

Environment and Covid: what is common is the uncertainty

What environment protection and covid crisis have in common? The uncertainty.



Environment

Environmental questions are often cannot be answered by classical science methods and by classical decision-making methods because

- lack of adequate data and knowledge on many topics (eg. ecosystem dynamics, climate interactions), and
- there is no single and universally valid set of values (e.g. clean air or clean water should gain priority).

(„...The issue on which strategic policy focuses normally takes the form of a so-called wicked problem. Wicked problems are characterized by a lack of consensus concerning both the values that are at stake and the relevant knowledge.” BUILDING SCENARIOS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL, NATURE AND SPATIAL PLANNING POLICY. Guidance Document PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, 2019) <https://eionet.kormany.hu/download/d/0e/82000/pbl-2019-building-scenarios-for-environmental-nature-and-spatial-planning-policy-3434.pdf>)

That is why environmental protection has started to use futuresight, which from the outset seeks to work in uncertainty with tools that adapt to uncertainty. (See more: Future research, scenarios <https://eionet.kormany.hu/jovokutatas-forgatokonyvek>)

Most environmental issues are very complex: they apply to all sectors. Segmentation by traditional sectors, the silo-like sectoral fragmentation, is a clear obstacle to the efficient handling of cases.

Environmental issues do not respect state borders. Just as the problems affect several states, often several continents, similarly the solutions must be international and global (at the same time, local conditions must be taken into account).

The handling of cases is, in turn, fraught with financial constraints. At the same time, environmental issues are receiving more and more attention across the planet. People are waiting for clear and urgent action. Failure to act, or late action, can result in significant additional costs.

Corona virus

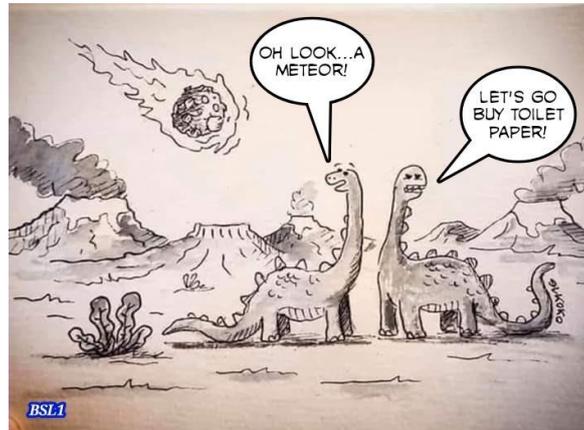
Questions about covid often cannot be answered by classical science methods and by classical decision-making methods because

- lack of adequate data and knowledge on many topics (eg. propagation of the virus, reaction to sunlight, humidity, hot water etc) and
- there is no single and universally valid set of values (e.g. covid infected patients or everyday patients should gain priority).

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Epidemic management works in uncertainty, using tools specialized to this. (See more: Future research, scenarios <https://eionet.kormany.hu/jovokutatas-forgatokonyvek>)

The expected social response to certain phenomena of the epidemic is particularly uncertain. For example, no one foresaw that one of the most important bottlenecks in treating a coronavirus epidemic would be the supply of toilet paper.



Most of the epidemiological issues are very complex: they apply to all sectors. Segmentation by traditional sectors, the silo-like sectoral fragmentation, is a clear obstacle to the efficient handling of cases. Today, no one thinks that the management of coronavirus belongs only to doctors. It is also a matter of legislation and logistics; but the economy, education, information management, etc. are involved too.

The epidemic does not respect state borders. Just as the problems that arise affect all the states of the world, similarly the solutions must be global as well (at the same time, local conditions must be taken into account).

The handling of cases is, in turn, fraught with financial constraints. At the same time, epidemiological issues are receiving outstanding attention across the planet. People are waiting for clear, urgent action. Non-action, or late action, can cause serious financial and human losses.

What do they have in common?

Urgent action is needed - in uncertainty. You could say it's a battle in the haze or a night fight with the blacks in the dark tunnel, but the point is the same. We have to live with uncertainty; classical science and classical decision making method do not meet expectations. Or at least not fast enough.

In both topics, it seems essential to take into account the various views and opinions of different fields, professions and interest groups.

In both areas, there are measures that can be proposed and taken quickly, and while their positive benefits are disputed, they are hardly a major concern. On environmental issues, tree planting is such a "low hanging fruit": its positive impact on the climate is debatable, but tree planting cannot cause problem. Similarly, recommending frequent and thorough hand washing is not problematic: it surely will not make trouble.



Meme in the spring of 2020: after washing my hands 57 times a day for 20 seconds