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**The World after Corona - how the world will  
be affected politically, economically, socially,  
technologically and environmentally**

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## **Introduction**

The world in spring 2020: The Corona-pandemic has all five continents under control. Everyone is stuck at home and has the same thought: Where is all this going?

It is evident that the pandemic will not end in the near future and new incidences happen daily. No one knows the further course of this misery. Will the situation become more harmless day by day or is the worst yet to come? Even while writing this essay it could happen that influential events, such as a second lockdown or the discovery of a miracle cure occur.

First of all, it is necessary to clarify what “after Corona“ means. Depending on the definition of this term the whole point of this essay changes. Is a world after Corona a world, where Sars-CoV-2 is extinct or does it mean that there are no governmental guidelines and restrictions anymore?

For me, a world after Corona is a place where the virus still exists but the situation is under control and there are no major restrictions anymore. With this being said, I will focus on the most probable course with the latest information of August and September 2020. I assume that there won't be a second lockdown and that the development of a vaccine takes more than six months from now.

Another thing that needs to be mentioned: The topic is relatively new and there is little scientific literature covering the long-term consequences. Most of it are hypotheses and predictions, which could be proven wrong afterwards.

## **Politics**

The COVID-19 pandemic affected international relations and local politics heavily. Since each country and even every federal state has an own opinion on how to deal with the crisis, conflicts were foreseeable.

On an international level, the main subjects of dispute were trade relations and financing funds, the supply of medical devices and travel warnings. The demand for medical supplies like masks, gloves, and respirators surged worldwide, as the pandemic worsened. Countries isolated themselves and selfish behavior was normal.

The US confiscated 200,000 FFP2 masks in Bangkok, which were ordered and paid for by Berlin's police force. Donald Trump invoked a Korean-War-era law, that does not allow the company that produces the masks to export them any longer.<sup>1</sup> Berlin's interior minister Andreas Geisel was upset and described the situation as an "act of modern piracy".<sup>2</sup> This was not the only incident where some countries acquired medical goods using unethical methods.

When money is involved, the good cooperation between the EU states crumbles. Surprisingly, the negotiations regarding the stimulus package ran smoothly. There was a controversy about the rule of law in states like Hungary but the dispute was adjourned. In the future, it could be that financing funds will only be assigned to countries which comply with European values and norms.

International cooperation was tested and while some partnerships were damaged permanently, others became closer. Franco-German relations improved, as the federal states Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate offered to receive and treat French patients.<sup>3</sup> It could be a starting point for further medical cooperation. Patients could be transferred to hospitals in different EU states if there is an emergency.

The Coronavirus pandemic influenced local politics as well. Usually, populist parties benefit from crises but this time, the German right-wing party AfD lost popularity. In the past, it was easy for the opposition party to simply criticize the great coalition. This time, however, the broad majority of voters was satisfied with the actions taken by the government. Everyone was too busy thinking about the virus, so other issues like crime, migration or climate change were secondary.

Once the crisis is over, the trust in the people's parties is partially restored and right-wing parties are less likely to achieve good election results.

## **Technology**

The technological field is probably the only one Corona had a rather positive impact on. Since people were forced to stay at home, they had the time to use technology

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<sup>1</sup> BBC News (2020)

<sup>2</sup> Senatsverwaltung für Inneres (2020)

<sup>3</sup> Saarbrücker Zeitung (2020)

even more. For some, it was not just entertainment but an important tool to keep up the daily life.

Many employees worked from home during the lockdown, if possible. In order to work properly, the required technological standards, such as fast internet connection and high-quality hardware needed to be met. The improvement of communication and information technology created more opportunities for remote e-work employment. In the following years, employers could look at the possibility of setting up an increased number of workplaces as home offices to save office space and rent.

Not only employees were forced to stay at home: We students still have to. Universities and other training facilities switched classes to online meetings or similar e-learning methods. At first, it was a tough time for everyone because of the unfamiliar situation. However, students and lecturers got used to it pretty fast and after some initial problems, online courses went trouble-free. In addition to the human network, the digital infrastructure is a key success factor for modern education. The “Index of Readiness for Digital Lifelong Learning” of the Centre for European Policy Studies shows that the digitalization of educational institutions in Germany is a disaster.<sup>4</sup> The country with the highest gross domestic product in the EU has the lowest score in this index.

The range of video calls and online conferences does not stop at universities and businesses. Even people who normally interact with people on a daily basis such as general practitioners, personal trainers, and bankers made use of modern technology to maintain proper social-distancing.

This seems simple, but there is a catch: Even people in urban regions of Germany do not always meet the requirements to experience lag-free video calls. Corona highlights the lack of fibre-optic connection and 4G expansion. Hopefully, the government will realize that digitalization has been neglected in the past and accelerates future expansion.

Even when social distancing is no longer relevant, video calls and conferences will be used more than in the past years in order to avoid travel expenses. Of course, regular meetings and classes will start again but perhaps there will be a duality. For example, it would be great if University classes were held live at the lecture halls but

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<sup>4</sup> Beblavý (2019)

also being live streamed, so students could join online if they are sick or unable to attend.

Corona also influenced the preferred payment method in stores and restaurants. While cash was often used in the past, it is now recommended to pay with credit cards. Stores that just now set up electronic or contactless payment systems will continue to use them after the crisis is over.

To sum up, it can be said that the pandemic boosted the technological progress and emphasized the need for comprehensive digitalization.

## **Society**

Social distancing is one of the main methods used to contain the pandemic. Needless to say, recent events had a huge impact on our everyday life and social interactions. No parties, cinemas or concerts: it is a hard time for the extroverts among us. Not only mass events have been prohibited, also the small things have changed. The government discouraged us from visiting relatives over Easter and will probably do so again over Christmas. Whether or not people obey these rules relies on their own mentality. The lack of social interaction during the lockdown certainly put psychological pressure on all of us but time will pass and hopefully, we will continue life unharmed. Basically, all the governmental guidelines and restrictions will be abolished in a world after Corona but some precautions could be useful occasionally.

In 2009, the American molecular biologist and Nobel prize winner Peter Agre recommended “Elbow Bumps” to prevent swine flu.<sup>5</sup> This form of greeting limits physical contact and the spread of diseases. In the ongoing pandemic, scientists also recommend to not shake hands and use elbow bumps.

Maybe business people who travel a lot start to give up normal handshakes and use other contactless forms of greetings, like the “Namaste” in India or the Thai gesture “Wai”. Additionally, during normal waves of influenza it would be useful to wear masks in public transport or at medical practices to keep the rate of infection low.

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<sup>5</sup> Agre (2009)

For some people, however, not everything will be normal in a world after Corona. For example, the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo were rescheduled and now take place between 23 July and 8 August 2021. Studies have shown that male and female sprinters “hit their peak around 25 years of age”.<sup>6</sup> Some athletes who were in their prime in 2020 are now another year older and possibly not able to compete anymore. It is a tragedy for everyone who trained hard to achieve their dreams.

## **Economics**

The Corona-crisis had, has and will have a huge effect on the global and local economy. Whether this is judged positively or negatively lies in the eye of the beholder and depends on the perspective.

Probably the most obvious effect Corona had on the economy was the stock market crash in February and March 2020, where almost every stock plunged at least 30%. Investors and traders lost Millions and some still did not recover from it.

The reason why the market crashed is obvious. Investors were afraid of the effect a pandemic has on the global economy and sold their shares, resulting in a decrease of the value per share. The panic was justified because the global economy indeed took a hit. Supply chains were (and are still) interrupted, as the Guardian reports.<sup>7</sup> China is one of the biggest producers of international goods, especially in the technological and medical sector. Due to lockdown measures, the factories were closed and companies from all over the world suffered. Their revenue has fallen considerably, primarily in the automotive, travel and pharmaceutical industry.

Not only stocks lost in value, the price of commodities such as oil, silver, copper and even the “crisis-proof” gold fell sharply. It goes further than that: the price of WTI oil futures went down to -\$37 per barrel in April 2020.

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<sup>6</sup> Pomeroy (2020)

<sup>7</sup> Davies (2020)

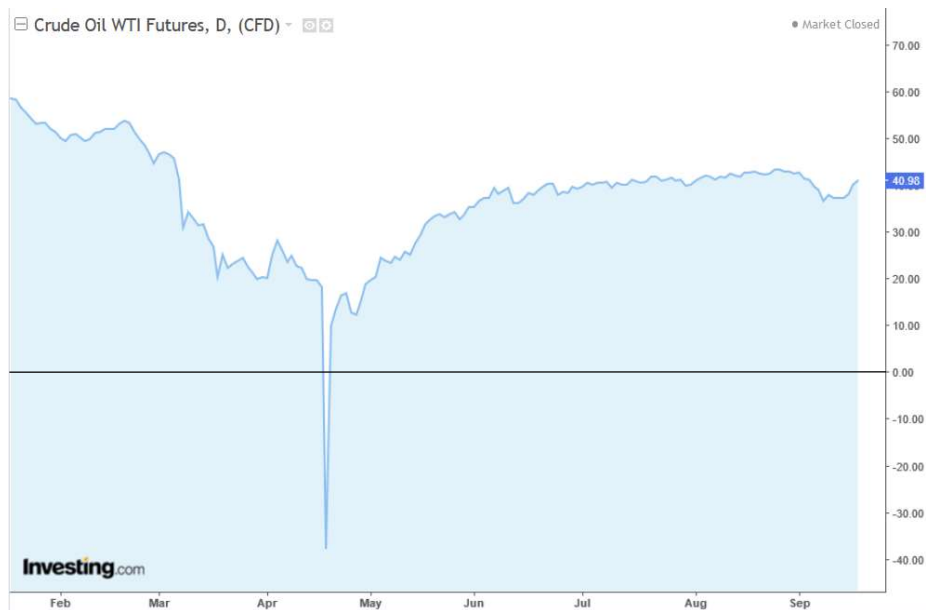


Figure 1: Oil price chart

Businesses needed to file for bankruptcy because of the slump in sales and some company's financial losses made job cuts necessary.

The economic crisis was perfect and economists predicted recessions, mass unemployment and oil prices of -\$100 per barrel.<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to all expectations, the economy recovered quickly and even though the unemployment rate has risen, mass unemployment was avoided. The oil price went up to \$40 per barrel and is now static.

As mentioned in the technological part, people used more technology due to the lockdown and regulations like night-time curfews.

All companies that made life at home more enjoyable benefited from Corona. Online streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon prime video, Disney plus and many more registered an increase of about 10% in viewership. Italy was hit hard by the pandemic and took strong measures aimed at the prevention of the spread of the virus. The number of first-time installations of the Italian Netflix-application was 50% higher in March 2020 than in the months before.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Reinicke (2020)

<sup>9</sup> Grandviewresearch (2020)

This upturn has provided fresh impetus for the stock market. \$NFLX, the stock of Netflix, Inc. rallied in 2020. The value of one share went from \$300 to over \$500 in six months, a total rise of 66%.

Online Streaming services go hand in hand with live streaming services like Twitch, YouTube Live and Facebook Live. These services gained popularity during the lockdown and will probably keep lots of new viewers once everything is back to normal.

Another aspect of live streaming are online meetings. Whether it is online classes or business meetings, video communication systems like Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Skype became more important than ever before.

Every single one of the “Big Five“ tech companies: Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Microsoft is involved in online (live) streaming and cloud computing. The market capitalization of all these five stocks combined is over 7.26 trillion US-Dollars and they make up over 55% of the NASDAQ-100 index<sup>10</sup>, which includes 100 of the “largest non-financial companies listed on the Nasdaq stock market”.<sup>11</sup> It does not matter if Starbucks, PepsiCo or any other of the remaining 93 stocks in the index did not perform very well after the crash because the Big Five are more dominant than ever before, bringing the NASDAQ-100 an all-time-high after all-time-high. In the future, these companies will keep the lead since Corona made them stronger than ever before.

As I carefully explained, big, multinational tech-companies benefited most from the pandemic, whereas other industries suffered. But what about small businesses like bars and restaurants, wedding photographers and hairdressers, exhibition planners or even the carnival society?

Insolvency administrator Prof. Flöther expects a wave of bankruptcies in autumn 2020, particularly for small businesses.<sup>12</sup> In his opinion, the Corona-pandemic did just enough damage to ruin the financial budget of companies that did not have reserves.

Sadly, this prediction seems to come true, in contrast to the -\$100 price prediction for oil I talked about earlier.

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<sup>10</sup> Libercka (2020)

<sup>11</sup> Nasdaq (2019)

<sup>12</sup> Plettendorf (2020)



## Environment

“The Covid-19-pandemic achieved something, where the community of states failed: It reduced the production of greenhouse gases.”<sup>13</sup>

Headlines like this can be found all over the news and it seems like Corona is the savior of the climate.

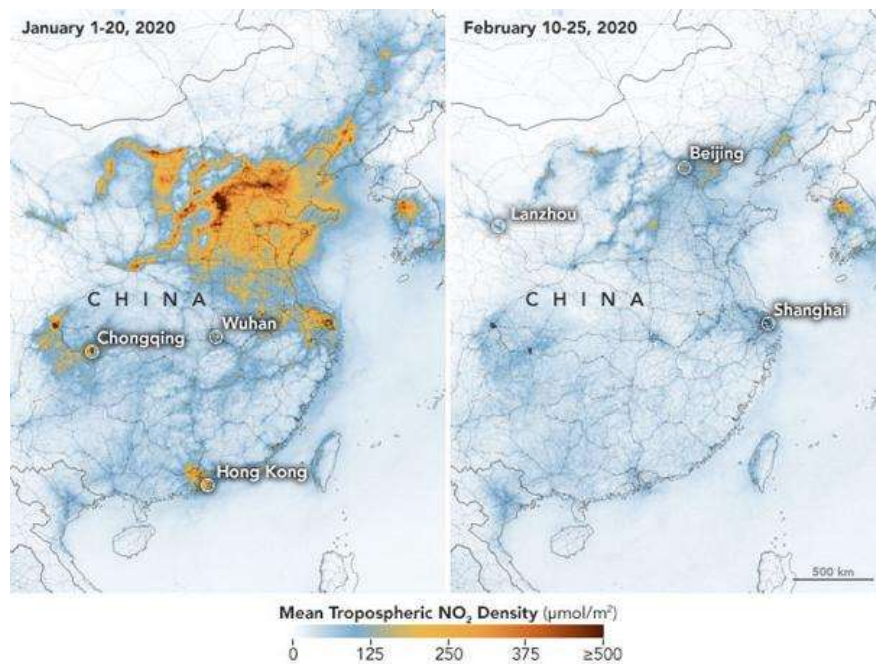


Figure 2: Nitrogen dioxide emissions

The graphic above shows the nitrogen dioxide emissions in East-China in January and February 2020. It makes perfect sense that there are less emissions if factories are closed and air travel is cancelled.

Speaking of short-term consequences: The lockdown certainly had a positive impact on nature, animals and the environment. In urban areas, animals like birds, racoons or foxes experienced more freedom and went out to explore the city. In Venice, the water in the canals became clear due to lack of tourists and traffic.<sup>14</sup> Even in rural regions in the desert of south Africa the effects of the Coronavirus became visual. On the one hand, feline predators were able to hunt easier because there are not many loud jeeps with tourists around, which would scare the prey. On the other hand, these

<sup>13</sup> Fulterer (2020)

<sup>14</sup> Jacobo (2020)

jeeps had a dissuasive effect on poachers. Reportedly, the number of unauthorized hunters has increased.<sup>15</sup>

Even if the effects sound promising, Corona will have a rather negative impact on the environment in the long term. Billions of euros are being used to stabilize the wrecked economy. This will create a hole in the state budget and in the future, this money will be missing to support the development of green technology and in the end, to achieve climate protection goals.

## **Conclusion**

The current pandemic affected every part of our lives, mostly negative. Some of us lost a loved one, others their family business or they had to give up the dream of winning a sports event.

Even though this sounds very depressing, there is room for improvement in the future if people and governments draw the correct conclusions. In a world after Corona, other flu-like diseases could be prevented easier because the measures to contain an epidemic are now tested.

The unbureaucratic support will help small businesses through the crisis and once the restrictions are over, they can continue their work entirely.

Corona is not the first pandemic on earth and unfortunately will not be the last. There have been previous economic crises and recessions in the last century and the global economy always recovered from it, even if it takes time.

We need to get through the hard times right now and have a confident attitude about the future because the situation will get better, eventually.

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<sup>15</sup> Eveleens (2020)

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## Figures:

Figure 1. Crude Oil WTI Futures. Streaming Chart. URL: <https://in.investing.com/commodities/crude-oil-streaming-chart> (Accessed 15.09.2020)

Figure 2. Nitrogen dioxide emissions in January (left) and February this year (right). Euronews. URL: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/04/nasa-confirms-a-fall-in-greenhouse-gas-emissions-in-china-amid-coronavirus-outbreak> (Accessed 15.09.2020)