

Resilience and Innovation: The European Governance System's Response to COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented challenge to European governance systems, testing their capacity to respond effectively to a multifaceted crisis. We conducted a systematic search between January and February 2023 of originally published articles from three electronic databases, such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and OECD iLibrary, including papers that were published in the last decade. This review provides a concise overview of the key aspects of European governance in the face of the pandemic. It discusses the initial hurdles in coordination and solidarity among member states, the strain on healthcare systems, economic repercussions, and the imperative for digital transformation. The review presents the current scope of research, highlights the limitation, and provides recommendations for future perspectives.

Keywords: European Union, COVID-19, governance, pandemic, political, Europe

JEL Classification: M14, H12, L38, M50

DOI: 10.24818/RMCI.2024.4.717

1.Introduction

An important turning point in the history of the European Union (EU) administration may be seen in the global pandemic brought on by the rapid spread of the SARS-COV (Coughlin et al., 2021). The European Union has undergone a significant transformation, growing to include many states with similar physical realities in size and population density while embracing states with smaller territorial scope. This has led to a lack of decision-making homogeneity, as not all governments are acknowledged as having the same scope of action (Goniewicz et al., 2020).

In order to increase its economic and political influence on the global arena, Europe increasingly requires a stable government (Van Dongen et al., 2012). It now has to deal with fresh waves of populism and euroskepticism emanating from both national governments and the people of Europe. Thus, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent loss of the United Kingdom from the Union, the EU must rise to the challenge and undertake a fundamental transformation of its administration (Toshkov, Carroll, & Yesilkagit, 2022). In addition to exposing all of

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the institutional flaws in the single currency, the crisis has left the Union weaker, less unified economically and politically, and unable to respond to the growth of sovereigntism (Schimmelfennig, 2018).

The problems are diverse and exist on numerous scales. For instance, the EU is currently dealing with issues of fragmented competencies as well as inequities across levels of government and different sorts of bodies, which could lead to a loss of public credibility and trust if the solutions do not come through clearly and forcefully (Gontariuk et al., 2021). Failures in preventive, communication, and risk management are frequently brought on by information asymmetry issues, which obscure the needs and rights of the citizens who are the true beneficiaries of policies and procedures. Given that the epidemic has only brought attention to a few systemic flaws, it is obvious that in order to understand these contemporary problems, pre-Covid governance must be examined (Nelson & Anderson, 2021). The system's efficient operation could not be guaranteed. Public and private hospitals as well as senior care facilities, for instance, have turned into the focal points of issues.

The pandemic coincides with a period of increased populism and sovereignty, a slump in the economy, and global instability. In this regard, the pandemic's effects have resulted in the worst shock to the global order since World War II, coupled with a tightening of border controls at all international and domestic entry points and the closing of the Schengen Area (Coccia, 2022). To stem the spread of the virus and lessen its damaging effects on national economies, each country's borders had to be tightened (Strange, 2020). However, by doing so, each country ran the risk of refusing to fully cooperate with the international community.

The epidemic caused a short-term, symmetrical economic shock in the European Union (Halmai, 2021). The progressive trend toward asymmetrical economic consequences, which run the risk of widening the economic divide between the North and the South, serves as a metaphor for the problem (Johnson et al., 2020). The ability of some nations, like Germany, to respond to the crisis with more significant resources at their disposal (De Bruin et al., 2020), in order to more quickly neutralize the detrimental impacts of contagion, serves as an illustration of this. It is obvious that different national economies will react to the epidemic in different ways. The response will be linked to internal cohesion, resilience, and the speed and quality of the measures taken to address the recovery. In almost all countries, even those that have best resisted the crisis, the polarization of the labor market, inequalities, and the discomfort of the middle classes are eroding the social fabric (Kyriakidis et al., 2021). Recovery cannot be solely economic, for if there is one thing that the pandemic has highlighted, it is precisely the gaps in the European project from a political perspective (Schmidt, 2020). The pandemic has highlighted the weaknesses and fragility of our society and economic system while revealing the significant potential and opportunities that a coordinated and planned effort to boost economic, social, and health recovery can offer (Bryce et al., 2022). With a careful analysis of the challenges and a possible roadmap, this paper aims to contribute to the current debate on the governance of the European Union, advocating for a more effective, coherent, and equitable model that can face the unprecedented challenges

of our time (Brattberg & Rhinard, 2011). This review also explores the myriad governance strategies employed by the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic effect on economic and political growth.

2. Materials and method

2.1 Registration and search strategy

The review was guided by the research question “What is the European governance system in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic?”. The authors employed the PICO acronym (P: Population, I: Intervention, C: Comparison, and O: Outcome) to facilitate the formulation of our search terms. The search was executed using Boolean operators (“AND,” “OR,” and “NOT”) to capture a wide array of results and to ensure that primary research papers related to the European Governance System were not overlooked.

2.2 Literature search

We used a highly sensitive search strategy to retrieve articles that addressed the governance system in Europe during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. We conducted a systematic search between January and February 2023 of originally published articles from three electronic databases, such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and OECD iLibrary, including papers that were published in the last decade. All papers obtained during the search were imported into the Mendeley referencing tool for flagging and subsequent removal of duplicates.

2.3 Screening and selection criteria

The examination of the database search results was made easier by using an independent screening method. Each article's titles and abstracts were initially evaluated for relevance to the current study by two independent reviewers using the Rayyan web tool (<https://www.rayyan.ai/>). The articles were divided into three categories, including "included," "excluded," and "uncertain." For the publications in the uncertain category, the abstract and technique sections were read and reorganized as either included or omitted. All original full-text articles that explored the European governance system, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, were included in the study. We excluded review papers, conference papers, discussion papers, editorials, and non-research letters from the study.

3.Results

3.1 Characteristics of studies identified

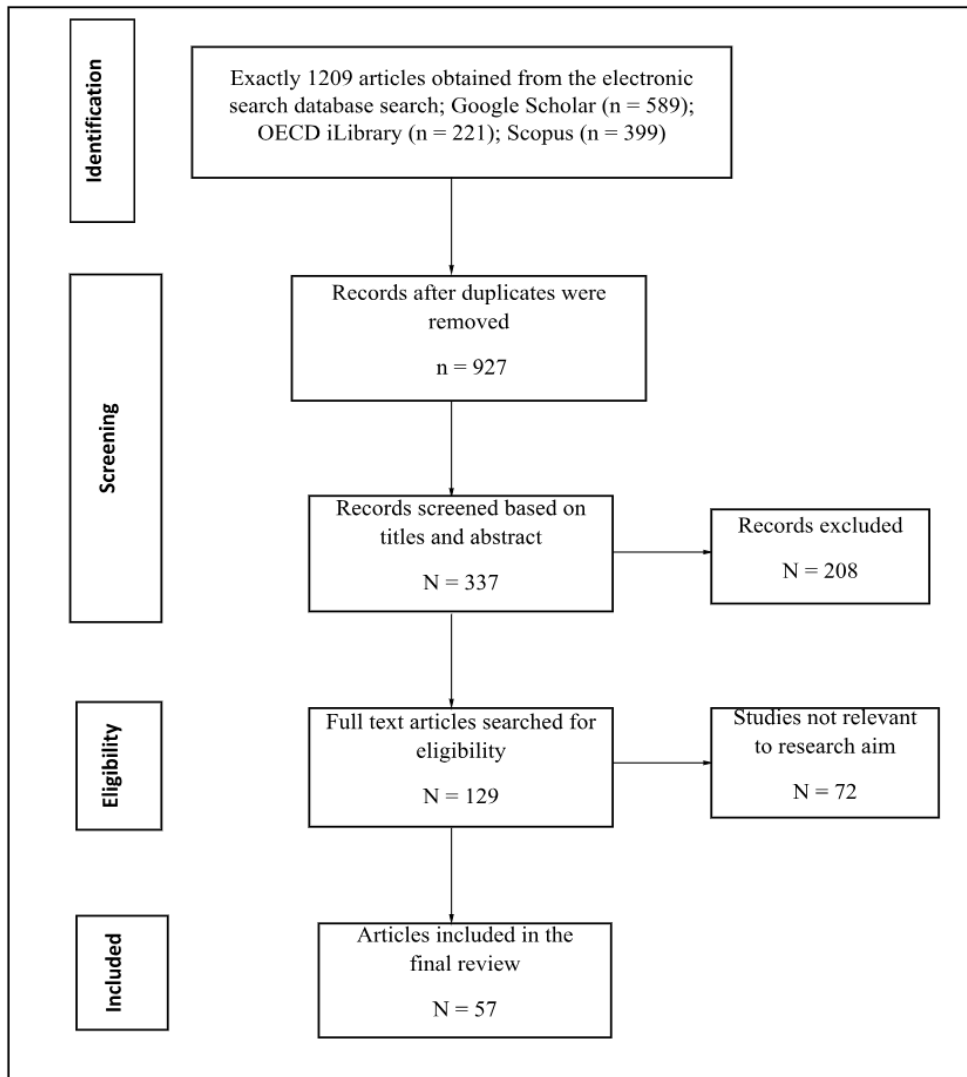


Figure 1. A PRISMA flow chart of the selection of studies that examined european governance in the face of the pandemic

Source: authors' contribution

Figure 1 above shows the PRISMA flowchart for the study selection and screening. Overall, 1,209 studies were obtained from searching three electronic databases (Google Scholar = 589; OECD iLibrary = 221, and Scopus = 399). Exactly

927 unique citations remained following the removal of duplicates ($n = 282$). After a critical evaluation of the titles and abstracts, precisely 337 articles were considered potentially useful for the present review. Out of this, 208 articles were excluded from the study because they did not have any relevance to the study. The full text of the remaining 129 articles was further assessed, and this resulted in the final removal of 72 articles. We therefore included 57 full-text articles that met the inclusion criteria.

4. Discussion

4.1 The pandemic crisis and the criticality of governance

The medium- and long-term economic growth strategy up to 2020 was produced by the European Commission in a paper released in 2010 (Gökmen & Lyhagen, 2022). The recent financial crisis has exposed the structural flaws in the European economy and undone a lot of the efforts and advancements made through community policies (Toshkov, Carroll, & Yesilkagit, 2022; Egger et al., 2021). The possibility of Europe returning to pre-crisis growth rates, or even better rates, exists but is dependent on all member states cooperating and aiming for good economic policy coordination while taking into account the limited amount of available financial resources (Elekes & Halmai, 2019). The "Europe 2020" strategy mandates that member states, and subsequently, regions, exert effort to align their development strategies with priorities and objectives through a collaborative approach (Ippolito et al., 2020). Thus, a development strategy with a focus on unity necessitates the adoption of a highly integrated organizational model and a multi-level governance system that involves a variety of actors in specific programmatic actions, whose implementation is continuously checked for accuracy and adjusted in light of results and shifting circumstances that may have an impact on the ongoing development process (Teisman & Edelenbos, 2011). Currently, the money from the Recovery Instrument designated for the current epidemic will mostly go toward brand-new projects and will only be used to a lesser amount to supplement the financing plans previously included in the common budget (Fouad, 2021). The funds set aside for emergencies will ultimately run out, so it is imperative to find structural solutions that can act decisively and consistently, harmonize, and build a more natural structure amongst states (Weitzman, 2007).

Europe largely consists of a collection of public policies that have developed over time and in accordance with various political ideologies. Through recommendations for modifications that affected instruments already existing on the European stage, the health crisis forced an acceleration of the process of remaking the instruments of European governance (Cone et al., 2022).

The recent economic and financial crisis has drastically altered some local situations, making the use of an experimental method more challenging. However, it is also true that a number of these local governance experiences from the era serve as benchmarks for the entire region today, particularly at a time when local governments face significant operational challenges (Francis & Feiock, 2011). In the

majority of cases, they continue to operate effectively and weave the local links that have been one of their strengths, frequently moving beyond local to create true networks with other regions in Europe (Halmai, 2021).

The durability of the Eurozone is being put to the test by an unprecedented crisis in the face of governance that has already been severely compromised by asymmetries and structural flaws during the Eurozone crisis (Pagoulatos, 2021). The European Union's current institutional structure and the ensuing governance procedures have severe crisis management limits. In the absence of institutional and fiscal tools that would enable a truly European reaction, and response to the health crisis and the accompanying economic crisis underlines the failure of the intergovernmental processes supporting the continent's economic governance (Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden, 2009). The topic of the continuing political discussion in Europe is now the quest for resources to finance economic recovery (Radice, 2000). It is obvious that action was required to offer adequate response and support to countries in need in a situation as crucial as the pandemic. Nevertheless, despite the pandemic's exogenous origins, the heterogeneity of the European context's intrinsic barriers could not be surmounted. But ultimately, the decision about each state's and Europe's overall behavior will be made by the European people themselves at the conclusion of the crisis (Mearsheimer, 2014).

In particular, in terms of its capacity to politically regulate the divisions that coexist within it, Europe finds itself in a situation of considerable challenge and hardship. The epidemic has made it clear that there is no one solution that can be used to address this governance gap; instead, Europe as a whole and its diversity need to be rethought (Aveni, 2023). To build a powerful and unified Europe, a heterogeneous Europe that takes into consideration varied speeds is a requirement.

4.2 Comparison of governance models

A reasoning that is only concerned with outcomes would predict that good governance would succeed in meeting predetermined goals while weak governance would fall short of those goals (Deliu, 2020). The way in which efforts are made to produce the desired results, however, is described by governance (Moore & Hartley, 2010). In this sense, both the intended outcome and the methods and policies adopted are crucial. Other social, cultural, and environmental factors that aren't well-represented by commonly used measures shouldn't suffer in order to improve some economic indicators (Burch, 2010). Most governments place a big emphasis on economic growth in their dashboards (Matheus, Janssen, & Maheshwari, 2020). Over time and in response to requirements, this area of governance is changing.

A notion like governance is put to the test in a socioeconomic setting characterized by the effects of the health crisis (Garland, 2014). The effectiveness of the current governance will play a major role in whether or not this problem can be resolved. In the fight against the spread of COVID-19, the way in which authority is exercised, as well as the effectiveness and relevance of the decisions taken during this crisis, are critical factors (Teisman & Edelenbos, 2011). At this level,

transnational coordination benefits from the involvement of the European government. Coordinating certain measures is necessary to prevent the virus's spread and lessen the severity of its effects (De Bruin et al., 2020).

The European Union strives for democratic governance, which is based on public input during the decision-making process (Kohler-Koch, 2007). However, in some circumstances, democracy exhibits significant fragility. The emergence of certain political currents that take advantage of the suffering of the populace pushes those nations inward in a gradual manner, undermining the cooperative nature of European governance (Lieberman, 2002). Western Europe is currently experiencing a regime and political power shift from a democratic model to populist rule. Claiming better governance is impossible if you represent the voice of the people while criticizing the current system and not providing any alternatives.

As a result, the inward-looking attitude of member nations weakens European governance and makes the absence of policy coordination among them even worse (Dăianu, 2019). The substantial impact of the monetarist current on the development of the European Union, which contends that market processes would enable the economies of the European region to evolve in the best possible way, places limitations on the democratic space (Keating, 2017). The democratic environment and one's ability to make decisions are key factors in exercising governance.

Under normal conditions, a government is tasked with managing a number of different factors, including budget allocation, the decision to pursue or not pursue particular international relations, and the decision to prioritize investment or operating expenses (Mathenge, Shavulimo, & Kiama, 2018). This work is significantly more difficult to complete during times of crisis. The known order's disruption has the consequence of making governance more complex than it already is. When a nation's government is already precarious, a crisis situation (like the COVID-19 epidemic) exacerbates and weakens the nation's balance and governance even more (Peters et al., 2022). Some European nations have been successful in overcoming the crisis and taming infection increases within the COVID-19 framework. We have concentrated on the situation in Finland among these nations. Given the numbers, this nation is one of the least hit in all of Europe, which begs the question of how the nation will respond to the crisis (Peters et al., 2022).

It is important to recognize Finland's quick response. When compared to other countries, steps to shut down air borders were adopted fairly quickly. Schools were shut down, and the populace was confined after this. The public's confidence in its government was exhibited by these actions. It was possible to attain the anticipated results if the measures were accepted and followed. The anticipated fall in Finland's GDP is 11.9%, compared to projections of a 3% to 4% decline (Belhadi et al., 2021). A sign of the confidence the current administration enjoys is how quickly significant decisions are made while maintaining a federating nature. This makes it possible to lay the groundwork for sound governance. Finland has been able to adjust to the situation because of its effective governance and the backing of its people (Sahlberg, 2011). Therefore, trust is a key factor in governance because it

establishes a favorable political climate and lends weight to the chosen course of action. For instance, the release of a mobile application has had broad adoption. Other nations have not been able to achieve the same level of devotion to a technological method of halting the virus' transmission, demonstrating the importance of having confidence in government mechanisms (Egger et al., 2021).

In comparison to other European nations, Finland's political system is unique in a few ways. State involvement is crucial in this system. The state regulates and harmonizes the relationships between the many components of society by enforcing strong social and educational policies (King, 2007). With the help of this "welfare state" structure, the government is able to maintain social cohesion, which is crucial for the general population's welfare (Mok & Kang, 2019). As a result, the government can rely on the backing of many different players, each of whom contributes to the maintenance of the system's balance. The quality of this governance, however, depends on a government's capacity to adapt to the context, both economically and socially (Lebel et al., 2006). Good governance cannot, therefore, be claimed by the simple fact of wielding power in a conventional manner. Finland stands out because it has made an attempt to adjust its governance to the current crisis circumstances in addition to exercising it based on the normative framework. With little harm compared to other nations, this is evident in its indices, whether in terms of health or economy (Christensen et al., 2023).

Thus, Finland's situation provides an illustration of strong leadership and efficient handling of the health issue. This dilemma has been effectively resolved by modifying the governance paradigm and involving the public in decision-making (Christensen et al., 2023). Thus, it is clear that governance is a dynamic process that changes based on the situation and needs. It is a flexible mechanism for selecting the best course of action in light of the current situation, not a static model to be applied consistently in all instances.

The diverse political, social, and economic environments of the member nations are reflected in the differences in their governance approaches (Uzunca, Rigtering, & Ozcan, 2018). Finland is a useful example of how good governance can involve the public in decision-making while simultaneously aiding in crisis management (Kuziemski & Misuraca, 2020). It is obvious that a nation's capacity for resilience and adaptation during times of crisis is significantly influenced by the caliber of its governance. As a result, governance models must be continuously assessed and adjusted to make sure they still meet the demands and challenges of the modern world.

4.3 The European governance of the future

A number of governmental and administrative management organizations are included in European governance (Schout & Jordan, 2005). Therefore, the focus is on the various European contexts and their ability to build democratically participatory forms of governance. In this way, the effectiveness of member-nation governance contributes to the strength of European governance (Jachtenfuchs,

2001). This relates to the governments of the member countries' capacity to federate and oversee state matters from an administrative and political standpoint. Thus, governance encompasses both a political and administrative component that involves maintaining steadfast respect for democracy and implementing sound management practices (Golooba-Mutebi & Hickey, 2018). Good management practices are defined as a collection of protocols that are acknowledged as legitimate globally and characterized as a model of reference (Strange, 2020). Furthermore, because governance is based on unique characteristics, socioeconomic settings, and development plans that vary from nation to nation, the intrinsic complexity of a nation's governance makes it impossible to build governance models and effective management practices. In contrast to the discipline of business management, "governance" refers to a method of doing things rather than a model of governance. The quality of governance in the absence of a governance model is not determined by comparing one's model with the one that is currently in use in a political arena, especially within the European Union (Rasche, 2009). Therefore, establishing the components of good governance is critical.

Analysis of internal and external public policies is a part of governance analysis, which is both administrative and political (Moore & Hartley, 2010). In this way, this idea enables us to identify European public policies and the manner in which power is exercised in reaction to modifications in the composition and roles of the state. Additionally, it is a transfer of power to a supranational level where a variety of non-state actors are present and occupy varying degrees of decision-making authority (Sivakumaran, 2016). Current needs can be met by establishing governance through adapting the exercise of power to changes in the state's structures and operations. As markets become more liberalized, government interference is reduced, and a new kind of market-based governance is established. Accordingly, the only way to intervene is indirectly, by establishing the tools and organizations in charge of regulating the market (Gómez-Baggethun & Muradian, 2015). A collection of supranational organizations with some sovereignty delegated by member states are combined to form the European Union. Unfortunately, the governments of the member states of the European Union lack confidence in European institutions, which hinders the EU from using its institutional prerogatives to govern (Lockie, 2013). Strengthening the European Union's institutions would open up more opportunities for improved governance in the future.

Similar to the financial and economic crises, the COVID-19 health crisis has had global implications. Member states of the European Union have also suffered, albeit in different ways, from this crisis (Belhadi et al., 2021). This has also made clear the boundaries of European collaboration when it comes to areas other than finance or the economy. In many previously open European countries, the growth of the far-right has also contributed to an increased lack of cooperation (Howard, 2010). The actions taken both during and after this health crisis will determine the direction of European governance in the future. Populism and sovereignty are on the increase in the contemporary environment (Deliu, 2020). It is critical to fortify the European Union's institutions in this divided environment, endowing them with the authority

to take decisive action to enhance member nations' coordination and collaboration. The health crisis has exposed the European Union's lack of coordination and collaboration. Confidence in this union is weakened by these shortcomings. Thus, it is imperative to combat the deficiency of legitimacy and trust that is causing European governance to become impoverished. The people of the European Union must take measures backed by all of its member nations in order to restore trust in the union and all of its institutions.

At the governing level, trust is essential. Restrictive measures have a perverse impact because the populace of some nations is extremely dissatisfied with the measures implemented during this crisis and has organized rallies to voice their displeasure (Ran, 2017). The administration's legitimacy is diminishing due to their incapacity to unite the populace. However, in some nations, the populace has demonstrated a strong dedication to upholding the different policies put in place by the government. The government relies heavily on confidence in the legitimacy of the institutions that are in existence. Thus, bolstering public confidence in European institutions and bolstering member states' political commitment are critical to the future of European government (Ran, 2017).

The political aspect of governance is equally important. The exercise of power must respect a democratic system to establish the legitimacy of the government. In this sense, democracy allows for governance resulting from the will of the people who have chosen to be governed by an ideology carried by such and such a government (De Bruin et al., 2020). However, governance today is no longer limited to the state alone. With the centrality of the market, the scope of state intervention is increasingly reduced, and market regulation without any intervention establishes a market logic of regulation and allows for "governing" without intervening directly. The future of governance is strongly linked to the place of the market. The health crisis caused by COVID-19 has once again demonstrated the limits of market logic with an explicit search for the particular interests of each. Numerous conflicts between European Union member countries arose during the distress of supplying certain products necessary to fight against the spread of the virus. Such events testify to a glaring lack of willingness to cooperate and help each other within the European Union (King, 2007). European governance must therefore equip itself with effective coordination tools to manage crisis situations.

European governance is an important subject that deserves to be addressed in an in-depth and critical manner. Governance is both political and administrative, taking place at the supranational level and in the member countries of the European Union. The quality of governance in European Union countries largely depends on the administrative and political capacity of the member countries to implement good governance (Spicer & Terry, 2016). In this sense, governance depends on the quality of governance of European Union member countries, good management practices, and strong institutions. It is therefore important to identify and address the various challenges of European governance in order to set up a system that can meet the demands and challenges of the present and future.

Conclusion and recommendations for future directions

The pandemic highlighted the need for improved coordination and solidarity among European Union (EU) member states. While the EU did take significant steps, there were initial disagreements and delays in responding to the crisis. This crisis underscored the importance of a unified, coordinated approach in the face of a pandemic. Develop a comprehensive and unified pandemic preparedness plan for the EU. This should include stockpiling medical supplies, enhancing healthcare infrastructure, and establishing a rapid response system. The pandemic also revealed vulnerabilities in healthcare systems across Europe. Inadequate resources, a lack of preparedness, and varying healthcare capacities among member states led to disparities in healthcare outcomes. It is clear that strengthening healthcare systems is paramount. Invest in healthcare infrastructure and create a mechanism for sharing best practices and resources among member states. Develop a common European Health Union to coordinate healthcare policies.

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