



AFTER SHOCK DIALOGUES

Insights Capture Report
with

riconfigure



Anna Gerhardus



Johannes Starkbaum



Shauna Stack



Observatory of
Public Sector Innovation



BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

2020 After Shock Dialogue Network – Event report

About this document

The COVID-19 coronavirus crisis of 2020 has been a significant shock to governments, societies and economies. The OECD, through its Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, has collaborated with like-minded organisations and conveners to capture key insights from relevant events to inform global discussions about the crisis, its aftermath and the implications for governments and their roles. This event report is one of a series of reports developed through this '2020 After Shock Dialogues Network' <https://oecd-opsi.org/government-after-shock> This will help inform, among other things and events, the discussions at *Government After Shock* on 17-18 November 2020.

This overview has been done in cooperation between the EU project [RiConfigure](#) and the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation. Event participants were also welcomed to join and share their reflections as a wrap-up session to the week of dialogue.

A high-level view of Democratizing Innovation: A Virtual Dialogue Event

As part of their European Commission funded project, RiConfigure has been hosting dialogue events, and given the pandemic segued to a virtual format for their second session. It was held from July 6 to 10 session, primarily targeted to a cross-sectoral audience, including project partners from Europe and Colombia. Core to the idea of “democratizing innovation” is RiConfigure’s framing of a “[quadruple helix](#)” approach, expanding the “triple helix” concept to bring together actors from the business or industry sector, the public sector, academia, and civil society to imagine and deliver innovation for people and problems. Part of this is explicitly strategic and political, ensuring that stakeholders, funders, citizens and policy people are all meeting and working from a common understanding.

What is the relationship of the event to the crisis?

The COVID-19 crisis pushed the dialogue event out of its intended physical host location of Vienna and across communities, inadvertently supporting their goal of democratizing innovation. More directly, however, the crisis formed a central theme throughout the dialogue, with COVID having helped regain a focus on civil society as key actor. In addition, “COVID has caused a pivot towards emergency innovation,” as one organiser noted, but there was a role for the innovation community to work through the medium and long term effects and the distribution of benefits and costs across society.

It also created a sense that there was a moment of opportunity to capitalize on for the science and research communities. “COVID-19 brought this kind of legitimatisation to science that it hasn’t seen for a long time.” But even a focus on science led the participants to social innovation questions:

“The focus was very strongly on medical topics, and on managing the outbreak. A medical and management topic. Then it got into [topics like] domestic violence, children not being able to learn, and the focus on science began to [diversify]...

There is this man on the moon metaphor for innovation. Why it is that we can send a man to the moon but we can't solve the problem of the ghetto? It's because the first is technical and structural, and the second is a wicked problem. It's easy to create facemasks; getting people to wear them is different.”. This example highlights the importance of including diverse actors in solutions to wicked problems.

What was the focus of the event?

Organisers described the focus as “thinking about the changes and the new normal”

However, there was a normative element, trying to identify and build coalitions around quadruple helix ecosystems and make structural choices that made collaboration between sectors more reliable and impactful.

“The point is: what does it mean to engage civil society in the process of innovation? There is a normative push. We have to align with the values expectation of society. How can the process of innovation be realized concretely?”

What were some of the highlights or points of reflection?

- “Civil society” is not an obvious, homogenous category. “With industry, with academia, we know what this means. Civil society can range from the general public to organisations, to disadvantaged groups.”
- “We started ideating at the event about whether or not the whole COVID situation will lead to more citizen engagement in research innovation on the one hand, [or] whether research funding will allow more of this type of innovation to appear.”
- “Participatory forms of research innovation: how much of that will be translated to the digital world... and if so, what are the consequences? On one hand, there are environmental impacts of people not flying... some people can easily participate online. At the same time, some people are excluded from this virtual events, either by not being able to participate, or not being able to contribute in the same way they [otherwise] would.”
- A crisis stimulates innovation in the short-term, but takes resources from other sectors and priorities; in the long run, the attention and economic constraints may pull resources away from innovation and back towards immediate concerns.

What were some of the key take-aways?

- When the question turned to how to bring civil society and the social sector into innovation, “the first thing was always ‘we need funding,’ and it became very clear that “there’s a power structure that doesn’t allow civil society to [participate fully]; they don’t see the purpose in engaging.” As was also noted, “understanding civil society is a prerequisite of engagement.”

- While innovation is currently getting attention because of COVID-19, it's also possible that economic downturns will pull funding away from research and innovation. "Innovation as such is a good thing, but it is not, per se, in itself, a good thing. [Partially] because it can distract from other things. Where is innovation heading towards and who is deciding this direction?"

What would you add to the three 'Government After Shock' questions?

What do we need to leave behind (both from before and during the crisis)?	What do we want to keep (both from before and during the crisis)?	What should we do differently?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic and social disadvantage. The crisis has shown that this is magnified. • The idea the interests are conflicting; sometimes interests can align. • The notion that things have to stay the way they are because they've always been like that... We'll just strengthen the inequalities that we've always seen in the world. • Homogeneity; each actor can have a different point of entrance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I'm not sure if we've arrived at any good insights from this year to keep, yet." • Hold on to the nature that there's the need to change. Time to think and reflect. Use each and every moment to better the system and not just in times of crisis. • Remembering that collaboration is possible and creates resilience. • Needs of different parts of society; a need for change in the sense that innovation is not imagined only as an expert endeavour that serves only selective interests (e.g. particular economic goals). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness for wicked problems that somewhat require the involvement of different actors in order to include the perspectives and • The issue of directionality of innovation; build on the collaborative coalitions but think more intentionally about direction, what, for whom.

What do we need to keep talking about?

- The question of how to bring cross-sectoral collaboration around directional, intentional innovation

- How to capitalise on the opportunity and risk of COVID as governments are currently funding and making decisions: ensuring a right-size place for innovation and innovation research, and also exploring and mitigating adverse effects or asymmetrical impacts across societal lines.

What advice could be given to others undertaking something similar?

- You don't get the right people in the room by simply opening the doors. "We tried to make an effort in the design of the event to have different representation in the roles. So designing for across geography, timezones, women and men. And diverse, also intersectional."
- RiConfigure designed for a small set of highly engaged participants, not just a one-way information flow to audiences, and not using mass-audience interaction tools (e.g., polls, surveys, voting); while it took a couple days for some participants to hit their stride, the event was characterised by robust verbal and written discussion throughout the sessions and much active participation. Plan for people needing time to get comfortable with different tools and options.
- It may be valuable to give people opportunities to get to know each other as participants to compensate for the interactions that would otherwise happen in a physical event.

Thank you and further information

Thank you to Johannes Starkbaum, Anna Gerhardus, Shauna Stack, and many more for their participation in the Dialogue Session to capture these insights. Further information about the event, including the sessions held, can be found at <http://riconfigure.eu/event/democratizing-innovation-an-international-dialogue-event/>.