WHITEHALL LECTURES

The Ninth Cambridge University Land Society Whitehall Lecture

Did Covid Kill the Climate?
How Democracies Fail in a Time of Crisis

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University of Cambridge

Given on Thursday, 26th November, 2020

The Whitehall Group
a forum of the
Cambridge University Land Society

Cambridge University Land Society
ALUMNI

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The Whitehall Lecture Series

The Cambridge University Land Society launched this important series of lectures at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in March 2014, in recognition of the part its members play in contributing to public policy issues. Society members are mainly alumni of the Department of Land Economy, but also from many other academic disciplines in the University of Cambridge. Many play important and often distinguished roles in a wide range of public policy issues that are covered by the work of the Department.

The Department of Land Economy is a leading international centre teaching in a strong research-orientated environment. It applies particularly the disciplines of economics, law and planning for the analysis of the governance of land use, urban areas and interactions with other environmental resources. It seeks to address contemporary problems as well as more fundamental analysis. This includes both the role of governments in establishing regulatory frameworks within which land and related markets operate and the role of private organisations in owning, managing and developing physical and financial assets within those markets. This combination gives the Department of Land Economy a unique and valuable perspective of critical public and private issues.

This series of lectures seeks to discuss major aspects of public policy that in one way or another touch on these disciplines. The lectures provide a valuable public discussion forum based on papers given by eminent speakers and experts in their fields.

The lectures are published as occasional papers and can be found at www.culandsoc.com (see 'Articles' Tab)

Welcome from the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cambridge

The Cambridge University Land Society is notable for its longevity and for its level of engagement with a wide range of contemporary issues. Over the last 50 years, the Society has built a membership base of nearly 1,000 alumni, spanning those who graduated from Cambridge in the 1950s who now hold senior positions in their fields, to current students and recent graduates of the Department of Land Economy. The number of disciplines and interests represented in the Society's membership – as well as the broad range of issues discussed at business and social events held by the Society each year – highlight what Cambridge does so well. We recognise that the challenges we face today are increasingly complex, multi-faceted and global in nature, and that they cannot be overcome with the expertise of just one area. This is why it is so valuable that the Land Society continues to bring together fresh and diverse perspectives from those studying and working in economics, land, planning, governance, finance, environmental resources and beyond on critical public and private issues. The Whitehall Lecture series represents a great opportunity to take this debate forward – and to build the Land Society's critical mass of expertise – and I wish it every success.

Professor Stephen J Toope, Vice-Chancellor, University of Cambridge

Cambridge University Land Society

The Cambridge University Land Society (CULS) is the largest and oldest departmental alumni Society in the University of Cambridge with over 1,000 members and is the alumni society for graduates and undergraduates of the University of Cambridge who either studied at the Department of Land Economy, The Department of Architecture, or having studied in other fields have since moved into the Property Profession. The Society arranges over 25 events a year, mainly Business Breakfasts in London, Lectures, Conferences, Seminars and site visits to some of the most important developments in the UK. Its events have attracted over 13,000 registrations in the last 10 years.

CULS members work in Architecture, Real Estate, Investment Banking, Climate Change and Sustainability, Planning, Regional and European Economic Research organisations. It has a strong membership across mainland Europe and in Asia as well as in the United Kingdom.

Amongst the Society's membership are the heads of many Real Estate Investment Banks, Public Property Companies, Property Investment Funds and Professional Firms and Institutions. The University is No. 2 in the UK and Europe and 4th in the World rankings.

The Society runs a number of important regular events including the Alistair Ross Goobey, Denman and Whitehall Lecture series and the Whitehall Group thought leadership policy dinners and lunches.

CULS provides strong student support organising careers events, a strong Mentoring programme for Graduates and Undergraduate students; funds academic project and supports posts within both the Department of Land Economy and the Department of Architecture.

The Whitehall Group

The Whitehall Group, a forum of the Cambridge University Land Society (CULS) is a high level influential policy discussion group of well-connected University of Cambridge alumni, who are mainly members of CULS. It pulls together a previous legacy of high quality events over the last decade which is outside the mainstream of CULS activities, into a special group restricted in size of membership, of individual and corporate members. The Whitehall Group operates through a series of focused lunches and dinners in London for up to 25 attendees per meeting in order to maintain an exclusive, intimate and senior level gathering under the Chatham House Rule. The Whitehall Group also runs a distinguished series of public policy lectures – The Whitehall Lectures. Whitehall Group events cover a wide range of macro-economic business, social and educational issues of the day – The Economy, Foreign Affairs, Social and Health Policies, Infrastructure, Transport, Energy, Climate Change, Finance and Investment, Environment, Housing, Technology, Real Estate Investment and Finance, Urban Planning, Education and Politics.

Honorary Speakers

Dame Kate Barker DBE; Dr Ian Black; Sir Tony Brenton KCMG; Rt Hon. Sir Vince Cable; Rt Hon Lord Clarke of Nottingham, CH,QC,PC; Prof. Douglas Crawford-Brown; Prof. Sir Ivor Crewe DL; Prof. Orlando Figes; Prof. Sir Malcolm Grant, CBE; Dr Loyd Grossman CBE; The Lord Hannay of Chiswick, CH, GCMG; Prof. The Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield; Rt Hon. Lord Howard of Lympne CH QC; The Lord Kerslake; Rt Hon. Lord Lilley; Prof. Sir David Omand GCB; Lord Prior of Brampton; Gideon Rachman; Sir Kevin Tebbit KCB, CMG; Rt Hon. The Lord Willetts; The Lord Turnbull KCB, CVO

Colm Lauder
Whitehall Group Chairman

Colm Lauder is the Head of Real Estate at investment bank Goodbody. Colm leads Goodbody's UK and Ireland company coverage, covering stocks such as Great Portland Estates, Derwent London, SEGRO, and Hammerson. Colm is a top ranked real estate analyst according to Thomson Reuters' Extel survey. He is a graduate of Real Estate Finance (MPhil) from Cambridge University and Property Economics (BSc) from Dublin Institute of Technology.

Douglas Blausten, Lecture Chairman (Honorary Vice President of CULS)

Douglas Blausten is a Consultant to Carter Jonas specialising in Corporate Real Estate Strategic work, the Healthcare and heavy industry sectors. He runs his own Corporate Real Estate Strategic Consultancy Company. He was Vice Chairman of NHS Property Services and Chairman of its Asset and Investment Committee until November 2015. He was a Trustee of the Mental Health Foundation for 7 years, and a Centre Fellow of the Cambridge Centre for Climate Change Mitigation Research. He is a member of the Cambridge Land Economy Advisory Board and holds a number of executive and non-executive directorships. He is a Trustee of charities working in education and mental health and addressing social inequality and deprivation. Douglas is an Honorary Vice President of the Cambridge University Land Society.

Introduction to the Nineth Cambridge University Land Society Whitehall Lecture By Lecture Chairman, Douglas Blausten

I would like to warmly welcome you all to the published edition of the Ninth Whitehall Lecture. I am very grateful to our sponsors for supporting this Lecture and the panel discussion which followed (**see https://youtu.be/5OwuvvkZbCU**). The large international representation at the live version of the Lecture, 300 people in 13 countries and including attendees from 15 universities and a number of brave journalists who have risked their lives and indeed been in prison for defending the democratic imperative, attests to the importance of Professor Runciman's Lecture and the undoubted profundity of his writings on democracy and power. His published and recorded works on the future of democracy and the power of politicians could not be more relevant for us than it is today and so the timing of this Lecture is totally apposite.

For a brief period in time last year – 3 months to be exact – the air pollution in London and in cities around the world dropped to previously unimaginable levels and in my case in suburban London 20 minutes away from Mayfair in the West End a seemingly remarkable variety of wildlife returned to our gardens. The immediate cost of the dramatic changes brought about was economic and healthcare stress and an assault on mental health particularly for those least able to cope with the imposed isolation and economic hardship. A society and a world unprepared for change.

The effort and investment made since then has been to conquer the pandemic, save lives and for us to return to normal – that normality is to pollute and invest in economies that will guarantee we pollute more and more into the future. As Greta Thunberg says "Our response to the pandemic does show that we can treat a crisis like a crisis … but it also really proves that the climate crisis has never once been treated as a crisis. It is just being treated as a public and important question, like a political topic."

Since this Lecture was given, the Report by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta of the University of Cambridge has been published and it sets out how Nature as an asset needs to be part of reconsidering our measures of economic prosperity, prosperity that has come at a "devastating" cost to the natural world.

The last six years in western democratic politics has for many been seen around the world as a disparate but concerted attack on the generally agreed normal rules of our democratic systems which are an acceptance of well established laws, court rulings, accepted legal or non legal precedent. The former French Resistance fighter, Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Georges Bidault wrote that 'The good or bad fortune of a nation depends on three factors: its Constitution, the way the Constitution is made to work, and the respect it inspires'. Many people see the attacks on our established norms by elected leaders as having resulted in a significant democratic deficit of such magnitude that the protection for societies by these rules has fallen away and has lost much credibility.

For those who viewed the short video clips shown at the online Lecture - and readers can view the whole event at LIVE The Ninth Whitehall Lecture - **https://youtu.be/5OwuvvkZbCU** (or follow the YouTube channel at https://www.culandsoc.com) - we witnessed the elected President of the free world's most powerful democracy seek to undermine its fundamental structure of voters' rights and a British Prime Minister seeking to override the peoples elected assembly by acting unlawfully. Although the authority of the elected assembly has been protected by the Judges of our Supreme Court we now see the executive possibly seeking to curtail those protections.

There are a variety of views as to the causes for these volcanic events which seem to threaten the foundations of our democratic systems. For many people around the world the crisis affecting the world's leading liberal democracies started in earnest some 6 years ago with the dismantling of established structures, legal and non-legal, the seeds having been sown for much longer. It will be a long road to re-establish the high ground again for the so-called exemplars of liberal democracy but in the meantime as Thunberg says "until world leadership treats climate crisis like a crisis only then can we change and achieve things'. Whether Cop26 turns out to be another talking shop or a catalyst for real immediate action remains to be seen.

THE WHITEHALL LECTURE GIVEN BY
DAVID RUNCIMAN FBA
PROFESSOR OF POLITICS
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

DID COVID KILL THE CLIMATE? HOW DEMOCRACIES FAIL IN A TIME OF CRISIS

This lecture is about the relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change. I do not intend to describe a direct link between them. I am by no means an expert in either epidemiology or environmental science and nor am I the sort of social scientist who can discern the deeper underlying connections between recent crises stemming from human-made impacts on the planet or the biosphere. Though the argument is frequently made that either the pandemic or the climate emergency – or both – are evidence of how human beings have progressively wrecked their natural environment, I am not going to be talking about the Anthropocene here, nor about existential risk. That case is for others to make.

Instead, I am interested in what responses to wide-ranging crises can tell us about the possibility of fundamental political and social change – both about what inspires such change and what prevents it. In particular, what can we learn from responses to Covid-19 over the past year for the ways in which political systems might or might not adapt to the looming challenge of possible climate catastrophe? It is an acute question that has been raised in various forms almost from the start of the pandemic. Is this global crisis some kind of dry run for what is to come? Is it a warning bell? Covid-19 is clearly not just a drill for something else – and a pandemic is not the same as rising sea levels or crop failures or the depletion of natural resources – but it does suggest new insights into how political systems cope with systemic challenges. I am going to focus on democracy here, but I want to come back to alternative political systems at the end.

I am choosing to focus on democracy because there are two plausible but diametrically opposed interpretations of what has happened as democratic systems have sought to respond to and ultimately overcome the pandemic. One is optimistic: Covid-19 has shown us that we are far more adaptable that we might have thought in the face of systemic threats. The other is more pessimistic: the response to Covid-19 shows us just how far short we still are from meaningful action on climate change, and indeed reveals just how easily distracted we can be from the real challenges we face. Let me consider them in turn before talking about the relation between them and some of the choices we face.

What is the optimistic story? First, Covid-19 has shown, to put it bluntly, that there is a magic money tree after all. Under extreme pressure democratic politicians can find the resources to meet a systemic threat and to support those affected by having to change the way they live, even if only in the short term. Some of the arguments against government action and investment on climate change – We can't afford it! It will bankrupt us! – look shakier in the light of what even centre-right governments have been willing to do this year. Perhaps the prime example is the UK government, which has adopted a massive programme of government support – and with it a large burden of government debt, now reaching 100% of GDP – despite being made up of politicians, including prime minister Boris Johnson, who have regularly derided their Labour opponents for fiscal profligacy and unsustainable levels of public spending in the past.

At the same time, the public has shown its adaptability. Behavioural change that seemed hard to imagine at the start of the year – home-working, severely limited travel, curtailed consumerism (or at least its migration to online outlets) – has proved quite possible. Some early forecasts from behavioural scientists suggested that after two weeks individuals would resist the restrictions. Nearly a year in – and despite evident frustration and political push-back – compliance is still impressive. Moreover, a lot of this compliance has been voluntary. Lockdown has been achieved at least as much by individuals adapting in the light of new information as by their coercion at the hands of the state.

The greatest success story of the past year is the speed with which vaccines have been developed. This outcome – which seemed wildly optimistic even weeks before the first successful vaccine trials were announced in November 2020 – speaks to the capacity of societies like ours to innovate under pressure. A combination of market

incentives and public investment – including around $12bn of federal spending in the US, and a £70m UK government investment in the Oxford/AstraZeneca programme, along with assured government demand for successful products – has vastly accelerated the timeframe for innovation. It seems that we can do it when we put our minds to it, and when we are willing to forego narrow cost-benefit calculations in the name of urgency.

The pandemic has also highlighted many of the underlying inequalities that have often appeared to stand in the way of climate action. The positive way to view this is to see it as having foregrounded issues which have tended to get lost in the onrush of democratic politics. In particular, generational inequities – the relative disadvantage of the young to the old, including in electoral terms, where the demographic advantage of older voters in ageing societies has tended to favour policies that speak to their concerns – have been brought into focus. Young people place a much higher priority on climate action than older voters. At the same time,

young people have been asked to make sacrifices for the sake of older citizens this year – educational, employment and other restrictions have had a high cost for the young, in order to protect the health of those much older. Redressing that imbalance post-pandemic could include prioritising the things that younger citizens care more about, including climate change

Finally, the pandemic may have removed the single biggest barrier in the way of global action on climate change: President Trump. Some political commentators, in the light of Trump's surprisingly strong showing in last year's election (at least relative to polling indicators), have argued that Covid-19 was not the issue that many expected, especially given how poorly the Trump administration had handled it. But I would take the opposite view: Trump was probably headed for re-election at the start of 2020, until the pandemic hit. The fact that he lost is a sign that many voters in swing states – who nine months earlier were signalling that they considered themselves better off than four years ago – did shift in the light of the damage done to their prospects by the virus and the administration's handling of it. Now the US has a president who has signalled strongly that he intends to prioritise tackling climate change as an issue, after four years of neglect, or worse. If the pandemic produced President Biden, and President Biden means concerted action on climate, then maybe Covid-19 saved the climate?

Maybe. The optimistic story has something to it, but it overlooks a number of other factors that point in a very different direction. To take these in reverse order. Even if Covid-19 gave us President Biden, it would be a mistake to overstate the significance of one election result. Four years of Trump have hugely disadvantaged the prospects for climate legislation, simply by dint of a Supreme Court which is now heavily favoured to strike down enhanced regulation (the Court is more clearly skewed against the regulatory state than it is against other high profile issues like legalised abortion). Reversing the impact of the Trump years on American judicial politics will take a very long time – the sort of time that the climate may not have. Moreover, American politics shows no signs yet of emerging from the zero-sum partisanship that dates back at least as far as the Obama administration: climate change remains an issue which the parties see primarily in terms of what damage it can do to the other side. That means that room for manoeuvre tends to be reduced to executive action, and what an executive does, another executive can undo (as Trump did to Obama, and as a future Republican president may do to Biden). For now, Biden is limiting himself to reversing what he inherited. Building a new

coalition to act on climate change still seems like a remote prospect. The era of tit-for-tat climate politics, which falls far short of sustained action, looks set to continue.

Moreover, one election does not determine a trend. The short-term impact of Covid-19 on democratic politics may be very different from the medium or long-term impact. Frankly, there has not been enough time yet for lingering or deep-seated resentments – above all, the lasting impacts of what still seems likely to be a long-term employment crisis – born of the past year's experiences to manifest in democratic politics. But over the next five-to-ten years, the results could be very different and could make government action on a whole range of issues harder, not easier. We have a previous example for this. The financial crisis of 2008 helped give America – and the wider world – President Obama as one of its immediate effects (he won the presidency two months after the collapse of Lehmann Brothers). In the medium term it gave the world both left- and right-wing populism, Brexit, Trump, Syriza, Corbyn, and much else besides. My sense is that Covid-19 is likely to do the same. Just as the disease appears to do lasting damage to many of those who survive it – 'long Covid' – so politics is likely to experience its own long version. The enormous disruption of this last year will change democratic politics over the medium term in unexpected ways. That time lag is likely to make action on an issue like climate change harder. These lingering resentments will relate to the unequal distributive effects of the actions taken by governments during the acute phase of the crisis, as winners and losers emerge. The sense of us all being in this together is likely to dissipate. Then all bets are off, especially on issues that require concerted collective action.

At the same time, generational and other inequalities persist. 2020 has not changed the brute demographic facts: older voters do still decide elections. Biden won in part because there was a shift in his favour among older voters in swing states like Michigan and Pennsylvania. There is no evidence these voters prioritise climate change. The voters who do – the under 35s – are still massively underrepresented in Congress (and indeed at the top, with a seventy-eight year-old man now in the White House). Radical 'green new deal' policies – of the sort championed by the thirty-one year-old Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez among others – did not receive an endorsement in last November's election. In the House of Representatives the Republican party gained seats, which hardly speaks to a rejection of Republican climate scepticism. The pandemic did nothing to shift American politics in a green direction in broader terms. In the UK, the government is talking about accelerating

green targets – bringing forward the date by which petrol and diesel cars have to be off the roads, for example – but that sort of talk is relatively cheap four years out from an election. Core Conservative support remains with the over-65s, who do not on the whole favour such policies. Covid-19 has not changed that. And other political actors – including Nigel Farage, who has been a climate sceptic for as long a as he has been a Eurosceptic – are wating in the wings to exploit lingering discontent. Farage's Brexit party has morphed into the Reform party, which is both anti-lockdown and deeply sceptical about wider environmental restrictions. The fact it has made little impact to date does not mean that this sort of anti-regulatory politics has no future. If anything, it is only just getting going.

The political response to Covid-19 has prioritised short-term over long-term concerns. In many ways, that makes it the opposite of a sustainable model for action

on climate change. There has been a consistent drumbeat of concern about when we will 'get back to normal'. That suggests something other than a structural shift. As I write this, in February 2021, the coming summer is being heralded as the time when familiar habits and ways of life – including patterns of spending and consumption – can resume. There will almost certainly be lasting adjustments from the lifestyle changes that have been forced on us over the last year – including to work habits, forms of communication, travel options and perhaps even to models of educational delivery. I find it hard to imagine I will go back to the way I used to lecture to my students before 2020, in large, poorly ventilated lecture halls, which already felt a little prehistoric in 2019. But government emphasis is still set to compensate for those effects rather than to turbo-charge them. The remedies for pandemic-induced economic hardships remain a return to growth and the resumption of consumer activity. Doubtless these could all be done in a greener way. But nothing about the Covid-19 experience either guarantees that or shows us how to make the politics work.

The innovation we have seen this year around vaccines also speaks to short- rather than long-termism. It has been driven by a crisis that has cleared government schedules and focussed minds in a way that is more like a war-time economy than a response to a peace-time challenge like climate change. There is plenty of historical evidence that the great engine of technological innovation is war itself: the big structural shifts of the past century and more have tended to come out of military-industrial spending on a gargantuan scale, not market-led investment. The digital revolution – including the internet and all that can be built on it – and the energy transition revolution – including shale gas and renewables – were born not just of government spending but of the sort of massively wasteful spending justified by military imperatives during the Cold War (these imperatives were energy independence, military advantage, and a desire to keep ahead of the enemy). This suggests that a green technology revolution might just need a war to get it going, which is not something anyone in their right mind would hope for. On the other hand, there is little or no historical evidence that a pandemic produces the same results. The First World War changed everything. The Spanish flu changed very little.

That is one reason I incline on the side of pessimism here. Some of the dynamic effects of Covid-19 on government and public behaviour come from the ways that it does indeed mimic a war-time situation: life and death threats requiring action

this day. But this is still mimicry: it is not actually a war, so some of these effects are relatively superficial. Wanting it to be an actual war would be madness. There are a number of ways to put this. An optimist might say that the $12 billion the US government has spent supporting vaccine research is trivial – barely a rounding error in government accounts – so just think would could be done in driving climate innovation and adaptability if the spending were on a Cold War scale, never mind a World War scale. But a pessimist would say that is precisely what this last year shows – spending on the scale needed for a problem like climate change doesn't operate on the scale of a pandemic; it operates on the scale of a war. And we are not there yet. Not even close.

Supporters of a green new deal point to the original New Deal – FDR's programme of government spending and investment at the height of the Great Depression – to show what can be done by a new president with the political will to take decisive action. But there is another lesson of FDR's New Deal: it ran out of steam in 1936/7, when the cyclical nature of democratic politics and the checks and balances of the US constitution got in its way. It was never sufficient for systemic change on its own, and FDR's attempts to bypass the political barriers (for instance, with his futile attempt to pack the Supreme Court) ran into the sand. What transformed the New Deal, and turned it from a tinkering experiment that a Republican president might undo into a structural transformation of the American economy and society that was set for a generation, was the Second World War. In truth, the Great Depression was insufficient for structural transformation – in that respect it was more like the Spanish flu than it was like the First World War. Only WWII was like WWI.

A protest by Extinction Rebellion activists at the Cenotaph on Armistice Day 2020 saw them unveil a banner that read 'Honour Their Sacrifice: Climate Change Means War'. If climate change does mean war – in the sense that it will require a political and economic shift on that scale – then Covid-19 is the wrong model. It is a tempting model because the response this year has mimicked some of the effects of war, including some of the social solidarity. But it has been without the lasting impact and without the genuine social transformation that war can bring (for all the horrors and divisions that war also brings). The Covid-19 model is deceptive in other ways too – its short-term impact can lead us to believe in the transformative power of elections, which is often an illusion in democratic politics. That Covid-19 meant Biden and Biden means transformation (simply by dint of the fact he is not

Trump) is wishful thinking. We should not put too much emphasis on electoral politics as the driver of lasting change. Elections are the focus of democracy, in part because they provide neat markers of political transition. The neatness is often illusory. Lasting change takes more than a rotation of the people at the top.

Movements like Extinction Rebellion have shown that there are many other ways of doing politics – street protest, civil disobedience, direct action have their place in a democratic system, for all the disruption they cause. Covid-19 has stifled that. It has also stifled attempts to innovate institutionally: this has been a year of government press conferences, of 'following the science' (until it becomes politically inconvenient), of behind the scenes shenanigans in No. 10 and the White House, of high politics setting the agenda and the public waiting to be told what to do. It has hardly been a model for democratic innovation. Tackling climate change will need new kinds of democracy – more deliberative, more inclusive, more dynamic – and the pandemic has done nothing to provide that. If anything, it has shown just

how sclerotic our democratic systems are, for all their ability to chop and change under pressure. The world's leading democracies – notwithstanding the arrival of the vaccine cavalry at the last moment – have not been especially innovative in meeting the dynamic challenges of the pandemic. And even the challenge of rolling out a mass vaccination programme looks at this point to be difficult for some of them, notably in continental Europe. This last year has been one of patching up and making do, not one of experimenting with new ways of doing things.

So, finally, what about rival systems? 2020 may mark a shift in perceptions of democratic politics, simply because it has become hard to avoid the evidence that the democracies – especially in Europe and the United States – have performed relatively badly. Yes, we have done things we didn't think were possible. But we have still done them poorly and chaotically. That is what democracies do – in the face of challenges, they adapt under pressure and tend to muddle their way through. The response to Covid-19 conforms to that pattern. But before we become complacent – if we can muddle our way through this, we can muddle our way through climate change too – we should bear two things in mind. First, China's far more ruthless and far more effective response to Covid-19 suggests an alternative model that may be better suited to a challenge like climate change in the absence of war. It is by no means certain that Chinese autocratic state capitalism will do any better in the long run. But it is at least possible that the sort of state action required is beyond democratic systems, which remain mired in short-term pressures and short-term solutions. Second, Covid-19 is not climate change. It is not a drill for something else. It is not a dress rehearsal. It is its own thing. Even China's relative success tells us little about what might be possible in relation to environmental threats and the need for an energy transition. Believing that pandemic might show us what to do about climate change when we can't otherwise see it for ourselves is evidence that we don't really know what we are doing. It is a get-out, not a solution. Thinking that Covid-19 could have saved the climate is ultimately one of the ways in which Covid-19 might help to kill it.

The Panel

Panel Moderator

Bronwen Maddox is the director of the Institute for Government, a leading independent think tank, which works to promote better government by focusing on how it is led, how decisions are made and how it is scrutinised. Browen has a degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from St John's College, Oxford and was previously the Editor of 'Prospect' and Foreign and US Editor of "the Times'. She is a member of the Governing Council of the Ditchley Foundation, is a non-executive board member of the Law Commission on law Reform in England and Wales, and was a Visiting Professor in The Policy Institute at King's College London. She regularly appears on BBC Television and Radio.

Panel Members

Mark Leonard is co-founder and director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, the first pan-European think tank. His topics of focus include geopolitics and geo-economics, China, EU politics and institutions. He hosts a weekly podcast and writes a syndicated column on global affairs for Project Syndicate. He was Chairman of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council until 2016.

Edward Luce is the US National Editor and columnist at the Financial Times. Before that he was the FT's Washington bureau chief. Other roles have included South Asia bureau chief, Capital Markets editor, and Philippines Correspondent. Luce was previously the speechwriter for the US Treasury Secretary, Lawrence H. Summers, in the Clinton administration. His books include Time to Star Thinking: America in the Age of `descent (2013) and The Retreat of Western Liberalism (2018)

Dr. Marina Povitkina is a Researcher at the Department of Political Science at the University of Oslo (Norway) and the Centre for Collective Action Research at the University of Gothenburg (Sweden). Her research interests are in comparative environmental politics, collective action dilemmas, democracy, corruption, and the performance of public administration.

Dr. Povitkina is closely affiliated with the Quality of Government and the Varieties of Democracy Institutes at the University of Gothenburg, and is a board member of the Interdisciplinary Corruption Research Network. She is also a contributing author to the Working Group III of the next IPCC report.

Dr. Ellen Quigley is adviser to the Chief Financial Officer and also a Research Associate in Climate Risk and Sustainable Finance at CSER (Centre for the Study of Existential Risk) at the University of Cambridge. At CSER her work centers on the mitigation of climate change and inequality through the investment policies and practices of institutional investors. Dr. Quigley's work includes lead authorship on the recent University report 'Divestment: Advantages and Disadvantages for the University of Cambridge.

The Panel Discussion can be viewed after the lecture on
https://youtu.be/5OwuvvkZbCU

An Opinion by
Douglas Crawford-Brown,
Professor Emeritus, University of North Carolina,
former Director of the Cambridge Centre for Climate Change Mitigation Research (4CMR)
'Think Locally, Act Globally'

Before you write to me pointing out that I have reversed Locally and Globally in the title, you are correct. But read on.

Dial the calendar back to the summer of 1992. The first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was in full swing in Rio de Janeiro, also known as the Rio Conference or Earth Summit. It was the meeting where the Climate Change Convention (later the Kyoto Protocol) was born. Nations were locked in discussions of how each could move forward on reducing the risks of climate change. Supporting the negotiations were complex climate models that required hours or days to run. This was much too slow to allow the negotiators to work in real time.

The solution: our international team of scientists created reduced-scale climate models that were significantly less complex than the research-grade ones, but could be run in minutes even on the computers of that time. Think 'Good enough for government work'. What did they show? It became clear that while the developed nations (called Annex I nations in climate policy) had put the current overload of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, the future trajectory of that concentration would be driven largely by what was to happen in the developing nations. The people of these nations deserved economic development, but if they achieved it in the same high carbon way as we had, the result would be a rapid and destructive increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide.

The Annex I nations certainly needed to ramp back their emissions (by more than a factor of 5), which is what I mean by 'Act Locally'. But even if they reduced to zero immediately, atmospheric carbon dioxide would cross a critical threshold due solely to the rapidly increasing emissions in the poorer nations. The sobering message was that Local action by the rich must be complemented by Global action to help the non-Annex I nations travel down a different, low carbon, path of development.

That was the challenge of 1992, and it is the challenge today. How are we to meet that challenge? First on the list is behavioural change. The developing nations have rightfully argued that they will change their ambitions for a high carbon economy only when they see the people of the developed nations (yes, I am looking at you) change their own lifestyles. Next up is low carbon energy and the efficiency of our buildings and factories. The innovations needed to significantly reduce the carbon intensity of these, and the capital required to create those innovations, are still found largely in wealthy nations. If those innovations were applied only in the Annex I nations acting Locally, the climate challenge would not be met. So these innovations and the capital needed to install them must be transferred at very low cost to the poorer nations so, again, they could travel down a different path to development. That means acting Globally.

It has led to a slowly growing pool of policy and economic instruments meant to transfer low carbon technologies, and through them low carbon economies, to the developing nations. Progress has been slow, not least because the developed nations have been cautious about any programme that might be perceived as making them legally liable for the damage from climate change in poor nations, which are the nations most at risk from those changes. These programmes involve aspects of wealth transfer and global governance, flash points for conservative governments.

Examples are the Green Climate Fund on which developing nations can draw for low carbon development projects that in many cases make use of technologies pioneered in the Annex I nations and funded largely by the wealthier nations, or the REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Nations) which give the developing nations options to cutting down and burning forests to provide for the increasing global demand for high carbon agricultural products. And equally important are emerging consumer-based policies that recognise that at least part of the progress reducing emissions in places such as the UK, EU and US is due to sending production capacity off shore to China (next up, Africa), with those other countries then being held responsible for the emissions that are caused solely by our own demand for products. Consumer-based accounting puts the responsibility back on the shoulders of us when we buy and use things.

So, that is the lesson for today. Think Locally to find solutions to climate change, but then Act Globally to transfer the solutions to the nations where they are most needed.

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