



# MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS



**Dear reader,**

We could, in fact, have known better: In 2012, the Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance presented a risk analysis on pandemics of the coronavirus type to the Bundestag. One which – from today's perspective – predicted later events. Although the course of events was described there in a much more drastic way, that is, as a “worst-case scenario”, being vigilant and taking precautionary measures would have been a wise move.

Epidemiologists worldwide were issuing warnings long before the coronavirus pandemic that is now endangering the whole of humanity and has caught us all off guard. And even in December 2019, when the first news about a virus that mostly affects the respiratory system started trickling in from China, it all seemed a long way away and like something that did not concern us. Then came the first lockdown in March 2020, accompanied by social distancing, masks and hygiene concepts. Culture ground to a permanent halt and pubs closed indefinitely, office work and school in front of the monitor at home became the norm, and we were obliged to cancel our business trips and holidays.

Looking back, we might rub our eyes in disbelief: The coronavirus has changed lots of things. Which of them will stay that way? What will require our attention in future? These are the questions we are addressing in this issue of *Forschung Frankfurt*, which is concerned not so much with incidence rates and R numbers, PCR tests, self-isolation and vaccination centres. The articles collated here are primarily intended to let us glance beyond the present from a social science and humanities perspective, especially by looking at past crises and pandemics.

In his article on the impact of the 2008/09 financial crisis, sociologist Markus Gangl reveals that politics was indeed quite capable of learning: Through joint

action, it was possible to keep unemployment down during the coronavirus pandemic – although the economic effects will be far more devastating than they were during the financial crisis.

An article by Iwo Amelung shows how the Manchu rulers in 17th-century China were able to consolidate their power by getting the dreaded smallpox under control. In the current pandemic too, China is acting consistently, as is only possible in authoritarian systems where civil liberties are obliged to take a back seat. The success in combatting the pandemic has boosted Beijing's self-confidence enormously. In an interview, political scientist Heike Holbig explains how. But we are also taking a look closer to home: How will the pandemic affect learning in our schools?

How have the coronavirus restrictions affected the way we deal with death and mourning? And how can the health system be better prepared for future crises? When we decided back in the autumn of 2020 to devote an issue of *Forschung Frankfurt* to the pandemic, we by all means had our reservations: Perhaps this would all be water under the bridge by the summer of 2021? In the meantime, the third wave of the coronavirus pandemic is behind us, and we are hoping that a fourth wave triggered by dangerous mutations is not just around the corner.

One way or another, the topic of pandemics will continue to occupy us for a long time to come – in particular because we want to be better equipped for the next one. Science can make an indispensable contribution in this context, as many encouraging examples of outstanding research work at Goethe University show.

We wish you insightful reading!

**Anke Sauter and Markus Bernards**  
Forschung Frankfurt Editorial Team

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