

20th International Scientific Conference
Globalization and Its Socio-Economic
Consequences
University of Zilina, Faculty of Operation and
Economics of Transport and
Communications,
Department of Economics, 21st – 22nd
October 2020

▶ **GLOBALIZATION AND COVID-19: THE ROLE OF
LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES IN CONTEXT
OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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▶ *FEM CULS PRAGUE*

Introduction

- ▶ COVID-19 Pandemic forced governments at all levels to take a focused response to the unexpected situation and brought into sharp focus different levels of federal, national and subnational decision-making (Dodds et al., 2020)
- ▶ The assumption that the division of functional responsibilities among different levels of government increases the efficiency and responsiveness of governments (Lago et al. 2020) became an acute challenge to be proven.

Research background

- ▶ Multilevel Governance Paradigm
- ▶ Relevance of functioning in context of the pandemic
- ▶ Conceptualization of the pandemic from the point of view of policy making
- ▶ According to Capano et al. (2020), pandemics are a difficult policy problem to conceptualize and structure.
- ▶ The political context is often important to understanding how the government deals with transboundary, unique, uncertain crises. (Lee et al. 2020)
- ▶ Interpreting and responding to pandemics is always a political act (Dodds et al., 2020)

Purpose of the article and Methods

- ▶ To analyse impacts of COVID-19 on local democracy
- ▶ In the research framework of the Multilevel Governance Paradigm, investigate the reaction of relevant local and regional authorities on current situation
- ▶ analyse how far the Multilevel Governance concept corresponds with the assumptions of efficacy and relevancy of current emergency response.
- ▶ Methods of content and comparative analysis based on primary sources and scientific literature review are used.

Results

- ▶ **Factors decisive for the emergency response in context of the MLG**
- ❖ Polemics about the governance structure
- ❖ absence of information on governance and institutional arrangements, some implications for governance may be drawn only indirectly, the most prominent governance sphere that is addressed across these remains the ***national level*** (UCLG 2020)
- ▶ the overall picture is complicated and cannot be explained by the formal structure of political systems per se (Dodds et al., 2020)

Results

- ▶ Migone (2020) argues that different national political systems affect both how power is distributed, and how policies are processed in the administrative and political systems leading them to generate and maintain specific policy styles.
- ▶ Federal states are often reproached for coordination problems but in several cases, central governments shirked their responsibilities, forcing subnational governments into leading roles (Greer et al., 2020),
- ▶ On the other hand, some authors praise the political system of their country as being able to act more autonomously and effectively, due to the historically based experience and well founded health care (Canada, Germany).
- ▶ For unitary states such as South Korea, Singapore and New Zealand - rapid health interventions, border closures, past experience...

Results

- ▶ existing governance systems and institutional arrangements are a key determining factor for effective emergency responses (UCLG 2020, Rocco et al. 2020),
- ▶ State capacity matters (Palermo 2020, Greers et al., 2020), the state capacity is connected with the state capacity to act (Greer et al., 2020)
- ▶ dependence of quality of governance and quality of emergency response (Council of Europe, 2020),
- ▶ Investment in state capacity to deliver services and enforce rules matters, on the other hand, strong state capacity does not mean it will be used well (Greers et al., 2020)
- ▶ Comparing e. g. middle and lower income states such as Mongolia, Montenegro, and Vietnam implement a more effective public health response than e. g. US or UK (Greer et al., 2020).

Results

- ▶ **Response from local and regional authorities in European context**
- ▶ From the point of view of local democracy, the crisis prepared unexpected threats, starting with the limitation of basic civil rights until the threats of executive powers on sub-national level, being described as the "lockdown of local democracy" (Council of Europe, 2020; CoR, 2020).
- ▶ The pandemic has resulted in an urgent "recentralisation" of multi-level governance structures for many European countries, regardless of the fact that regional and local levels were sometimes much more reactive in responding to related challenges. It would be important that COVID-19 "should not kill multi-level governance" in the name of false impressions, while "recentralisation is not a miracle cure for the pandemic" (Palermo, CoR, 2020)
- ▶ Implications for the spread of nationalism - one could speak about a 'pandemic populism', authoritarian opportunism and geopolitical skulduggery (Greers et al., Dodds et al., 2020; 2020; CoR, 2020)
- ▶ More recently, COVID-19 bears implications for governance, with citizens' trust in governments increasing in some countries, especially for local politicians, and decreasing in others (OECD, 2020).
- ▶ European Committee of the Regions proclaimed that "at all costs it must be avoided to exploit the crisis to justify toughening national positions. On the contrary, this should be a wake-up call for national capitals that crises know no borders and only a strong, well-funded Union can support its members, regions and cities. " (CoR, 2020).

Results

- ▶ **Cities response in global context**
- ▶ In context of the crisis, OECD (2020) has defined the role of cities as:
- ▶ On the one hand, cities have acted as implementation vehicles of nation-wide measures such as the local support to and enforcement of the confinement measures, thanks to their resources and capacity or their local prerogatives;
- ▶ on the other hand, cities have been spearheading more bottom-up, innovative responses while resorting to technology or other resources and building on their unique proximity to citizens (OECD, 2020)
- ▶ In the face of COVID-19, several mayors and local administrations have developed innovative ways to inform, reassure and communicate with the public, developed a wide range of digital tools to cope with daily needs and health issues. (OECD, 2020; CoR, 2020; Council of Europe, 2020).
- ▶ In many cases, Mayors in person lead the charge to reassure their residents with a range of creative options from engaging with public figures, to using social media to address live questions (OECD, 2020). This development has confirmed that – as previously stated by Torfling et al. (2020), the public sector is more innovative than its reputation.

Key findings

- ▶ As key findings one could consider:
 - 1) the **deepened multi-stakeholder partnership and collaborative governance**, vertically as well as horizontally, which played a decisive role in the efficiency of emergency response;
 - 2) the **role of digitalization in communication between all levels of governments and further stakeholders**, while pointing out the need for further effectiveness and security of (not just) sensitive data. Especially the social media context and cybersecurity issues will be more and more important in the debate of the private and public sectors.
 - 3) Finally, the absolute **need for place-policy based resp. regional-policy based responses** has been emphasized, while respecting the national-centred powers.

Conclusions

- ❖ This paper analysed impacts of COVID-19 on local democracy and the reaction of local and regional authorities on this situation.
- ❖ From the point of view of regional and local authorities, the crisis prepared unexpected threats for local democracy, starting with the limitation of basic civil rights until the threats of executive powers on sub-national level, being described as the “lockdown of local democracy”.
- ▶ On the other hand, from the point of view of international organizations (especially OECD and the UN, partly EU), this situation prepared a way, or an opportunity, to abandon “old structural mistakes” and use the situation for a more sustainable way of living, especially in context of SDGs and the Green Deal concept.
- ▶ Similar reaction can be observed in the cities’ level response, as “many cities are already planning for life after COVID-19 with a range of investments to pair economic recovery with environmental sustainability with an emphasis on clean forms of urban mobility and energy efficiency“ (OECD, 2020).

Conclusions

- ▶ As it is too early in most cases to identify the effect of policy decisions on the course of the ongoing pandemic (Greer et al., 2020), it is evident that “recovery from the crisis should be a shared responsibility across all levels of government which should leverage financial resources and good governance to deliver opportunities for all, to transition to a low-carbon and climate resilient economy (OECD, 2020).
- ▶ Still, governance issues, from global regulation to local collaboration and capacity building, might present the biggest challenge for research and action (Bailey, 2020).

- ▶ Thank you for your attention!
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