Essay

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

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                        Fachbereich I - Wirtschaftswissenschaften

Semester: Fachsemester 2 – Master Studium

Abgabetermin: 18. September 2020

Introduction

There has never been a spring and summer like 2020 around the world. Self-isolation and restriction of movement were accompanied by alarming news of an increase in the number of illnesses, as well as a description of the various symptoms of coronavirus infection. There is no doubt that the coronavirus pandemic will lead to changes in all areas of our lives, but the far-reaching consequences will only become apparent over time.

Many people believe that the coronavirus pandemic will change our lives forever, and it is expected to lead people to be more attentive to their health and hygiene issues. The current crisis has a lot of unusual features, so the trajectory for getting out of it is not yet clear. But some possible changes are already visible. In my essay, I would like to highlight the impact of the pandemic on the political, economic, social and technological spheres of life, as well as talk about the impact of quarantine on the environment.

This topic is of great interest to the entire population of our planet, as this year's events have affected almost every individual in our society. Many people ask the question: What awaits us next? Will the pandemic change our lives, or will it only accelerate the changes that are already needed? Will work and training on the internet continue to be the norm? At the moment, the population does not have a clear idea of the changes that the coronavirus pandemic will introduce permanently. In the short term, it can be assumed that governments, and people in general, will try to get things back to how it was. However, the shock that society is going through is startling and, of course, the post-crisis world will not be the same as it was before.

1. Policy

The fight against the coronavirus puts modern society in an unusual situation. In fact, it is a war situation in which the authorities are given emergency powers and the usual rights and freedoms of citizens are restricted. Every government has to make difficult decisions about the appropriate measures: what restrictions to impose and when to relax them, what to spend money on and how to attract more investment, what national considerations can be used to favour international cooperation. These decisions must take into account health advice, economic considerations and political constraints.

At the beginning of the pandemic, experts doubted that Europe would impose the same restrictions as China. However, the Chinese regime learned implementing traffic restrictions, prohibiting travel to work, and forcing quarantine at home, are more effective than voluntary self-isolation and self-organisation of responsible citizens. A tough state, accustomed to authoritarian decisions and broad powers, can build a temporary hospital for those infected with COVID-19 in 10 days[1]. An oppressive environment filled with uncertainty can quickly turn into panic and so this can be their justification for this total use of power.

The experience of pandemics contributes to an increasing neurosis within society. People will be afraid of a recurrence of the pandemic leading to it becoming easier for them to accept restrictions on rights and freedoms. Politicians who are in favour of expanding the powers of the state and regulating different areas of life will be able to gain additional favour and score points. The pandemic will be their argument. It is a crisis that not only overstretches the health system and kills thousands of people, but also leads to a recession, stopping or hindering the economy for months. You want it to end? Then it means you need to accept the state being able to impose severe restrictions more quickly. Thus the ruling elite needs more power to pass the right laws and impose restrictions in an express regime.

2. Economy

In the winter of 2020, a pandemic with hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of people infected was considered unlikely, so little serious effort was put into calculatating its consequences. In early February, economists focused only on the epidemics of the recent past. The most obvious comparison was an outbreak of another coronavirus, which caused massive SARS disease in 2003[2]. The comparison showed that the impact of the new epidemic would

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[1] Business Insider (February 2020): A construction expert broke down how China built an emergency hospital to treat Wuhan coronavirus patients in just 10 days: https://www.businessinsider.com/how-china-managed-build-entirely-new-hospital-in-10-days-2020-2?r=DE&IR=T

[2] CNBC (February 2020): Coronavirus: The hit to the global economy will be worse than SARS: https://www.cnbc.com/2020/02/06/coronavirus-the-hit-to-the-global-economy-will-be-worse-than-sars.html

have a greater negative impact on the global economy. However, already in March, it became clear that the forecasts, despite being negative, were still too optimistic about the impact.

The scale of the problem was so great that the world economy could not even theoretically be prepared for it. Restrictive measures taken by the authorities of various countries led to a partial or even complete halt to production and a sharp decline in the service sector. At the same time, foreign economic activity was also affected. In the second half of March, it became clear that the economies of the world's largest countries were in recession and that it could take years to overcome the negative consequences of the pandemic. Saxo Bank called this year lost to the economy[3].

According to The New York Times[4], European companies are preparing for massive staff cuts to compensate for the collapse of the business due to the coronavirus outbreak. The transport and retail sectors will be hardest hit. Until the recent resurgence of coronavirus outbreaks, economic losses from the pandemic were rising rapidly. Corporate giants and retailers will seek to reduce tens of thousands of positions in the autumn and over the next year. Airbus[5], Lufthansa[6], Air France[7] and countless small businesses are planning reductions. In addition, according to The Guardian, a third of UK companies are planning to downsize by October 2020 due to the closure of the job retention programme.[8]

So far, the most dangerous factor for the global economic recovery has been the second wave of coronavirus. The second wave of coronavirus is no longer just a threat and has become a reality for many countries around the world. The governments of countries affected by the second wave of the pandemic are already returning quarantine measures, declaring emergency evacuation and testing for coronavirus. New outbreaks are putting an end to the possibility of rapid global economic recovery.

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[3] Saxo Bank (April 2020): Saxo Q2 Outlook: A World Out of Balance:

https://www.home.saxo/campaigns/pr/2020-h1/saxo-q2-outlook-a-world-out-of-balance

[4] The New York Times (August 2020): Europe Tried to Limit Mass Layoffs, but the Cuts Are Coming Anyway:
https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/24/business/europe-economy-layoffs.html

[5] The Local (July 2020): Airbus job cuts to hit Germany hardest: https://www.thelocal.de/20200701/airbus-job-cuts-to-hit-germany-hardest

[6] FlightGlobal (August 2020): Lufthansa Group warns of compulsory job losses:

https://www.flightglobal.com/airlines/lufthansa-group-warns-of-compulsory-job-losses/139661.article

[7] Euronews (March 2020): Air France cuts 7,500 jobs and sparks criticism of €7bn state bailout:
https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/03/air-france-s-7bn-state-bailout-slammed-as-talks-begin-over-job-cuts

[8] The Guardian (August 2020): One in three UK firms expect to cut jobs by autumn, poll finds:
https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/aug/10/one-in-three-uk-firms-expect-to-cut-jobs-by-autumn-poll-finds

3. Society

People need to be more focused and careful when it comes to health care. If the population remains in the habit of paying due attention to hygiene, this may in the future have an impact on the reduction of rotavirus and other infections that are transmitted by contact. In my opinion, people will not behave as they used to, because the memory of the pandemic remains.

As far as social distance is concerned, it will take time for people to get back together comfortably at concerts and public events, but it will happen eventually. We can also assume that there will be a number of people who will avoid travelling. Such people will have a stronger perception that when being on an aeroplane or train in the immediate vicinity of people, the risk of coronavirus infection will be several times higher. However, the diagram below makes it clear that only those in the immediate vicinity of an infected person have higher risks.
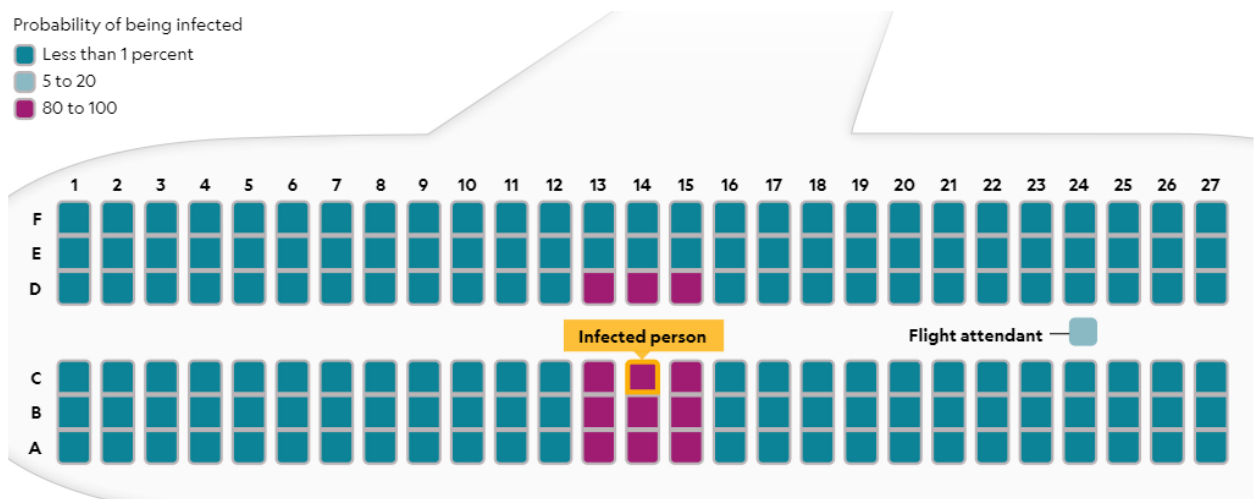

Fig. 1 – Probability of being infected[9]

According to observations by the FlyHealthy Research Team, choosing a place at a window and staying seated clearly reduces the likelihood of contact with an infectious disease. But as you can see from the attached graph, the team model shows that passengers in the middle and aisle seats across have a rather low probability of infection.

The impact of isolation on human behaviour and psyche should also be given special attention. Yes, we are "free" in our homes, but that freedom is severely restricted. Social isolation leads to chronic loneliness and boredom, which can have a detrimental effect on physical and mental wellbeing if it occurs for long enough. As people live in an uncertain environment, isolation is exacerbated by mass panic and anxiety. The fact is that our brain is programmed for sociality, and without loved ones around us we suffer physically, more

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[9] Fig.1 KENNEDY ELLIOTT, NG STAFF. ART BY TAYLOR MAGGIACOMO. SOURCES: HOWARD WEISS, PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY; VICKI HERTZBERG, EMORY UNIVERSITY
https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/01/how-coronavirus-spreads-on-a-plane/

precisely, neurobiologically.[10] It has been well documented that long periods of isolation in custody or quarantine due to illness have a detrimental effect on mental well-being.[11] Single people have a higher risk of early death than even alcoholics and obese people.

There will be more depression, anxiety and social avoidance after the epidemic. The longer the quarantine period, the higher the risks. It is likely that the population will have new behaviours that were unthinkable a few months ago - such as registering for a plane only with a certificate of absence of infection and/or acquired immunity. In an extreme example, society may be divided into different "classes", with those proving they have anti-bodies allowed more freedom than those who cannot. In any case, society will rely on improvements in Psychological understanding and treatment to function.

4. Technology

We are lucky that this pandemic happened in the technological era. It gave us the opportunity to continue to communicate, to work, to celebrate holidays and to support loved ones, even from a distance. Modern technology has largely helped people to stay in touch with each other, virtually maintaining communication.

Today it is generally believed that coronavirus accelerates many technological trends. What had taken 5-10 years to change is happening right now. Education has switched to online, along with retailing. The shares of Zoom, a company that develops software for teleconferencing, have soared: as more and more office employees are switching to remote work.[12]

We will not go back to our previous lives under any circumstances. I think the pandemic has given a serious impetus to people to think about what they can do online. In just a couple of weeks after the pandemic started, people moved many actions into electronic format, thus pushing the progress forward for several years. Many people are also rethinking the balance of their personal and working lives.

The pandemic has shown which companies have been able to adapt their work processes to the harsh environment in which our planet's population finds themselves. In my opinion, the desire to change the rhythm of life, to adapt to new circumstances and to acquire new habits is the key to progress, and companies that don't do this successfully will be left behind.

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[10] SAGE Journals (April 2020): Social isolation in Covid-19: The impact of loneliness: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0020764020922269#:~:text=Those%20affected%20and%20suspicious%20cases,by%20mass%20panic%20and%20anxiety.

[11] Stickley, A., Koyanagi, A. (2016). Loneliness, common mental disorders and suicidal behavior: Findings from a general population survey. Journal of Affective Disorders, 197, 81-87. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26971125/

[12] The New York Times (February 2020): The Week in Tech: Coronavirus Disrupts the Industry: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/28/technology/coronavirus-disrupts-industry.html

Special attention should be paid to telemedicine. Telemedicine is the remote provision of medical services (e.g. patient monitoring and consultation) and the interaction of medical staff with each other using telecommunications technology.[13] With the development of telemedicine, people save time and effort because they can communicate with a specialist online. This is particularly important during a coronavirus pandemic, because a person can seek help online at any time without exposing his or her health, as well as that of others, to danger.

In this chapter, I would also like to address a topic very important and relevant today; the dissemination of false information about the coronavirus. The pandemic has generated a huge amount of misinformation. It is possible that many of us have come across audio recordings or photographs that have been distributed through messengers to 'warn and protect' friends and family. Such fakes have a certain pattern - texts are presented in a confidential manner, addressing a loved one or an acquaintance, and they contain a call to action. On the one hand, it tells you what to do to protect yourself, and on the other hand, it is recommended that you distribute information to help as many people as possible. In my opinion, this is an irrational reaction to fear, which usually manifests itself in major epidemics and disasters.

Initially, we cannot understand how big the problem of fake news distribution is, but the statistics are astounding - roughly 800 people died from drinking highly-concentrated alcohol in the hope of disinfecting their bodies, while 5,900 people were hospitalised after consuming methanol, with 60 people going blind as a result.[14] Many IT companies reacted immediately to the situation with the spread of false information - Facebook banned the advertising of drugs promising to cure coronavirus and started blocking fakes about infection.[15] In my opinion, people must follow basic rules - check the source, develop critical thinking, analyse their own emotions.

5. Environment

Just a short time after most European countries had gone into quarantine, news began to appear that environmental pressures were reducing. The streets were empty, production was shut down and the number of flights was reduced by several times.

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[13] WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data Telemedicine: opportunities and developments in Member States: report on the second global survey on eHealth 2009. (Global Observatory for eHealth Series, 2)

https://www.who.int/goe/publications/goe_telemedicine_2010.pdf

[14] Deutsche Welle (August 2020): Spread of coronavirus fake news causes hundreds of deaths: https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-misinformation/a-54529310

[15] Forbes (February 2020): Facebook Bans Ads Promising A Cure To The Coronavirus:

https://www.forbes.com/sites/rachelsandler/2020/02/26/facebook-bans-ads-promising-a-cure-to-the-coronavirus/#49a56dfa1fc1

During quarantine in China, CO_2 emissions were reduced by 25%.[16] The United Kingdom also recorded a reduction in carbon emissions and pollution levels.[17] The dramatic reduction in transport usage has also played an important role in this - even in countries where no strict quarantine has been implemented, people are asked to avoid any travel that is not absolutely necessary. A question that has not yet been answered is how long will these changes last? It may happen that when the flights resume and the factories are back up and running, people will try to catch up and the jump in emissions will quickly compensate for the downturn we are seeing now.

Reduced transport and production stoppages have resulted in much cleaner air in many cities - figures 2 and 3 show satellite images showing air pollution levels in March 2019 and 2020.[18] The same applies to cleaner rivers and lakes where the company's waste water has stopped discharging.
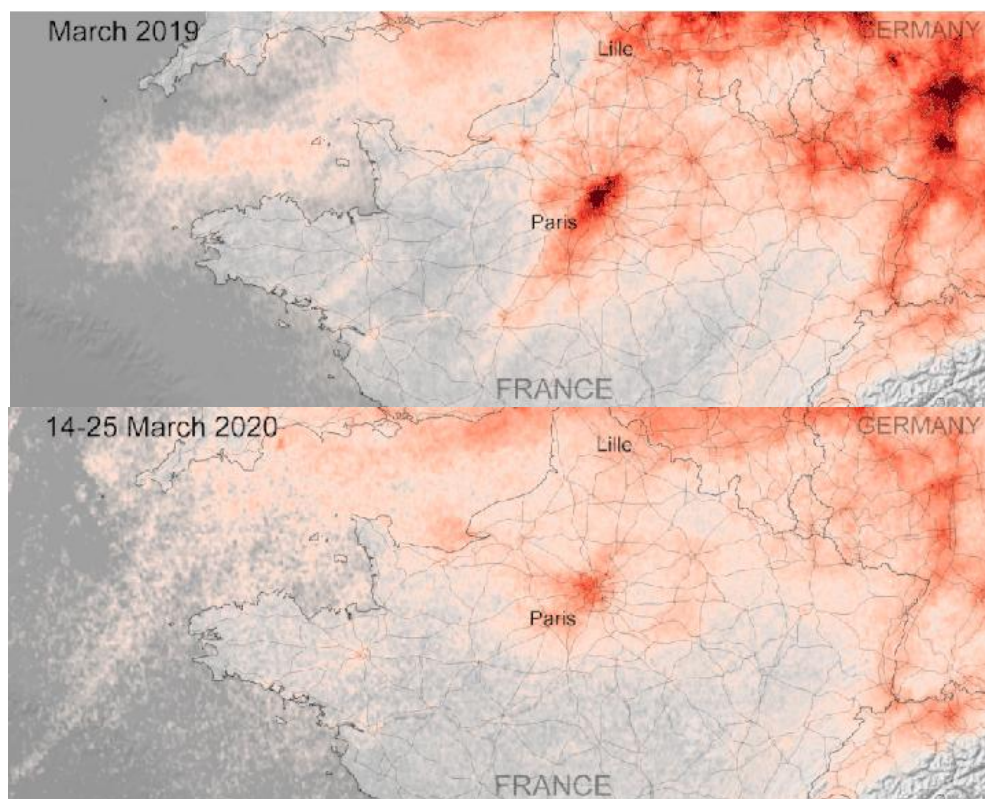

Fig. 2 and 3 - Air pollution data obtained before and after France was locked down[19]

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[16] CarbonBrief (February 2020): Analysis: Coronavirus temporarily reduced China's CO2 emissions by a quarter: https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-coronavirus-has-temporarily-reduced-chinas-co2-emissions-by-a-quarter

[17] Sky News (June 2020): Coronavirus: Effects of lockdown could see UK carbon emissions drop by 11% this year: https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-effects-of-lockdown-could-see-uk-carbon-emissions-drop-by-11-this-year-12004148

[18] Sky News (March 2020): Coronavirus: How lockdowns have caused drop in air pollution across the world: https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-how-lockdowns-have-caused-drop-in-air-pollution-across-the-world-11965509

[19] Fig. 2 and 3 Sky News (March 2020): Coronavirus: How lockdowns have caused drop in air pollution across the world: https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-how-lockdowns-have-caused-drop-in-air-pollution-across-the-world-11965509

Is there any chance of making these changes more sustainable? Yes, if, for example, a large number of companies decide to continue working remotely, which would cut down on commuting. If people understand the value of health, well-being, communication with family, and the local community, they may not make up for lost trips and purchases immediately. Another possible effect is the emergence of new habits that may be more environmentally friendly, such as the use of bicycles, which avoids public transport during the pandemic.

However, while nature has cleared up in some places, in others it has become more stressed. Just a few worrying examples: in the USA, many communities have stopped recycling.[20] Restaurants and coffee shops have stopped selling coffee and food into their own cups and containers.[21] Shops began wrapping each bun in a separate plastic bag.

Of course, during the pandemic, the negative impact on the environment was reduced by several times. If people continue to work remotely and the use of transport in cities is noticeably lower, the trend towards reducing emissions will continue. But every coin has another side; in this case a sharp decline in the economy, the destruction of small and medium-sized businesses, psychological reactions to stress, the loss of loved ones and forced isolation. There are less destructive ways to improve the environment.

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[20] Waste Dive (March 2020): Municipalities suspend recycling due to coronavirus impact on prison labor, broader safety concerns: https://www.wastedive.com/news/recycling-mrfs-prison-labor-suspensions-coronavirus-covid-19/574301/.

[21] Starbucks` Stories & News (March 2020): Managing Through the Dynamics of COVID-19: https://stories.starbucks.com/stories/2020/managing-courageously-through-the-dynamics-of-covid-19/

Conclusion

The coronavirus pandemic has brought global change to every sphere of our society. We are in a situation where the picture is changing quite rapidly, and we can only speculate about the impact the pandemic will have on the lives of everyone and on society as a whole by the end. Quarantine measures are justified. Which of us, when aware that going to a bar may potentially cause the death of an elderly stranger whom we may unwittingly infect, would still choose to go to that bar? Hopefully, when the price of boredom is measured in the lives of old people, society is ready to get bored at home, without going out and having fun. Even at work you can sometimes not travel, especially if you have to take the metro, and the world will not turn upside down if you stay home. You should not confuse complete self-isolation with a reasonable reduction in social activity. This virus is not so terrible as to require pausing living.

As a consequence of the current pandemic, the phenomenon of "virtualisation" will develop even further. Virtualisation of trade is already widespread. There is an active digitalisation of financial and administrative services. There is more to come from telemedicine, communication and entertainment. And also remote work, what many office workers could only dream of just five years ago, is becoming a legally established, necessary step during a pandemic. Virtualisation takes place using technology, so we can also expect explosive growth in investment in technology and communication.

An important lesson from this situation should be for all humanity to understand what thoughtless, careless consumption in all its forms can lead to, and to understand that we all live in one common, global space. Although borders can be drawn on maps and marked with checkpoints, in reality they no longer exist, and the increase in globalization and virtual technology will only exacerbate this.

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