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HOW HAS COVID-19 CHANGED THE SUSTAINABILITY FORESIGHT

In the spring of 2020, the routine life of the majority of the world's population was disrupted by an unexpected crisis. The changes it caused became the conditions of one of the largest natural social experiments conducted on all mankind in recent years. It is difficult to overestimate the unprecedented efforts that had to be made to address strategic and tactical challenges at all levels of government. From everyday decisions that individuals have to make in their daily lives (how to get to work, how to organize distance learning, how to protect themselves and their families from risks), to global decisions that unite the collective efforts of many. These processes are considered as objects of scientific interest.

And in October 2021, the Nobel Committee awarded the Prize in Economics to three US-based scientists (D. Cardo, J. Angrist and G. Imben) for a revolutionary rethinking of the approach to finding empirical data sources for the socio-economic systems studies. By the logic of Nobel laureates, so-called "natural" experiments are vital source of information about the processes taking place.

Some changes in the behavior of social groups under the influence of uncontrolled factors that researchers can observe in the framework of desk research, allowed to obtain additional empirical data to study the labor market, the role of education in the formation of human capital etc. Notably, it is important for the researcher to be able to find the conditions of a natural experiment, identify factors that affect the behavior of the object and establish appropriate correlations.

One can hardly imagine a simulated situation of large social groups being tested, while routine patterns of their behavior are being radically changed. But these changes have been achieved recently in a natural way: people massively refused to use a personal car, suspended air travel, changed approaches to work organization, and began to study online. All these and many other changes in human behavior caused by the global COVID crisis have become an unprecedented scientific case that requires proper scientific investigation.

Firstly, the pandemic has shown that humanity can respond quickly to crises and that social collaboration is a viable goal. Given the issue of sustainability, the pandemic is the largest lesson that has shown that efforts to achieve the Sustainable

Development Goals can lead to results and quite quickly. And most important, the decisions and actions of local governments had an obvious and prompt, albeit rather short-lived, effect in terms of sustainability. For example, shifts in government policies during the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly changed energy consumption patterns. Changes in border crossing terms, domestic restrictions of free movement within the countries, stimulation of e-commerce and many other solutions have led to a reduction in CO2 emissions (in some countries [1], emission reductions reached -25% compared to the previous period).

In addition, the pandemic has initiated a change in global priorities. Governments have had to rapidly refocus their efforts on ensuring the health and safety of their citizens, which has distressed the economy around the world. This, in turn, has raised fears that actions within the corporate social responsibility agendas of global companies will take a back seat without being competitive in conditions where most businesses are forced to carry out large-scale reengineering processes. However, some companies have not shifted away from certain sustainability benchmarks. In particular, the British bank Barclays in the spring of 2020 announced that its plans to limit funding for fossil fuel projects will not be revised, that confirmed its intention to become a company with zero carbon emissions by 2050 [2]. Moreover, according to a large-scale 2021 State of Supply Chain Sustainability Survey conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Transportation and Logistics Center, 80% of respondents said that the pandemic did not affect or, conversely, strengthened their companies' commitment to supply chain sustainability [3].

Besides, the pandemic raised the question about what kind of political regimes are the most efficient to overcome the crisis. The efficiency and determination of management decisions made in countries with different political regimes are significant. For example, among the countries that are at the very top of the ranking according to the Democracy Quality Index 2020 [4], the vaccination rates of the population are quite high. And this could be a marker of the success of government policies and actions of government officials in reduction the crisis, demonstrates the ability of these states to perform their functions. Thus, in Denmark as of November 2021, 76% of the population is covered by the necessary vaccination, in Finland this figure is 72%, in Norway - 69% [https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations?country=CHN]. As for the countries with the most distinct autocratic regimes, the situation is more diverse: in the vast majority of them the level of vaccination fluctuates below the mark of 5%. At the

same time, in China this figure is the highest in the world, and in Saudi Arabia it corresponds to the values of the leading democratic countries. Therefore, the most important lesson to be learned from the COVID crisis is the lesson for the management system. It has allowed us to rethink and make sure that humanity is able to change behavioral patterns, which has a lasting effect in the context of sustainable development.

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