

# The Pandemic As a Portal: Tracking and Enabling New Possibilities

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OK, so let's start. OK. Welcome, everyone. This is "The Pandemic as a Portal: Tracking and Enabling New Possibilities". My name is Beatriz Botero, and I am a fellow at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, and it's my pleasure and honor to introduce you to our panel and our panelists today.

So we are in a Zoom webinar, a very pragmatic form of gathering in our pandemic times. And in many ways, these times of the coronavirus pandemic have shown many of the injustices and not-so-nice parts of our societies. We've seen risks of any surveillance, authoritarianism, racism, various forms of discrimination.

But something interesting is happening, too. We have seen innovative alternatives, ideas, and projects-- that not long ago seemed impossible-- emerge and become, all of a sudden, possible. Today we'll hear from the founders and participants of three projects that are seeking to capture and document this new possible.

These projects are COVID-19 Policy Response, The New Possible, and Don't Go Back to Normal, and they are all motivated by the belief that archiving and rendering visible these new ideas and alternatives might contribute to shifting our regulatory paradigms and how our post-pandemic world might look like.

The speakers' views expressed in what follows are their own, and they don't represent the opinions of the institutions they're affiliated to. And I'll just introduce them, but just for you to know, if you have questions there is a Q&A feature in the lower bar of your Zoom platform. And you can type your questions then, and then we'll have some time in the Q&A for hopefully discussing many of them.

So our speakers. Elettra Bietti is a doctoral candidate at Harvard Law School, a Kennedy Scholar, and an affiliate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society. Her research is a platform power through a moral and political philosophical lens, US, and EU technology law. She regularly volunteers for Privacy International.

Frederike Kaltheuner is also part of New Possible with Elettra, and she's a tech policy fellow at Mozilla. Previously, she led Privacy International's work on corporate surveillance, and she has given expert evidence in the European Parliament, the Belgium Parliament, and the UK House of Lords. She holds a Masters in Internet Science of the University of Oxford and a BA in Philosophy and Politics from Maastricht University. She also has an upcoming book about technology and global justice.

Phoebe Tickell is part of Don't Go Back to Normal Project. She is a complex systems thinker developing methodologies and governance better suited for a complex world. She was previously a researcher at Imperial College London in Microbial Engineering, and is now an Associate Lecturer at Schumacher College.

And she has worked across multiple contexts, applying complexity and systems thinking to many things-- governance, organizational design, philanthropy, advising, education, and other forms of strategy. And she sits on the Advisory Board of the International Bateson Institute.

Francis Tseng is part of COVID-19 Policy Tracker. He's a software engineer and lead independent researcher at the Jain Family Institute. And in the past, he was a designer at IDEO, adjunct faculty in the New School, co-publisher of The New Inquiry, researcher-in-residence of NEW INC, a fellow at the New York Times, and he has worked on spatial economic modeling at the Institute for Applied Economic Research.

And finally, but not least, Daria Vaisman is also part of COVID-19 Policy Tracker. She's a doctoral candidate in Criminal Justice at CUNY Graduate Center and adjunct graduate faculty in statistics and research design at John Jay College. She's currently working in the public sector and previously worked at Transparency International, the Eurasia Foundation, and was a speech writer and media analyst for the Prime Minister of Georgia.

With that introduction, I'll just open it up for our panelists to tell us about the alternatives of our future.

Great. Hi, thanks for having us. So Daria and I will be talking about our COVID-19 Policy Tracker, so let me just share my screen.

OK. So just a little background for how I came to this project. I noticed a lot of people posting examples of policies that seemed very progressive and radical as a response to COVID-19, so I started collecting them on this page here.

And the way I thought of it was, this is a list of things that we allegedly can't have, except that now we can. Yeah. So that's how I came to it. I'll let Daria speak.

I started noticing, in the beginning of COVID, a lot of absurd laws were disappearing-- were being revoked. And I think ever since I was a kid, I had a book called Why Donkeys Don't Sleep in Bathtubs-- the idea of archaic laws that are on the books that could easily be reversed.

And I was also seeing really progressive policies-- but incidentally progressive. And I was thinking about what it would look like to be able to have some kind of comprehensive, systematic way of organizing-- some kind of database.

And a friend of mine actually sent me Francis's website. And we got on the phone and we start discussing what that would look like. He's already-- he has a background in building really interesting models.

So we came together, and we started talking about what we would want in such a collection and archive, and this is the site that resulted. So I'll just briefly go over what we have here.

The main feature is that we were building this data set of these policies, trying to keep track of what category they fell into, what the nature of the policy change is, whether it's a public or private sector-led change. We have some other things about the specific branch of government, where that information is available, what level-- if that was state, local, federal-- where it occurred, and so on.

And then we experimented with a few different ways of actually visualizing this information. And I think one of the most useful ones is this timeline here. So where information about when these policies would expire was available, we plotted them here, just so you could see the extent of them, when they were about to run out, and so on.

And we had discussed how to create this taxonomy. It was what took the most time in the beginning. It really was an iterative process. So we were collecting examples, and then looking at what sectors they fell in, and then we made a list of what sectors seemed like-- where there were changes happening that were most important, and then you were collecting examples based on the sectors.

And in terms of debating how to limit the scope, at first we were deciding whether to also include regressive policies-- what kinds of changes we wanted to look at, what the threshold was. So would we look at policies like-- for example in the court system, the profound effects of moving to video.

And so we decided as a rule of thumb is, is this something that people protested for? So all of our examples in our-- I think eight or nine categories-- are issues that people protested before.

And then we worked on the subcategories. We wanted something that was on a mezzo level so that there is a uniform set of criteria so someone could search them quickly or look for patterns. And that was an iterative process also.

So for example, in health care, we had examples of-- I'm trying to find them-- lifting archaic blood restrictions for men who have sex with men, lifting work requirements for Medicare, New York state allowing foreign-trained medical workers to work in New York state.

So we put all of those under the category of-- what was the category?

Lifted regulatory barriers, I think.

Lifted regulatory barriers. And we did that process for a number of our subcategories.

And so real quick, just to go over what we were hoping to accomplish with the project. Our main goals were to understand where these changes were happening, and who was driving them, and how long they're supposed to be in place so that people are aware of when the changes are meant

to expire, and they know when to start pressuring people, and who to start pressuring to expand or extend them. And then the secondary goal was to create an archive.

And then also to create a tool that we can actually do data visualization and actually look for trends. Are changes happening at what level of government? Are certain types of lawmakers initiating them-- mayors, governors, legislators? Are there certain sectors where they're happening more and happening less?

And so building an archive in data visualization. And that is our project.

Yeah, that's great. Next project.

That would be Elettra and me, and I'll start by sharing my screen. So like every good side project, The New Possible started with a tweet.

Just like Daria and Francis, I had been noting in March, but also in April-- I had started bookmarking examples of things that-- changes, decisions, policies, but also changes in public opinion-- that I felt were genuinely surprising.

And for a long time, I thought it would be really important to capture these. On the one hand to remember-- to have an archive of all the things that were suddenly possible that were seemingly possible all along, so that we can go back to them and make more bold demands in the future.

And I think the one example that sparked it were discussions about canceling debt, which is-- I know friends who have been working on this issue and pushing for debt cancellation for a long time. And suddenly, in the midst of a pandemic, it's suddenly possible to forgive debt.

A few weeks later, we started The New Possible. I think the moment I tweeted saying, I would love to collect these examples, somebody showed me the COVID policy tracker, which is very detailed, and has lots of subcategories, and has a US focus.

So also based on seeing this, I thought we want to do something slightly different, as in we do not aim to create a comprehensive archive of everything that is happening, but the purpose is twofold. So on the one hand, this is a repository. It's an archive of ideas.

But it's also a prompt for further action and policy changes, because we also noticed, for example, the way in which-- lost in translation-- changes that were happening in Italy were being reported in the UK. Sometimes they were being misreported. So what started as a simple repository of news stories quickly became a little bit more, where we provided more context and background to each of the stories.

So one good example is that there were suddenly reports that a universal basic income would be introduced in Spain, and people kept e-mailing us that we should include this in the archive. But it turns out that's actually not the policy change that was happening-- that's just how it was being reported in other European countries.

So what started as a small project by Elettra and me. We're now a group of volunteers. We have people in the US, UK, Germany, Italy helping us. And Emma Lopez from Valencia also created the Spanish version of the site.

So this is what the site currently looks like. So you can see we do have categories, but they're very broad. So it's transportation, economy, society, cities. Something we noticed is that lots of changes were happening on the local level. So a lot of cities were making very progressive decisions.

And we do accept submissions. Recently we agreed on submission criteria, which we always implicitly had, but we now articulated them more clearly. So the criteria are, we want to document and explain policy changes and grassroots initiatives. We included that to ensure that change does not just come from government, especially in parts of the world where the government is more repressive. But these changes have to have become possible as a result of the pandemic.

We also decided to focus on positive changes. And we defined this to mean changes that lead to more environmentally sustainable, democratic, inclusive, equitable, and more just societies. That's still vague and broad, but we had a case where the US Supreme Court was allowing phone calls, and we were thinking, that was one case where we weren't sure-- is this generally positive, or is this simply different?

And finally, I think what's really important is that all of these are possibilities that activists or communities have been fighting for for a long time-- that they were also being told that they're impossible or unrealistic. And we're striving to collect examples from different parts of the world, but obviously we are limited based on who we are, the languages that we speak.

So we have a strong European bias, and we have lots of examples from local government and cities from Europe, but we lack examples, let's say, from Latin America. And with this, I'm handing it over to Elettra.

Awesome. I'm going to share my screen as well. OK. So as Frederike said, the project has two main functions. On the one hand, it's conceived as an archive-- as a repository of things that are happening and that are possible. And on the other hand, it's supposed to be a source of inspiration for future action. So it's also forward looking.

And obviously what happened is that the pandemic is shifting-- it's moving geographically, and it's becoming more salient in certain regions, less salient in others-- as time progresses. And so as time progresses, things changed also for us.

So both Frederike and I are currently located in Europe, which was one of the early loci of the pandemic, and is now relatively less central, I would say. And so we've also started thinking with our collaborators about what the future of this project might have to look like.

We want to maintain it as it is. Should it be a relatively static archive? Should it be an evolving archive? Should we include different kinds of things on the website, and what kind of direction

do we want this project to take? So reflecting on this moment in history, and this really important moment of breakdown or shift, I was thinking there are three possible metaphors that might help us think what exactly the pandemic is doing.

So on the one hand, we can understand the pandemic as a catalyzer-- as an accelerator of dynamics and paradigms and structures that pre-existed, but that were less salient, less aggravated, less exacerbated. And so that's one perspective on the pandemic. A lot of people have said, oh, nothing's really changing. It's just being accelerated.

And for example, we see lots of neoliberal kinds of policies, privatizations, giving more and more power to private tech companies to handle and take care of services that would otherwise normally be considered within the scope of government's action and competencies. So that's one way in which trends of neoliberalization have been really accelerating.

Another thing that has been accelerating is the exacerbation of inequality, as we've seen in the last few weeks, and anger, and exclusion. So obviously, that's another way in which we're really seeing how the pandemic has accelerated and acted as a catalyzer.

The second metaphor is the pandemic as a form of breakdown-- as a moment and in which things break down, change, and suddenly become visible. And it's suddenly a moment to start seeing and re-evaluating certain structures and paradigms that we operated under.

And so here, one really salient example is the environmental question. So the pandemic has obviously completely shifted our impact on the climate. Not necessarily because of our own will, or not necessarily in a way that we control, but it has brought us to a world that seemed completely impossible just six months ago. And so somehow it acted as a moment of breakdown, where we could actually see in action some of the consequences and some of the possibilities that six months ago seemed completely crazy and unbelievable.

The other one is health care, and I think of the US in particular, and countries where health care is privatized, and where there is no universal right to free basic health care. And I think situations like COVID-19 are highlighting the need for further access to health care for all, and are highlighting the need for all to be able to access health care for the welfare of others. So my right to health protects someone else, and I think that's a very powerful realization that comes with the pandemic and really shifts some important paradigms.

And then finally, the pandemic is a portal, which is Arundhati Roy's metaphor. And that's the idea that it's an opening-- it's a window on something different. It could be very much of the same and accelerated, so a differently exacerbated similarity. It could be something entirely distinct and entirely unforeseeable.

But the idea is that there might be some optimism-- that we are at a moment when we can change certain things. And so while the portal can bring negativity and disillusion, it's also a time to start acting, to start showing, to start seeing, to start discussing possible futures that we want to bring about.

So with that said, I'm going to move to the next slide. So what are we thinking about for this project? There are lots of challenges, questions, things we're thinking about, and we would love input. We would love, if people are interested in our project, please come forward. Please email us.

So there are questions about how to maintain the website. For the moment, it's a side project for all of us, so we do it on the weekend. We do it when we have a moment of spare time. We basically take news and submissions that the public submit to us, and we take it on and do a selection using the criteria that Frederike explained, and then we decide to publish or not to publish.

It's not a repository that's supposed to be exhaustive in any sense. It's very much a selection that we think is helpful to get a sense of what's happening in the world.

We want to expand geographically. We would like to get more perspectives from around the world-- from people who have different experiences to us, different languages. So we're very interested in expanding in that sense.

And finally, we're starting to think about potentially diversifying the kinds of content that we have on the website. And so we're thinking about the second function of the website, which is forward looking, moving towards action. And we're thinking about bringing in policymakers and people who actually work on policy changes, and maybe have interviews or videos with them, trying to trace policy change from its roots to its ultimate implementation.

So that's an idea that we're playing with right now. And so we're thinking video podcast, we're thinking all sorts of media. And if you're interested, we would love to hear from you. Stop screen share, I think.

Before we hear from Phoebe, who is our last speaker, I want to tell the audience that you can access all these projects online. The links are on the event's site. So don't stop here. You can also engage with them directly and scroll down by yourself. And now our last project. The floor is yours-- or the screen.

Thank you. I'm just going to get my slides up. Can you see them? Great. So hi everyone. Thank you for the invitation to take part. It's really great to be among so many great projects that interlink and potentially have this ability to be like a tapestry, in this moment, of ways we cannot go back to normal or ways we can help manifest this new possible.

So the project that I'm here to talk about I co-founded with somebody called Steven Reed, and it's called Don't Go Back to Normal, which I think is quite self-explanatory in the message that we're trying to put out.

I'll say a little bit about the genesis of it, but just to give you an idea of what it is, I've put the link into the chat if you want to click on it. It's essentially a platform of alternatives-- alternatives meaning services, tools, ways of working, ways of decision making-- in a categorized list that

makes it really easy for people to see that alternatives that can replace the old way of doing things with new ways of doing things.

And the new ways are essentially a whole range of things like technology that is open source, technology that has better privacy and security, services that prioritize localism, sustainability. So you can click through and have a look, and I'll go through some examples.

But the way we imagined this project was basically being a full stack-- a full societal stack-- of alternatives that people can very easily, one by one, shift over to. And as a project, we resonate most with this pandemic as a portal metaphor because we see this Overton window, also, for consumer behavior.

And potentially, while everybody's pausing and in lockdown, they can actually use this moment to reflect and make those changes-- so transition from, let's say, an unethical bank to an ethical bank.

So this is the URL. Right now, we've got the URL DontGoBackToNormal.world, but also DontGoBackToNormal.uk, because we'd really like to encourage people from other countries to get in touch with us. We've made all of the code of the website open source. It's all built on Airtable, and it's very, very easy to make copies of it.

And we've had a team in touch from Germany and a team in touch from the US who are interested in creating DontGoBackToNormal.us or .com, DontGoBackToNormal.de. So we'd like to build up this whole stack across different countries, and we want to own that we can only give advice in a local geographical context. We can't give advice globally.

So this is myself and Stephen. We co-founded this in mid-April, and the genesis of the project was essentially a phone call where I'd spent the last month very, very activated, and writing all sorts of articles about, for example, the need for lockdown before the lockdown happened. I was feeling a lot of urgency that the pandemic, in a way, is a bit like a dry run for the sorts of changes we need to go through for climate change and long term civilizational survival as well.

And we were talking on the phone with Stephen, who's a software developer. And also, we both have a complexity in systems thinking background that we've both applied to systems change in different ways. And we're just talking about the opportunity of this moment, actually, to help people see that the old ways of doing things are not great, and that they cannot go back to normal.

So I'm going to show you some of the examples of our site, and then talk a bit about what we're thinking about for the future, and ways that you can support or get involved. These are different categories. So I'm not going to show all of them, but just to give you a sense of what the website looks like and talk through some of these examples.

So for each category-- I think there are 10 categories in total-- we are choosing maximum three options, because our desire with this project is to keep it really, really simple. Part of our hypothesis is that there's so many alternatives out there, and there's so much advice, and so much



competition of what's the best tool, that we want to try and be a filter and give people a really easy way to see some alternatives that they can very easily transition to today.

So for doing food differently, we've got some community-supported agriculture schemes, like an Oddbox-- getting these boxes of vegetables that are wonky or rejected from supermarkets. We've got the Open Food Network, which is an open-source tech platform that helps people connect to local farmers. This is doing decision making differently, so forms of flat decision making, non-hierarchical decision making-- for example, holocracy.

This as an example of social media-- so different platforms that are actually open-source or cooperatively owned. Doing video and messaging differently-- so this feels especially important. In this moment, so many people have transitioned to working and having conversations with family on Zoom. But actually, we're finding out that Zoom doesn't have very good privacy and security policies, and it's a large corporation that owns it. So yeah, there's this importance of actually transitioning to platforms that put people and ethics and security and privacy and freedom first.

Then we've got to do work differently. So these are different ways of working-- horizontal organizations or collaborative work patterns. Doing budgeting differently-- so Cobudget is a tool I was involved-- I am part of the collective that created Cobudget. And it's essentially an online tool that allows groups to do budgeting together in a totally transparent and open way. So that's just one example of another tool.

Doing ownership differently-- so promoting cooperative company structures, instead of shareholder-owned companies. There are more categories on the site, but I didn't want to have to go through every single one. But yeah, just to say that, as Elettra said, this is also not an exhaustive list, and the idea is that it's curated.

And actually, Steven and I either know the people who run the project or own the projects, or we've worked with them in some way before, or we've verified. So there's a lot of due diligence that's kind of gone into choosing what is on this site, and that's part of the value that we want to bring to people-- a trusted source of top projects or services that they can move to.

The last thing I wanted to say was both Steven and I are really passionate about the whole systems change, and we've got this idea that-- I guess because of our complexity and systems backgrounds-- we believe that potentially, all of the changes have to happen at once. You can't just go slowly, one by one. It's going to be a total transformation that we need in quite a short space of time.

And it might sound crazy that there's a reality where all of us are buying our food from community-supported agriculture, or that all of us are using Scuttlebutt instead of Facebook, but essentially, that's the place we need to get to. And this project is an attempt to help that shift happen.

We've got our launch event on the 23rd of June. I will put the link into the chat, because I haven't got the link up here. But you've all be very welcome. And this is my website. This is Steven's website. If you'd like to be in touch, we'd love to have you. Thank you.

Well, thank you all for those great presentations and great work. Before we open it up for the Q&A-- but I want to encourage the audience to submit your questions. We have maybe two lined up, but not that many, so go ahead-- I have a few questions for you first.

I want to ask you, what is one of the most surprising things that you've encountered as you've curated this material? What policy changes have surprised you? And how have those changed throughout time? I think the latest project was started in April, but how have you seen the mood change?

I don't know if someone wants to start, or should I call on someone? If you want Phoebe to start-- because you were last before, maybe you want to start this one, and then we can go the other way around.

Sure. So the question is how have things changed? How have I seen--

What has surprised you, and what has changed since you started?

OK. I'm going to start with a second question. So what I've seen change, I guess, is the energy and momentum that I think a lot of us could feel in March and April, and the sense of-- I think many of us like utopian at heart who start these projects. And there's a sense of, oh, things could be different. Another world is possible.

And now I think I'm starting to think about crises-- for example, 9/11-- and what happens after a crisis. Often, there's an immediate response of loads of goodwill and collaboration and hope, and then if we look at 9/11-- what's happened after that-- the impact on the way the world-- politics and policies and culture changed after that.

I'm just concerned about what might happen after this crisis, and how do we work together to make sure that this is potentially a catalyst for greater change? And you know when you've got a saturated solution, and you just add a grain of dust and it turns into a solid? I'm wondering if we can really find what that catalyst is to crystallize better ways of doing society.

And sorry, what has surprised me? It's a really hard question. I'm actually going to pass to someone else. I can't think of a surprise.

OK. Do The New Normal founders have something that has surprised them, or something on how it's changed? Frederike or Elettra?

I think there's one example that I think both Elettra and I found always very fascinating, and that was the fact that at some point in the pandemic, Amazon has nudged users to buy less, not more. And I find this fascinating.

It's not radical. There are lots of things to criticize about the way that Amazon has handled this crisis. But I thought it was interesting that the very same tools that currently optimize for one goal can very quickly be utilized to optimize for a different goal. This one I found fascinating.

I think another one was-- but only because I am not where I usually live and I've been living in a sublet, so I spend a lot of time monitoring Airbnb for very personal reasons. But what was interesting-- I could really see and observe how holiday rentals were entering the long-term rental market. And there was a moment in April when this was happening a lot, and now it's again-- the atmosphere in Berlin at the moment is the pandemic is over-- which it really isn't, but that's the general mood, and it's immediately reflected in holiday rentals and the way that landlords behave.

And on the overall question, I'd also say, I think being in Europe-- the mood at the moment is very different than it was in March. In March, we also did this project to practice optimism at a time that felt extremely dark, to really celebrate and highlight all the positive changes that are happening. And with a lot of things, I feel this moment has passed a little bit. But also, this epidemic isn't over.

So I think we're in this strange period at the moment where in some places there's the appearance of normalcy, but that's not the radical new normal that we thought it would be, which makes it more important than ever to track and remember all these radical possibilities that were possible, and that still are possible. And to follow up on them and make sure that we keep the possible open, and not go back to very narrow or even dystopian versions of the future.

Thank you.

Yeah, so I'm going to mention two different ones from Frederike. So one that I found really interesting-- so I'm Italian, and there was lots of news about the Venice canals being super clean and having never been as clean, which I found very exciting, and also very pretty. So we have a news on that on the website.

And the other one is a very recent one. It's the announcement by IBM, Amazon, and now Microsoft that they would stop supplying facial recognition software to the police. There are obviously questions on how that will play out and whether that's a full commitment or not, but I think that's significant and very recent.

In terms of how things changed, just one reflection is, if you look at the numbers of cases around the world, it's quite interesting to see what countries are doing badly and what countries have done well. Obviously, we're not at the end of the pandemic-- we can't draw final conclusions about this-- but it's pretty telling that a lot of the countries that are led by populist leaders have done fairly poorly in these times.

So on the one hand, I think that's a positive message. It tells us there is something wrong with some of the directions that politics have been moving towards in recent years. On the other hand, there is a question-- I think as things change, as people get more and more unhappy, and poor, and excluded-- whether some of these kinds of policies will actually start gaining traction again,

and discontent might take over and lead to some really concerning results. So I think that's my gray, black, positive and negative conclusion.

Should I start, Francis? I think for me-- and again, our project is focused on the United States-- the ability to house the unhoused-- to house the homeless so quickly, and with the same budget that there was before, really surprised me, when the issue was about COVID and spreading COVID.

Same with jails and prisons-- really kind of extraordinary. Criminal justice reformers in the United States have been pushing for these changes for decades, and we've been told that it's difficult or impossible for a variety of reasons that suddenly disappeared. And I'm hoping this will trigger larger questions about how the US uses its prisons-- obviously, besides the profit motivation-- [INAUDIBLE] so sorry. On cue, always whenever I get on a Zoom call.

But also that these releases are for people who aren't public-- aren't risks-- aren't security risks. How are we using our prisons? I think what's changed-- I think this fatigue has set in. I think we believe in law and governance a lot less now than we did three months ago in the US, the same way we believed in it less three months ago than we did a year ago.

And so what's interesting is that a way that we envision this project is incidentally progressive policies that were changing for other reasons-- to deal with the economy, to mitigate the spread. But now the most, to my mind, significant reform in the past-- really extraordinary-- is police reform, and the way that it's actually being-- the protests-- which I'm still thinking through how they're connected to COVID. They're clearly very deeply entwined.

But this is something that is being propelled by people-- by citizens-- and then is prompting governments to be responsive, as opposed to governments trying to mitigate their own crises and providing more [INAUDIBLE].

And the last thing is I think a lot more people are-- progressivism. I've seen this. People are scared of it, but they're actually-- they are progressive. You don't use that word in the US. You say to someone, would you like student debt forgiveness? Would you like health care? Would you like a basic level of human rights and a humane style of living?

People will say yes, but then if you frame it a different way, they get very scared. So I think that there's something in the framing of how to hopefully push forward. But sadly, I'm not very optimistic. I think a lot of these are one-offs. For example, prison releases-- this has not risen to the level of policy, and I think we're going to see a lot of evictions right now if there isn't an extension. And there's a crisis in the making that hopefully will prompt better reforms.

Yeah, just to build on what everyone else has said, I think one of the most surprising changes for me is not actually from the policy side. But in the US, at least, there's been this rise in interest in mutual aid and these non-governmental ways of support structures, and that's really encouraging to see.

In terms of how my own kind of thinking about this has changed, I guess there are two things. One is that it seems to me like a lot of these policy responses weren't so much about-- yeah, they weren't really about addressing the pandemic per se, but controlling the economic consequences of it. And it seems that the economic consequences-- the narrative that's emerged-- is that they're more to do with the shutdown in response to the pandemic, as opposed to the pandemic itself.

And now with all these rushed re-openings here, it seems the decision is now that we can avoid a lot of economic fallout if we just don't shut down. And so that's a worrying trend for me.

The other is-- I think Daria already touched on this-- but a lot of these policies aren't really long-term changes. They're more a pause button. So in the US, for instance, there have been many eviction moratoriums, but the problem is that those have largely not included any kind of rent forgiveness.

So you can't be evicted for three months for not paying your rent, but at the end of these three months, you still have to pay the three months of missed rent. So that's effectively just delaying the consequences. So that's been a little discouraging as well.

Thank you. So the questions from the audience are piling up, but I want to just ask another general question to you, and then we'll read from the Q&A featured questions. I want to hear a little bit maybe, if you haven't yet spoken about this, about the personal experience for you-- about running these portals, doing it as a side project.

What have you learned, what has been challenging, and maybe if you can also throw in how people could help? Tell us a little bit what this has meant for you. I hear different inclinations towards optimism and less optimism, so maybe if you tell us a little bit about that. Yeah, go ahead.

We need help. And if anyone is interested or knows anyone, that would be wonderful. The idea for this to work is-- to be able to see patterns-- that we collect a lot of things at a specific level of detail. And we have gone back and forth on depth versus breath, and we're trying to do both.

But it is so time consuming. We both have full-time jobs. It took us-- I think the taxonomy still works, the structure works, but we really want to be able to collect these examples and be able to have this really as an archive. And it's too much work for the two of us.

And it would be great to do something-- a lot of these great trackers are using the Google Doc share, where you'll see 45 people on the document the same time. We want to be able to vet everything and fact check it first, but some kind of modification.

If you go to our website, you can send in examples, and Francis has built a backend for that. If you know anyone who would like to help, please, that would be wonderful. So that is our pitch to you.

Someone else about what they've learned or what it has meant?

I think it's that what we need is-- we are at a different-- so we decided not to be an archive, but a narrative, a storytelling, a curated collection of examples. And what we need help with is figuring out where to take this next, given that these stories are just not coming in anymore. We could try to preserve them, help promote them, but there are also different approaches. I think this is one.

And then the other one is-- and that was just a quick lazy solution. We're hosting this on Squarespace, which has cost money to maintain, which is fine for now, but if this were supposed to be sort of preserved-- it needs a longer term home, basically. Elettra, would you maybe have different thoughts or additions on this?

I was thinking, one thing that was surprising for me was to realize how complex it is to-- so if you decide that you want to put positive changes on the website, how complicated it is to decide whether something is actually positive. And also, once you start looking into the piece's news and related coverage, you realize it's actually pretty opportunistic, or a one-off, or it was planned all the way but they're implementing it perhaps a little bit more quickly now.

So a lot of the things that look surprising actually are not that surprising, and it's pretty rare to find something that's genuinely surprising that was being pushed for for a long time and denied, and then suddenly it's happening. So I think that's my takeaway from this. And obviously, it takes time.

But it's also been a really great experience, and I must say, I don't know, I really like these projects-- all of the ones that have been presented-- because I think they give this sense of optimism and the sense that actually, yes, everything is gray, there are positive and negative things, but there is always a possibility for change. And I think that's really important.

Building on this one small point-- what is surprising for some is not necessarily surprising for others. So through collecting these examples, I learned a lot about the criminal justice system in Europe that I didn't know, which is on me. I didn't know the extent to which European prisons are overcrowded, and what a big deal it is that currently they are not, and how many reports by human rights organizations were there for a long time.

I'm aware of time and not wanting to take up all of the--

I think we have up to 1:15 if you're OK with that-- if that works for everyone. So we're fine.

OK. Good. Yeah, so we also need help. I'd say it's also a side project, and any help is really welcome. We have a board of advisors, so if you're an expert in any of the categories that are on our website like alternative food systems or alternative technology or ownership, please do get in touch.

And we'd love to have you. We're happy to have 50 advisors if that's what wants to happen. On the site itself, if you scroll down to the bottom, there's a little Submit an Alternative. So if you have any ideas of tools or services that are not currently there, then you can scroll down and tell us-- submit a project or a tool that you think should be on our database.

I think generally, we just want this to go as far as possible, because we want as many people to see these alternatives as possible. So sharing the site is really helpful. We've actually only just launched it publicly. We've had it built for the last couple weeks, but we've just been putting everything in place and swapping out the platform. So yeah, sharing it in the next week would be super helpful.

And I think the experience of doing the project-- I think it gave me a longer-term view out of the pandemic of just, OK, this is a long game. It's giving me like a sense of, if we want to get here-- if we're going somewhere-- how could that happen? How long would that take? It's not going to happen in three months. It's going to take years. But using some of this momentum seems like a pretty good idea.

Yeah. I think that's everything I would say. I would just add as well I'm interested in talking with Frederike and Elettra afterwards, because I wonder if there are ways-- in my mind, I was trying to think about how they connect. Here are these tools or services that can help you move towards the new possible, and then you are gathering evidence that it's happening. And I don't know-- it could be interesting to think about how they connect.

That's great.

In all directions, right? Like the taxonomy of the COVID Policy Tracker-- I was also thinking maybe we should have been more systematic.

OK. So some of the questions on the Q&A ask about the relationship between the civil rights arising, mainly in the US, but now also expanding to Europe. Well, I don't know if civil rights arising is the right word-- the anti-racism and anti-blackness movement that we've seen in the past few weeks-- and the role of tech companies and platforms.

So this started maybe last week, when IBM decided that they wouldn't sell facial recognition software to police departments in the US. And there's an interesting set of questions here about, how do you see that playing out in the near future? The relationship between the political context and the role of tech companies. I don't know if any of you have some thought on that easy question. Or hunches. Hunches would work.

I'll try. I'll try to respond a tiny-- I'll give my five cents. So someone, I think, asked about scope. So how do we limit the scope of our website to the pandemic, and how do we distinguish efforts that have emerged as a result of the pandemic versus other things including anti-racist protests, et cetera?

We don't make distinctions, and that's something that we've been thinking about now. We don't necessarily distinguish between the pandemic and everything else that's happening. And as Daria said, they're probably extremely connected. And so we think it's part of the same big moment of change.

So I don't know if the question is, what the role of tech companies has been in relation to the anti-racist protests, and how does it connect to the pandemic? Or just separate questions, one and the other?

Those were separate questions and I piled them together, so you can do whatever you want.

OK. So I'll just respond on the tech companies point, which I think was something that I covered in my presentation. I think broadly, we're seeing tech companies taking advantage of the moment and trying to take on more and more aspects of private lives, of governmental functions, et cetera. So they want to be depicted and seen as good guys, and often they are trying to do good things.

So in the contact tracing apps question, I think largely they're seen as doing the right thing. They're trying to put forward solutions that are more privacy protective. But it's part of a general strategy of acquiring more and more credibility, trustworthiness, and power over people's lives, especially in light of the fact that our lives are becoming more and more virtual, and more and more mediated through these platforms, infrastructures. So my view is pessimistic. I think we need to push back.

I think Naomi Klein called this a digital land grabbing that's happening. So there are surveillance companies pitching in. It's very much both. I'm also pessimistic. So it's important to push back and exercise a watchdog function on everything that's happening to technology at the moment.

And just because-- just one sentence to add. I want everybody else to speak as well-- to say we struggled a little bit with the protests and how to reflect them on the website. And the reason was, a lot of the changes are the consequence of years of activism and work, and we didn't want to give the impression that this is because of the pandemic that we're seeing these changes.

It's probably a catalyst, but especially when it comes to IBM and Amazon, there's been lots of activism that has been demanding that they stop face recognition, and it would be too easy to say it's because of the pandemic. Maybe there's a catalyst factor, but it's complicated.

I guess I would just chip in around-- I don't think it should be up to citizens and our personal choices. I think, unfortunately, that's where we are though. If we want to choose more ethical and secure alternatives, it's on us. And unfortunately, it also means that if we're all on Facebook, then the benefit of being on Facebook is that everybody is on Facebook.

A question I sit with a lot is, how do you get a momentum or a mass exodus to other platforms? Because they're there-- they're available-- and they would become much better if we put money into them instead of using these free platforms, where there's these invisible costs, like your data is basically mined. If you're not paying, then you're paying through being watched, surveyed, and having targeted advertising, and much worse-- being manipulated, targeted.

Watch Cambridge Analytica-- the film. It's all there for us to see, but we're hooked to these platforms that are farming us for data. And so that's not really an answer. My answer is, here's a platform that shows the alternatives, but how we get enough people onto those so that it actually



is beneficial to be there and plays the function that these platforms should is an open question. I don't know if anybody wants to riff on that.

OK. So we can go for the next question. So there's an interesting question about something that you have mentioned already in your different interventions about the short term versus long term nature of some of the projects and ideas you've been following. So I'm going to read it, because it's interesting.

So what obstacles have you found in making The New Possible and that type of short-term interesting policy or response that you're seeing stay. For example, in the prison reform cases that you have all mentioned, or maybe even having Amazon not incentivizing us to shop too much, or that type of thing-- how do you think we could stick to those, or what are obstacles?

I think it's a question of political will. And I think we're still in a crisis. And no one is really making medium-term-- as far as I've seen in this space-- medium-term or long-term policy decisions. So I think there is a moment-- it's interesting.

All the trackers that I follow in criminal justice that follow jail releases, prison releases, questions on pretrial detention-- they all stopped. All the policies stopped and the trackers were stopped mid-April. I think that there was a moment of-- the people who were going to be released were released. And because the courts-- a lot of them are on pause in various ways for various types of low-level crimes and misdemeanors that usually end up in jail churn-- so no one's had to really think about this in a sustained way.

I think when it benefits companies-- we've been following employment. I think a lot of the flexible work and remote work arrangements-- I see in the works in government where that has never been the case before. I think when people see that it works, and for companies that it's cheaper for them-- Twitter, I think Facebook-- a number of big tech companies.

In regards to progressive social public policies, unless people push for it, I think there's going to be this reactionary law and order criminal justice response again, especially because this kind of authoritarian personality emerges during moments of crisis. We're seeing it all over the place.

So even towards criminal justice, we've looked at bail reform. Even when bail reform-- so it's a completely awful system in which the majority of people are in prison because they can't afford to pay bail before they've actually been convicted. There's been a movement to reform to release on recognizance. There's been so much pushback against that, even when it shows that it hasn't increased any kind of metric of crime, things like that.

So we know that it's emotional. We know that it's not logical and it's not based on reality. And so if people continue to respond fearfully, we're going to see pushback, I think, unfortunately.

So I have something, maybe to respond to which is--

Go ahead.

--I think the key to long-term change-- again, five cents-- the key to long-term change is to shift the paradigms. So I think we currently live in times where certain forms of economic logics tend to be supreme and govern lots of policy making. And so policy is shaped so as to fit certain kinds of considerations from a cost-benefit analysis.

And I think it's key to progressively move away from that in order to have lasting change. And how do you do that? So one way of doing that is starting by securing certain forms of well-being to those who are the least able to understand what is in their interests, potentially, and vote for it.

And so I believe firmly in welfare and the welfare state. And I think if you give health care to people, people start understanding why it's valuable, and they start understanding why a lot of other things are valuable. So you need to start somewhere. And then you need to start shifting paradigms, and start showing that a lot of the things are currently considered in some countries as disastrous are actually not at all disastrous.

I'll just chip in that the long-term-- seeing the impact of say, Extinction Rebellion, or the current Black Lives Matter protests-- protest and movements has got a role to play here. There's the study that Extinction Rebellion was based on that shows that 3.5% of the population is all you need for mass paradigm change or movements to succeed, based on past movements that have worked in the past around civil rights. So yeah, I think that's one piece of the puzzle.

Well in that sense, your projects seem very important for the moment. We have some time, so we have two specific questions that I'm going to read. And then if you have something to say about them, please do.

One of them is whether you've seen projects, including those without much access to digital platforms or the internet-- whether you've seen something new in that sense that has caught your attention. And the other one is something you mentioned in passing as well-- some of you-- but maybe if you have some thoughts on whether the pandemic will enlarge or shrink, maybe, our privacy and civil rights-- how you see that playing out.

It's funny, because I feel we are all very touched by your projects, and so it seems like we want you to tell us about the future that awaits us. But you, for sure, have been looking into the possible future, so please-- yeah. So those two questions. I don't know if you have thoughts on them. Maybe Frederike, go ahead, and then Daria.

I don't have to go first, but I think that the irony is that my normal job is tracking the negative and the dystopian, which is why I enjoyed this project so much. There are lots of trackers and projects out there that track precisely the shrinkage of civil rights. And I think one takeaway from this is that, even if you think in terms of human rights law, in a global pandemic it can be justified to restrict liberties if they're lawful, proportionate, time-limited, and strictly necessary.

So a lot of this-- my answer to the question is basically, well, it's up to us. And a lot of very boring monitoring will have to happen to really see if all restrictions of civil liberties that were meant to be temporary are actually being rolled back. And if a lot of compromises that we made

in an emergency will actually end. And what will happen to the data that was collected-- will it be repurposed? And all of this will require long-term monitoring.

And I'm not a big fan of saying, will the pandemic lead to a shrinkage of civil rights, because it really depends. We're in the midst of it, and it's entirely and completely up to us to ensure that this is not the case.

Thank you. Daria, you also had something to say, I think.

I'm just going to ask you to repeat the first question.

Oh, so the first question was the one on civil rights. And the other one was whether you've seen something about digital inclusion projects along those lines.

I think Elettra and Frederike are probably better suited to answer, so I will defer.

So on the digital inclusion question-- I think it's a very relevant question. And we basically just thought, let's create this website, and have not thought through any of those important questions. Also because it's pretty small scale for now, but it's definitely a very salient consideration that we should take into account if we want to expand the website and make it something that can actually guide change for many.

So I think it's very relevant. I don't have examples in mind of things that are happening offline that might be analogous to what we're doing. On the surveillance question, I can only agree with Frederike. I think it's a question of understanding what we mean by emergency under constitutional regimes, what is possible and not possible for governments to do.

A lot of what-- or everything governments have been doing in times of COVID is legal and acceptable under the law. The question is whether we're happy with these things being done, and the potential consequences of these kinds of changes, and how they might be-- to use the language I was using before-- shifting paradigms and entrenching certain digital structures, certain apps, certain methods of tracking that didn't exist before. And that would now become part of the new normal, and I don't think any of us would be happy with a new normal that is about surveilling individuals more and more.

On the other hand, I'm not extremely worried, personally, about contact tracing apps. I don't think people are using them as much as we would have hoped-- or some people would have hoped. So I'm less worried about that, and I am also conscious that the surveillance is happening anyways. And so not much is changing in that sense. But things will be changing. And it's very important to see what defaults are being put in /

Say something on the digital inclusion, because actually in my full-time job I work in a philanthropy fund where we fund community projects. And one of the biggest problems we've had during this pandemic is that basically, all of the people that are offline are suddenly completely unavailable and can't be reached.

So people who used to drop into clinics, or social services checking in on children-- it's become really difficult. And short of handing out iPads, it's really tough to know what to do.

My two cents in connection to the Don't Go Back to Normal project is that we'd like to reach out to the mutual aid networks, because they're networks who are online-- they have Whatsapp groups-- but then they are connected locally to people who don't have-- like the elderly, like people who are not connected online. And so for a project that wants to reach people who are not online, I guess it's about connecting with the people who are online who are connected with people who are offline, and trying to like mobilize in that way.

That's great. Thank you. Well, I think our time has come to an end. I don't know if any of you have something very last to say, but I think some of the takeaways are that if you are listening and you want to help them reach out, volunteer, send projects and ideas, I think that was something that certainly came up.

And I just really want to thank you all for taking the time on your spare time to give us all these new paradigms and ideas about how our future can look, and also to be attentive to what's going on around us. And yeah, thank you very much. I'm mute clapping, which is one of those awkward things about Zoom events, but we're all clapping for you. And yeah, thank you.

Thank you so much.

Thank you.

Together.

An unmuted clap.

[LAUGHTER]

You can see in the chat that people are saying thank you and clapping.

Thank you, everyone.

Bye. Nice to meet you, those of you I didn't know before.