and COVID-19: Safeguarding health, integrity and trust.”
- The discussion was moderated by Professor Anna Visvizi.

Nearly 100 extended paper proposals were submitted in response to the initial call for papers. Of these proposals, as a result of the stringent review process, only 58 papers are included in the proceedings. This suggests that the acceptance–rejection ratio stands at 60:40. All papers were subjected to several rounds of a double-blind peer review process (at least two reviews in each round of the review process). Reflecting the inter- and multi-disciplinary focus and scope of the Rii Forum 2021, the papers included in this volume are grouped into four broad thematic sections. These include:

- Technology-enhanced teaching and learning in times of COVID-19
- Smart cities in times of COVID-19
- COVID-19 and the business sector
- COVID-19, the political system, migration, well-being

The papers included in these **Rii Forum 2021 proceedings** serve as evidence that in times of uncertainty more inter- and multi-disciplinary research is needed to inform the decision- and the policy-making process. This volume offers a unique view not only of the impact of COVID-19 on our societies but also of ways of navigating the challenges that emerged.

We are indebted to the keynote speakers, Professor Erkki Ormala and Mr Ari Huczkowski for sharing their precious time and unique expertise with the **Rii Forum 2021** delegates. We remain grateful to the **Rii Forum Steering Committee** and the **Rii Forum Program Committee** for their commitment, sound judgment, and hard work in the process of organizing the **Rii Forum 2021** and then successfully moving the conference to the virtual space. We would like to say “thank you” to all contributing authors for their hard work and their patience in subsequent rounds of the “revise and resubmit” process. It would not be possible without the

reviewers who devoted countless hours to evaluate papers submitted to this volume. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the entire Springer team and the Editors of Complexity for their continued support and guidance.

We remain hopeful that the forthcoming Rii Forum 2022 will be held onsite and that the online mode of the conference delivery will be just an option. Please check the **Rii Forum** web site (<https://rii-forum.org>) for updates.

Sincerely,

Anna Visvizi
Orlando Troisi
Rii Forum 2021 Chairs

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We would also like to thank our dear colleagues and friends, who responded to the initial call for panels and papers, thus making the Rii Forum 2021 a truly inter- and multi-disciplinary conference. Even more so, we would like to thank all Rii Forum 2021 delegates for creating a friendly and welcoming atmosphere at the conference; an atmosphere filled with respect, self-discipline (think of the presentation time!), as well as rich in critical and constructive feedback. We cannot thank you enough.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the Rii Forum 2021 reviewers. You did an amazing work. Thank you!

Finally, we would like to thank the Publisher, Springer Nature, and its entire team for granting us the opportunity to collaborate on this volume. We appreciate it.

Very kind regards,

Anna Visvizi
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