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Government After Shock: TFP x Hertie School Futures Dialogues
Report and Policy Recommendations

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Introduction

Government After Shock was an initiative coordinated by the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI) with the support of the European Commission. It aimed to create a local and global conversation about how the COVID pandemic shock has played out across different countries and contexts, to support each country's ability to govern amidst complex and changing circumstances, and to promote international collaboration in public sector innovation. On 17 November 2020, in conjunction with a series of global events, The Futures Project (TFP) co-organized the Collaborative Hub for Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Denmark.

It was in this context that Government After Shock: TFP x Hertie School Student Futures Dialogues took place. The event drew on both the personal experiences and professional expertise of the Hertie School faculty and students. Four different thematic groups reflected on the policies of their countries of origin, residence, or interest during the crisis, in order to answer the three Government After Shock questions: What should we leave behind? What do we want to keep? What should we do differently? Through these questions, more conclusive ideas about what policies are effective in a crisis can be assessed and evaluated for the future.

The following report contains an overview of the findings from each thematic area:

Health Governance

Chaired by Prof. Mujaheed Shaikh

The aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed underlying structural inequalities and inadequate social policies, paving the way for discussions on future improvements. At the same time, several policies have proven successful in the face of such an uncertain and unprecedented crisis and deserve further consideration. Focusing on government communication and coordination, gender, and health inequalities, this session summarized observations of participants from three different countries (Austria, Germany, and the United States). These observations form the basis for policy recommendations to ensure a more targeted response, learning from diverse collective experience. Countries, regardless of size, population, or wealth, will thereby be able to enhance their capacity to anticipate, understand, and govern complex and changing circumstances.

What do we need to leave behind?

In the area of government communication, the discussion mainly touched upon three issues: (1) inconsistency in corona-related measures and the communication thereof; (2) politicization of actions; and (3) power asymmetries between the various stakeholders on both a national (e.g., federal vs. state) and EU level. Furthermore, the observations of exclusion of scientific voices as well as the incapability to manage a pandemic in an international approach were mentioned.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated gender gaps and the distribution of unpaid care among men and women. In general, women are at a higher risk of poverty, which was increased during the crisis. Political willingness to specifically target the high burden of (especially) women remained rather low. Also, the discrimination against non-traditional forms of family life was evident.

Labor market measurements (short time work and unemployment benefits) may increase the pay gap also reflected in health inequalities. There was insufficient attention around the negative consequences around mental health.

What do we want to keep?

The COVID-19 pandemic created an urgent need to understand the crisis at hand, and spurred a new level of data collection, availability, and visualization. Similarly, information dissemination, combined with transparency and made accessible in understandable formats, created a vital and common understanding among the public. These successful knowledge sharing practices should be extended to other socioeconomic domains, e.g. gendered social issues. Although notably absent in the American context, the "celebrity status" of science and the successful promotion of scientific voices in policy discussions is another practice that should be carried forward and expanded to other policy domains. In the question of coordination, the practice of local experimentation allowed for agile and incremental approaches in the face of an ongoing and highly uncertain crisis. When situated within a centralized measure framework, or "toolbox," this best practice can be applied to similarly ambiguous and continuous crises. Lastly, there is much to learn from the successes of large scale investment in innovation (e.g. in vaccine production, ventilator

manufacturing) as well as the considerable and sustained public discourse on the topic of COVID-19; these experiences should be transferred to address other major and less urgently perceived crises, e.g. the current climate crisis.

What we should do differently?

There is a need for more systematic management of knowledge and its dissemination in accessible terms for the population. This implies improving the population's literacy in terms of preventing infectious diseases and the importance of complying with the measures proposed by the governments. The coordination mechanisms among all the levels of government should be strengthened so that the measures adopted are not contradictory and can put at risk the trust of citizens in the authorities.

The pandemic made more evident the need to reformulate gender roles that position women as the principal provider of childcare and so as the need for a comprehensive reform of the childcare system. Moreover, in the future will be relevant to ensure gender balance and diversity in the scientific and decision-making spheres.

For future government responses, there should be a prevention plan that considers a more equitable distribution of resources since the pandemic has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable groups in society and its effects will potentially amplify and exacerbate existing inequalities.

Summary of Policy Recommendations

- Further attention needs to be given to gender equality when examining the short- and long-term effects effects of crisis response and social policy
- Strengthen coordination mechanisms between different levels and branches of government to ensure that consistent, accurate messages are getting to the population in a timely manner
- Governments should consider how to distribute resources equitably and how to do so in a way that accounts for the disproportionate effects of crisis on the most vulnerable groups in society
- Strengthening trust in scientific institutions and societal literacy in public health concepts will better prepare populations for crisis response

The Media, Politics, and Public Policy in Times of Covid-19

Chaired by Prof. Daniela Stockmann

Like in many other sectors, the exogenous shock of a "crisis" highlights endogenous factors that endanger the stability of governments. Political communication strategies often frame a crisis as solely an external shock, while the media in liberal democracies push for answers regarding the underlying systemic failures. These competing frames can cause conflict and distrust between policy makers and civil society. Many of the factors discussed in this panel are endogenous factors heightened by the pandemic. Policy makers should ensure that their communication strategies and future policy agendas address these issues as seriously as they discuss the exogenous shock of the pandemic.

What do we need to leave behind?
- Misinformation spreading on social networks
  - There is no strategy, neither governmental nor platform-led, that successfully mitigates the diffusion of misinformation on social networks. In a hybrid media system, social networks are the leading source of news for a wide breadth of the population, and this single factor had an immense impact on the success of restrictive measures.
- Disconnected and culturally diverse populus
  - Standardized messages were unable to reach populations with numerous languages, cultures, and levels of ICT connectivity. Policy responses should include message diffusion across diverse national communication channels.

What do we want to keep?
- **National addresses from federal leaders**
  - Televised addresses reach large proportions of the population and can inspire trust in a policy response. This tool should be kept for use in the next crisis scenario.
- **Participation of trusted civil society members**
  - Figures such as doctors, nurses, and public health officials should be incorporated into the crisis communication strategy to boost public trust in the policy response. This applies beyond moments of crisis.

What we should do differently?
- **Focus on educating and communicating to vulnerable groups affected by the digital divide**
  - Groups in rural areas with low incomes and low ICT connectivity are the last to learn how to manage a virus. Messaging should be tailored to the most vulnerable populations, as less-vulnerable groups will more easily source information without governmental guidance.
- **Balance a message of trust in citizens with enforcement mechanisms**
  - The French case showed the panel how a very strictly enforced first lockdown and "infantile" message caused citizens to feel belittled, their individual decision-making

power denigrated. However, we contrast this with the case of the United States, where the pandemic response largely depended on individual decision-making power, resulting in tragic numbers of deaths.

Summary of Policy Recommendations

- Message diffusion across diverse national communication channels in order to reach a more disconnected or diverse populous.
- National addresses from federal leaders.
- Trusted civil society leaders should be included into the crisis communication strategy.
- Specific focus on communicating with vulnerable populations.
- Message of trust balanced with concrete enforcement mechanisms.

The Role of the Private Sector

Chaired by Prof. Sébastian Mena

The private sector has thus far played a multifaceted and dynamic role in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, private companies demonstrated great flexibility and pivoted their manufacturing, service delivery, and supply chains to provide necessary supplies such as personal protective equipment. Out of necessity, many companies adopted work-from-home and flexible work policies at unprecedented speed to accommodate social distancing requirements. On the other hand, corporations are also at the heart of an economic system that left some workers disproportionately exposed and unprotected during the pandemic.

For policymakers interested in maximizing the well-being of the publics they serve, the role of the private sector must be considered with a balanced view of the sector's strengths (innovation capacity, responsiveness, resources) and limitations (ultimate concern with profit, sometimes at the expense of people and planet.)

What do we need to leave behind?

- **The economy should serve society, not the other way around.** Social problems and well-being should be the end goal rather than profit. Policymakers can shape the regulatory and structural environments that can steward companies away from harmful practices.
- **Employers should invest in their employees.** This is one strength of businesses as partners in society – policymakers should promote practices that encourage companies to invest in their workers.
- **There is more to life than work.** Workers in all roles, not just the ones with advanced degrees or who make high salaries, should be able to access a work/life balance that supports their right to health and happiness.

What do we want to keep?

- **Nurture the human drive to innovate and explore.** Business environments can facilitate innovation, risk-taking, and exploration. Keep this spirit, but channel it toward human and environmental needs.
- **Businesses need to be flexible and open to new ideas – the crisis has shown they can.** Agility is a strength of the private sector, and the pandemic has made it necessary for businesses to adapt quickly. Businesses should remain be open to other previously unimaginable changes for the better.

What should we do differently?

- **Our conversations about the future need to be more pluralistic.** Multisectoral, participatory processes will be a necessary part of planning for the future. Companies should be as intent on listening as they are on speaking.

- **Rethink freedom and flexibility.** Flexible working arrangements have brought a sense of freedom to some, but freedom should also entail the right to health, a decent quality of life, etc. This can only be achieved when everyone – not just those with high-paying jobs – are included.
- **Support alternative forms of organising.** Alternative forms of organising (benefit corporations, cooperatives, etc.) offer an opportunity to capture the best of business with a fundamentally re-thought foundation, one that is more oriented to the well-being of people and planet.

Summary of Policy Recommendations

- Promote practices that encourage employers to invest in their employees.
- Put the well-being of people and planet at the centre of economic policymaking.
- Nurture the private sector's strength and capacity for innovation, and channel this toward innovation that meets human and environmental needs.
- Engage stakeholders in pluralistic, multisectoral, participatory conversations about the role of business in society.
- Support organisation structures that are formulated for impact (i.e. the corporate model may not be the best one for meeting future challenges.)

Digitalization in Government

Chaired by Prof. Gerhard Hammerschmid

The pandemic has shown governments the importance of the digital world and how fast changes can be made that once were unthinkable. Public servants working from home and all public services offered online were far away scenarios. But governments managed to rework their modus operandi and responded to this shock in unprecedented ways. In this sense, digitalization gained a lot of momentum that otherwise would not have been possible - but it is still not the new normal.

Governments need to close the digital divide and improve their technical infrastructure to guarantee that the entirety of the population has access to the internet and electronic devices. Moreover, it is essential to change the attitudes and skills of public servants towards new digital responses- improving technical issues is not enough. A new digital culture in government must be created.

What do we need to leave behind?

- **Poor infrastructure:** improve hardware, connection, broadband in all regions of the country.
- **The same way of working, the old mindset:** It is not only about technology or going online, but also about changing culture, processes, routines, overcome resistance.
- **Lack of trust in digital government:** People still prefer to do things offline, meaning governments need to gain citizens' trust.
- **Lack of general awareness on data protection:** Before the pandemic citizens were not aware what data protection means and the importance that governments guarantee it.

What do we want to keep?

- **The momentum for digitalization**
- **Quicker decision-making processes**
- **More autonomy and trust in the civil servants**
- **More flexible work arrangements**
- **Digital forms in order to work together and collaborate**
- **Learned capabilities:** Implement new methodologies created during the pandemic, for instance agile methodologies that helped develop a software in months, like the Corona app or crisis reaction creating stress test to check whether government´s organisations are prepared to react to new crisis.
- **Data awareness**
- **Better and more transparent communication:** The way governments informed the citizens about the corona measures through all possible channels: website, social media, email, text messages.
- **Relevance of government:** Governments have proved their resilience and important role during this crisis gaining relevance again.

What should we do differently?

- **More collaboration, cooperation, and coordination:** across agencies within the government and across different actors (government, private sector, civil society)
- **Shared learning across countries**: we need a more honest discussion about best practices.
- **Investment in Digital Talent:** Attract digital talent who work around the government to work FOR the government
- **Close the digital divide:** Measure and monitor the digital gap is essential to reduce it.
- **Overcome resistance to change:** Create a new digital culture in government.

Summary of Policy Recommendations

- Invest in digital infrastructure and digital talent.
- Prioritize disconnected regions to close the digital divide.
- Create a digital culture within the public sector to overcome resistance to change
- Introduce agile methodologies to keep innovating and avoid losing the momentum the crisis has given to digitalization.