

Press Release

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Leopoldina Advocates a Sustainable Approach to Tackling the Coronavirus Pandemic

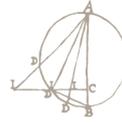
In a [statement](#) published today, the National Academy of Sciences [Leopoldina](#) addresses the many aspects of the corona pandemic and provides concrete recommendations for action. The Academy recommends a shift towards sustainable forms of economy, more European and international cooperation, and a strengthening of services of general interest and common goods that will make our societies more resilient to future crises.

Among the authors of the statement are Jürgen Renn, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, and Robert Schlögl, Fritz Haber Institute of the Max Planck Society and Max Planck Institute for Chemical Energy Conversion, supported by Christoph Rosol as coordinator of the Anthropocene Research Group at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science.

The authors of the study call in particular for a medium and long-term perspective on the social and structural change processes necessitated by the pandemic. "After the pandemic, it must not amount to an unreflected restoration and cementing of an unsustainable status quo," says Jürgen Renn. "At the core, the changes now required must be transformative in nature." This applies in particular to the increased protection of climate and biodiversity, but also to social participation and the common good. "All this means *de facto* health protection," said the Max Planck Director.

Renn, Schlögl and Rosol, together with the other authors of the Leopoldina statement, are convinced that the current corona crisis should be used to build a sustainable economy. The development of a climate-friendly economy and a consistent turnaround in mobility and agriculture provide essential impulses for innovation and crisis-resistant growth. The scientists therefore also call for the objectives of the German Sustainability Strategy to be consistently pursued and refer in this context to the [recommendations](#) of the *Wissenschaftsplattform Nachhaltigkeit 2030* (Science Platform Sustainability 2030).

Instead of a recovery of the fossil economy, a transformation of the energy system should be initiated by reinvesting in renewable and sustainable industries and services. "The transformation of the energy system is also a unique innovation opportunity for Germany and Europe," explains Robert Schlögl. This includes the rapid introduction of a CO₂ price with an actual steering effect, the implementation of the national hydrogen strategy and the consistent restructuring of the electricity market.



The scientists are convinced that the current political reactions to the Corona crisis, in particular the unprecedented economic rescue measures taken by Germany and Europe, can also develop a paradigmatic character for the energy and agricultural turnaround, which in turn requires investments and radical cuts of at least the same magnitude. The goals and measures of the European Green Deal, including an EU industrial strategy, the just-transition mechanism, the farm-to-fork strategy and the EU Circular Economy Action Plan, offer a sensible framework for this.

In view of the dramatic effects of the corona pandemic, there is a need to better research and communicate the systemic causes and interrelationships of global social, economic and ecological risks and resiliencies across disciplines. In the future, science and research will therefore have to face the challenge of making contributions to solving complex human problems across disciplines. A hitherto largely overlooked prerequisite for the outbreak of the corona pandemic is the rapid loss of wildlife habitat due to increasingly extensive agriculture and climate change, and the associated deterioration in the resilience of ecosystems. "The enormous speed at which the virus spreads and the dramatic worldwide effects on the health and social structures of many countries were only made possible by today's global mobility and the increasing inequality in populations," the scientists emphasize.

Indeed, the current corona pandemic is one in a long series of epidemic-related crises. "However, this crisis will assume unprecedented proportions due to today's circumstances – the "great acceleration" of socio-economic processes and global interdependence," say the three Max Planck researchers. Historical experience and findings have made it clear how epidemics since about 1940 have not only become increasingly frequent, but how their containment must also be countered with ever greater technical and economic effort.

The trauma of an unprecedented disruption of social interaction over generations has yet to be overcome. However, the Corona crisis has already helped to raise the importance of common goods for social life, the preservation of cultural and political achievements and the ecological foundations of life in the 21st century directly into the general awareness once again. It makes clear what radical cuts are necessary to protect health, the environment and society.

"However, such lessons are all too quickly forgotten," warn Renn, Schlögl, and Rosol: "We know from many other crises that after a phase of acute exacerbation, social oblivion quickly sets in again. Corona should be a beginning to break this mental and political mechanism and to act now with foresight, so that the coming crisis does not become even more severe."

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