

# What lessons does the Corona crisis teach us about globalisation?

(Nina R., EF)

The Corona crisis has shown us that our economic system depends on growth and that one virus can put the whole world into a shutdown. In a crisis like this, the market is not self-regulating. Instead it needs help from the state. We do not know what comes next but we know that we cannot go back to “normal”. Our actions have caused too many problems. Solidarity, collaboration and a change of system is now required - nationally and globally.

## So far

“Global village” is a metaphor which stands for the fact that people from all over the world have come closer to each other as a result of globalisation. Information can be spread very easily, countries have become more interconnected, people can travel around the world and can cooperate internationally, but there are (as always) some negative side effects: Unlimited growth led to a climate crisis and an exploitative and ruthless economic system.

Since we were “restricted” in our freedom, more and more people have noticed that social contacts are vital for survival (and are even more important than money) and that a change-over in our lives is possible. I see more cyclists and runners in the park. Human beings become creative and start to improvise because they do not know how long these limitations will be in effect, for how long they have to cope with the current problems and how the world will be afterwards. It is a time in human history at which we do not know what comes next. We cannot plan<sup>1</sup> – something that makes people anxious.

The big question is how long it will be like this.

## The risks

The economy goes down, small companies are in distress and many people are losing their job. In America about 26 million have already become unemployed within a month because of the crisis. The Corona pandemic shows and reinforces trends that are in favour of big companies but bad for the consumers and co-workers<sup>2</sup>. Amazon, for instance, provides their goods online but the employees have to work more for that and probably not always in safe conditions.

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1 Welzer, H. (2020). *Alle haben sich eben darauf verlassen, dass es irgendwie immer so weiter geht*. Retrieved March 22, 2020 from <https://www.fr.de/kultur/gesellschaft/alle-haben-sich-eben-darauf-verlassen-dass-irgendwie-immer-weiter-geht-13609180.html>

2 Müller, H. (2020). *Die Welt nach der Krise*. Retrieved April 12, 2020 from <https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/corona-krise-und-wirtschaft-die-wirtschaftlichen-folgen-der-pandemie-kolumne-a-542e8a73-273f-4e2b-958b-bea91c94d472>

The less competition there is and the more power shifts to those who already have a huge impact on the markets, the more the economy will suffer, the more our world will be “de-globalized” and the more our democracy will be in danger. Even before Corona, there were already significant signs that showed an intention of a total surveillance through technology: “In the future, our identities in everyday life will come to be defined more and more by our virtual activities and associations. Our highly documented pasts will have an impact on our prospects, and our ability to influence and control how we are perceived by others will decrease dramatically. The potential for someone else to access, share or manipulate parts of our online identities will increase, particularly due to our reliance on cloud-based data storage.” (*Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen in “The New Digital Age”*)<sup>3</sup>.

This is an attack on our freedom and democracy but it seems as if we are sacrificing our rights voluntarily. We do not see the danger of a potential abuse of our data. I do not insinuate that digitalization and technology are the devil in disguise but there are not just a few people who want to take advantage of our personal data. For example, is it really necessary to track people so that we can follow up who infected whom? Should it not be enough to stay in quarantine and to inform those with whom we had contact with? I do not want to be observed in public by some cameras and expose information about my personal life like in China...

The only two things, according to Henrik Müller, that can stop “big business” are globalisation and competition<sup>4</sup>.

### Why Globalisation is important

Although globalisation has caused many problems like environmental pollution and climate change, a big gap between poor and rich, inhumane working conditions, for example in the garment factories in Bangladesh (<https://waronwant.org/sweatshops-bangladesh>), a homogenization of the world's cultures and as we can see and perceive now: a pandemic, it is nevertheless really important that the world stays interconnected. Without globalisation many things would not work (for example a free movement of capital, goods and services); we would not be able to run an efficient business and most people would fear a residue of civilisation. If countries work together, they will not wage wars on each others. That is why international cooperation is so much important. In times of Corona (and in general too) we should not blame other countries for causing the virus, instead we should work together to find a vaccine. We could even find and we must find (!) a way to solve the climate crisis by working internationally. I know it sounds like a utopia but I believe in human beings.

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3 Schmidt, E., & Cohen, J. (2013). *The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business*. New York City, US: Vintage Books

4 Müller, H. (2020). *Die Welt nach der Krise*. Retrieved April 12, 2020 from <https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/corona-krise-und-wirtschaft-die-wirtschaftlichen-folgen-der-pandemie-kolumne-a-542e8a73-273f-4e2b-958b-bea91c94d472>

People often fear that climate activists and politicians want to take away our freedom but we are only imprisoned if we go on like this because then the planet cannot be saved. We will drown in the water that will flood our cities or we will die from a heat wave, to say it drastically. What is not important, for instance, is money, control and power, but it is creativity, innovation, sustainability and cooperation.

Maja Göpel, a transformation researcher and climate expert, says that the way we economize now is even less economical than economizing sustainably because we must invest more money in the damage that we have already created<sup>5</sup>.

Another interesting thought is that “flying is not a human right”<sup>6</sup>. Why do people have to fly from Cologne to Munich and back on the same day just to take part in a business meeting that lasts an hour and could easily be done as a video conference? Why do we always think that just because something is cheap or convenient it is bound to make us happy? There are many alternative options that might work just as well but bring a new and different quality to life<sup>7</sup>. We just have to ask ourselves: “Who do we want to be?”<sup>8</sup>

### What matters now

Once we have made it through the Corona crisis, our lives must not be ruled by companies which do not act in the interest of humankind or all other living creatures. We cannot allow that every country will be on their own and countries fight against each other. But we also cannot go on like we did before. So far, the system has been based on exploitation and endless resource consumption. It is neither healthy nor pointless or sustainable in the long term. As Maja Göpel says, we can only be innovative if we reduce our consumption by about a tenth.

That means we have to emerge stronger from the crisis. What we need is a system that is fair and balanced, within a country and globally, that is not based on exploitation but cooperation and that is future-orientated.

Globalisation and technology are not bad in themselves, but rather the way we handle with it can be good or bad. So the question is, what kind of globalisation do we want?

Is it a society in which everyone lives in his own bubble, can allegedly consume endlessly, is self-centred and only focused on the individual? Or is it a world that

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5 Göpel, M. (2020). *Ökonomie und Ökologie – ein Widerspruch?*. Retrieved March 15, 2020 from <https://www.zdf.de/gesellschaft/precht/precht-210.html>

6 Welzer, H. (2019). *Grünen-Chef Habeck und Soziologe Welzer eröffnen phil.cologne*. Retrieved June 4, 2019 from <https://www.rundschau-online.de/news/kultur/debatte-in-koeln-gruenen-chef-habeck-und-soziologe-welzer-eroeffnen-phil-cologne-32648834>

7 Welzer, H. (2011). *Luxus ist kein Menschenrecht*. Retrieved July 24, 2011 from <https://www.welt.de/print/wams/nrw/article13504461/Luxus-ist-kein-Menschenrecht.html>

8 Hüther, G. (2019). *Das Leben besteht nicht darin, sich irgendwelche Konsumbedürfnisse zu erfüllen*. Retrieved September 6, 2019 from <https://utopia.de/gerald-huether-hirnforscher-das-leben-besteht-nicht-darin-sich-irgendwelche-konsumbeduerfnisse-zu-erfuellen-51507/>

works together to find solutions, a world that is creative and really innovative, a world that stays curious and allows us to live in dignity?