

The Corona Pandemic and the importance of projects at societal level ¹

Reinhard Wagner

In many parts of the world, life is currently coming to a standstill. Freedoms of assembly and travel are being massively restricted, entire industries are paralysed due to trade barriers and employees in certain regions or even countries must work from home. These are not scenes from a science fiction movie, but unfortunately reality due to the spread of the corona virus.

This of course also has consequences for project-related work. Meetings within the framework of projects can now only be held virtually because international travel is reduced to a minimum. Development aid projects will of course be limited by the virus. Trainings and events (e.g. of the global project management associations) to exchange experiences and build up know-how are only possible virtually for the time being. All in all, this will probably slow us down by at least six months in development. The panic selling on various stock markets indicates the extent of the economic distortions, but even worse are of course the social distortions, as can be seen in the example of hamster purchases.

On the other hand, the crisis has made it evident that it requires the cooperation of everyone in society to be able to cope with a crisis of such magnitude. It starts at the level of neighbourhood help, where younger people offer the elderly to do their shopping. Companies support suppliers, service providers and above all freelancers in replacing the loss of physical cooperation and income with home office or other virtual forms of cooperation. Of course, cooperation at the level of local authorities, states, government, regional and international organisations is also important. In addition to ad-hoc measures, intensive communication across all media, it is above all the organization of targeted projects such as the expansion of medical care facilities, securing the supply of food and critical infrastructure facilities, and even financial support for companies and citizens in need. All measures that involve medium- and long-term support necessitate the approaches of project, programme and portfolio management.

Therefore, a research programme recently launched by Alma Mater Europaea entitled "Capabilities for delivering projects in the context of societal development ([CaProSoc](#))" is so relevant. It brings together over 70 partners from more than 50 countries who are working together envisioning that "all actors involved in sustainable societal development are aware of the role projects have in society and use projects effectively for the benefits of society." Why do we need a programme such as CaProSoc? Because we need to have an impact on societal development, help society to develop through projects and project management in sectors beyond economy and industry, making sense of projects and showing ways of dealing with the

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increasing number of societal challenges (e.g. climate change). Furthermore, the idea of CaProSoc is relating project management to civil society and addressing a wider audience (including but not limited to charities, communities as well as a wider scientific community). CaProSoc is unique, as it provides multi-perspective views (with different disciplines, cultures, domains etc. involved) on the topic, is grounded in practice learning for application in diverse areas and acts as single point of information for research and information on this topic. CaProSoc will provide a forward-looking perspective on the future role of projects for society and utilizes projects as a learning field.

An example of the role of projects, professional project management and the support of society through Project Management Associations is the refugee crisis that hit Germany five years ago. In one of my articles on this crisis ([IPMA Insight No. 1](#)) it is mentioned that “challenges for cities in regard to migration are the need for housing, water, food and electricity, dealing with the growing slums and sanitation, the need for job opportunities, security, easily accessible health care and so on and so forth. Many cities struggle with migrants who do not speak the language of the country of their choice, belong to a different religion and carry a distinct cultural heritage with them, which could cause troubles in their new homes. Typically, in a first wave, the young and capable people move into the cities, later their families follow bringing elderly people and young children with them who need special assistance from the municipalities and their infrastructure.”

In 2015, dealing with more than a million refugees, the German Project Management Association (GPM) helped organize voluntary support, for example educational programmes, e.g. offering language lessons to refugees and training refugees in the methodology of project management in order to increase their chances of finding a job. Furthermore, volunteers of GPM developed a Project Management (PM) Handbook for municipalities and the public administrations dealing with this kind of massive influx of refugees. They facilitated a workshop for the City of Nuremberg dealing with the refugees in the metropolitan area and the capital of Berlin adopted a Masterplan regarding Integration and Security for asylum-seekers and migrants, which was developed by members of the GPM.

This highlights the fact that there is know-how on both sides, research and practice, to overcome social challenges. Often, however, civil society lacks the awareness and capabilities for effective implementation of projects in situations of crisis. This is where CaProSoc steps in and aims to be a contact point for a large number of institutions that are interested in the topic and want to make their contribution to the public good in the coming years. More information on the international CaProSoc research programme can be obtained from the author: reinhard.wagner@almamater.si

About the Author



Reinhard Wagner

Germany



Reinhard Wagner has been active for more than 30 years in the field of project- related leadership, in various sectors of Industry and not-for-profit organizations. Since 2002 he has been actively involved in the development of national as well as international project, programme and portfolio management standards, for example as Convenor of ISO 21503 “Guidance on Programme Management” and ISO 21500 “Guidance on Project Management”, as Project Manager for the IPMA Organisational Competence Baseline and IPMA Delta as well as a Subject Matter Expert for several other standards. Reinhard is Chairman of IPMA’s Council of Delegates, an Honorary Chairman of GPM (German Project Management Association) as well as Managing Director of Tiba Managementberatung GmbH, one of the leading PM Consultancies in Germany. Since 2006 Reinhard has been participating and supporting scientific projects and research in the field of project management. So far, he has edited and published more than 35 textbooks and hundreds of articles and blog posts. He is currently writing his doctoral thesis on the topic of Project Society. He can be contacted at reinhard.wagner@almamater.si