Zitationshinweis

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The profession was mute in the pandemic

>> If you are interested in a political portrait of the late Merkel years, you will find it in a somewhat remote and initially inconspicuous place, namely here: https://www.gesis.org/angebot/daten-findenund-abrufen/ausgewaehlte-nationale-daten/ bundespresseamt .

At this URL address, surveys commissioned by the Federal Press Office (as part of the Federal Chancellery) are archived. In the matter of Covid-19, they prove a decidedly great hunger for knowledge on the part of the federal government under Angela Merkel. Since the 12th calendar week of 2020, it has obtained a total of 43 Corona weekly reports from the FORSA polling institute with all kinds of attitudinal questions, as well as studies on information behaviour during the pandemic, on Generation Z's attitudes to Corona and corresponding annual reviews. Only a fraction of the commissioned surveys are deposited at the above address. In addition, from March 2020 onwards, Infratest/Dimap provided mostly daily briefingson attitudes and personality-related perceptions around Covid-19 on the basis of a Corona online panel specially set up by the survey institute (COMPASS: Corona-Online-Meinungs-Panel-Survey-Special). Of course, the approval ratings for the various Corona measures on the government side and, in addition, the popularity ratings of the acting personnel were always reported.

The natural scientist Merkel, the physicist, for whom it was enough when she spoke of an ‚exponential curve' to make the capital city journalists completely awestruck (by the way: if two people catch Corona in 2020, four in 2021 and eight in 2022, we are also dealing with an exponential curve), shows herself here from her obsessive ‚Mirror, mirror on the wall' side. 1Thisgets its very special flavour when one simultaneously takes into account all the things the federal government was not interested in during the pandemic, ‚this greatest challenge for solidarity-based action since the Second World War' (A. Merkel). The German government did not want to know whether someone died of or with Corona. Nor did it want to know how many intensive care beds were really available in the German health system. Although it justified serious lockdown decisions with an acute threat of overloading the health system, it thought it could afford to obtain the relevant and - as was soon to become apparent - not very reliable data from interested parties. 2

The German government under Chancellor Merkel was not interested in whether children were really the drivers of the pandemic - and it was certainly not interested in the psychological, physical and social consequences of extensive school closures. Nor did it consider it necessary to use a well-established instrument such as the representative health panel of the National Cohort to find out, for example, how high the proportion of those who have experienced the disease asymptomatically is, or how long immunity lasts after illness.

It also obviously did not want to know more about where sick people become infected, and how this might be related to income, education, migration background, living conditions, employment, etc., and how, in view of such information, one could react intelligently to the pandemic, especially to its regionally very different manifestations. Instead, the federal government preferred to deal with abstract r-values and with unreliable reporting data mislabelled as ‚incidence' or with computer simulations of moderate prognostic value. The PhD physicist also thought she could do without a real evaluation of the lockdowns - she liked instead the ‚flatten the curve' feasibility illusions that could be fuelled with them. The government was also interested in how to effectively protect the truly vulnerable, the elderly, since the unimaginative lockdown method was not able to do this - if at all - much too late, after the great death in the old people's homes in autumn/winter 2020/21. The Chancellor, on the other hand, was very interested in the political approval ratings for her blind flight through the pandemic and was willing to spend a lot of foreign money for this.

The list of failures and mismanagement is painfully long. In view of the avoidable suffering of those affected, it is little consolation that the CDU/CSU was also voted out of office in September 2021 because of its bungling handling of the pandemic. The former head of the Federal Chancellery, Helge Braun, applied for the party chairmanship after the lost Bundestag election, claiming that he could point to the successful pandemic management under his leadership. 12.5 percent of the voting CDU members found this convincing in December 2021 - an astonishingly high figure.

All this went largely uncommented upon from the political science community. The profession was mute on the pandemic, although intervention studies actually fall into its special area of expertise. In a reappraisal of the handling of the pandemic, however, there would now be enough exciting research questions: How can it be explained from an administrative science perspective that independent scientific advice by the Robert Koch Institute was largely absent? Why did federalism in Germany, in the form of the Conference of Minister Presidents, immediately abandon itself? And how and why were the health ministries booted out by the state chancelleries and the Federal Chancellery? And who, for what reasons, actually made the motley crew of computer simulators, laboratory virologists and mobility researchers responsible for providing scientific advice to the federal government? <<

Literatur

1: Zu diesem Muster ihrer Regierungspraxis siehe bereits „Regieren nach Zahlen“, Der Spiegel, 37/2014.

2: Siehe den Bericht des Bundesrechnungshofs an den Haushaltsausschuss des Deutschen Bundestages nach § 88 Absatz 2 BHO über die Prüfung ausgewählter coronabedingter Ausgabepositionen des Einzelplans 15 und des Gesundheitsfonds (Abgabe von Schutzmasken an vulnerable Personengruppen, Ausgleichszahlungen an Krankenhäuser und Aufbau von Intensivbettenkapazitäten).