

**CHAPTER 10**  
**IT WASN'T MEANT  
TO BE THIS WAY**

*In an essay to set the context for No Going Back, Part 3, Pamela Barrett charts the crisis map of the past two years and draws out some of the profound repercussions that continue to affect us all.*



***“You have power over your mind and not over outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength”.***

**MARCUS AURELIUS IN MEDITATIONS**

WE HAVE HAD OUR SHARE OF EVENTS in the past few years. Now just emerging, haltingly, tentatively, from the world’s worst ever global health crisis, a new geopolitical inflection point emerges in Europe. There is nothing like a world-altering crisis to move you on from the last one. We note these events that have at their heart an identifying cause and comparative effect, for better or worse: globalization and the interdependence of our world.

This most recent crisis is the ultimate challenge to globalization and the hard fought, mostly won, once settled world order post WWII. How weighted, how freighted, how traded that sounds. On what did it depend, that it could so easily be broken? Was it really so fragile? Apparently so. The informing principle of our time was not so universally definitional, after all.

In the current crisis centering on Ukraine but with effects across the world, we can see that all of history is a conversation between generations, immediate or long forgotten generations whose choices whisper or shout across time, demanding action, resolution, retaliation, recompense and reconciliation. And it appears only in defence of a global world order do we seek to define it, to measure it, to value it, and to assert it, in triumph of the giant concepts, sought and gained in the smallness of individual actions, adding up to the tide of human roar – “this far and no further”. In a shouting echo of historical conflicts, where morality matters, where notions of reality are contested as much as definitions of truth. In this, the third part of *No Going Back*, George Sipos explores the problems and potential of Eastern Europe, pointing out that, sadly, it was Ukraine that had the most potential for further development of international education in this region. Perhaps it will yet be realised.

The ongoing event which Ailsa Lamont analysed and presented in the first pre-Covid part of this publication was of course the increasingly volatile issue of climate change, lurching in designation from chronic to critical in just a few short years. Almost always since the acceleration of post-war globalization, climate change has been devastatingly urgent. As Ailsa notes in her

updated analysis for No Going Back 3, this is now an existential crisis, and of central importance to international educators.

2020 was all about a novel Corona virus. While there is no going back, two years on, we need to remind ourselves of the collective global and personal dislocation and trauma of the pandemic.

The pandemic. Globally life-threatening with astonishing rapidity, the Covid-19 pandemic was (and still is, despite the desperation to move on) the event that informed our time and hollowed out our ability to engage with the world for two years.

The pandemic. It has been life-changing for most, and sadly life-ending for many. It has been stubbornly persistent, though the miracle of vaccine technology has enabled us to relegate the “pan” to endemic by the time of writing in March 2022. While there have been waves and virus variants, after the (uneven and strangely contested) rollout of the vaccines, there has been something of a restoration of much of the world’s global economic and societal activity, though clearly recovery is nowhere close to a straight line, landing us with varying degrees of confidence in declaring a tragic phase of our existence over.

The pandemic. It was absurdly politicized, tragically divisive, and it disproportionately affected specific groups in western societies, and entire countries in certain parts of the world.

The impact on international education, where student mobility (in multiple directions) is of course a defining element, was of course, immediate and devastating. That many institutions were able to respond in some way through the creation of different, digital and online models of communication, teaching and learning is a testament to the commitment of this extraordinary sector, and to the resilience of our student communities. In this publication James Richardson and Bee Gan give us a case study around the online delivery issue, and Lindsay Mathers-Addington provides a fascinating analysis of the Duolingo contribution to the English

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language testing dilemma that confronted many institutions in 2020.

It wasn't forecast, and while its impacts were breath-taking in their pace it wasn't a single event. Historical inflection points are typically sudden, shocking, or extraordinary. If we were of those generations, we remember where we were on 9/11; when the Berlin Wall fell; or when Barack Obama was elected. The pandemic was a rolling catastrophe, seemingly unending, with no one defining moment. Adam Tooze bookends the 2020 onset pandemic period in his fascinating account with "President Xi Jinping's public acknowledgement of the coronavirus outbreak on January 20, 2020, and Joseph Biden's inauguration as the 46th president of the United States precisely a year later on January 20, 2021". During this period, Tooze explains that "The danger [the pandemic] posed disrupted the daily routine of virtually everyone on the planet, stopped much of public life, closed schools, separated families, interrupted travel both within and between countries, and upended the world economy." Adam Tooze: *Shutdown: How Covid Shook the World's Economy*, Allen Lane, 2021.

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Towards the end of 2019, when we looked ahead to 2020 to provide forecasts and offer perspectives, the coming year was meant to be about the start of an iconic new decade.

The Economist noted that the highlights would include:

- **Looking forward to an ugly and divisive presidential election in the United States.** (The characterization was true of course, though the effects of the ongoing division were understated and resonate still).
- **China declaring its having met its target of achieving "moderate prosperity" by 2020.** Instead, China landed on ambivalent language by the end of a Covid-riven 2020 that suggested that it has modified its goals of economic growth at all costs. "Four decades of breakneck economic development have brought China only to the level of GDP per capita enjoyed by South Korea and Taiwan in the early 1990s..." reported the Foreign Policy journal, and continued "China has developed pockets of world-class expertise but has proved unwilling or

unable to allow its people the autonomy they need to flourish – and take their country beyond the “moderate” level of development it has already reached”.

- **The world looked forward to the Tokyo Olympic Games in the Summer of 2020.** Ultimately postponed by a year, though still, oddly, called the 2020 Tokyo Games (presumably so as not to lose all that merchandise!) these Olympics became the Games of “Will They, or Won’t They?”, that is, bow to the inevitable impossible challenges of hosting a global crowd- and travel-dependent event in the middle of the pandemic, eventually offering a much-altered and traduced sporting event in 2021 which reportedly lost around 640 billion yen through the 12-month postponement.
- **The Economist forecast a global economic slowdown for 2020.** Economist Editor Zanny Minton-Beddoes forecast that “It will be a volatile year, characterised by unstable, angry and polarised politics, and an enfeebled economic outlook for the world.....” Global growth had already slowed in 2019, impacted by the Sino-American trade war, but the immediate economic devastation wrought by the pandemic made any forecasts, even from the august Economist irrelevant. By January 2021, the IMF reported “a severe collapse in 2020 that has had acute adverse impacts on women, youth, the poor, the informally employed, and those who work in contact-intensive sectors. The global growth contraction for 2020 is estimated at -3.5 percent, 0.9 percentage point higher than projected in the previous forecast (reflecting stronger-than-expected momentum in the second half of 2020)”.
- **Brexit and its aftermath were expected to be examined closely in 2020.** The extent of the division, damage and potential for global diminution of the UK from Brexit was not tested as significantly in terms of the country’s place in the world given the pandemic, but the Conservative government’s competence and capability to lead the country through the pandemic certainly was; as was the ability of the UK’s much-vaunted NHS to stand up the resources to deal with the worst public health crisis in a century.
- **In Afghanistan, no one was looking forward to the end of a 20-year war that cost the lives of about 241,000 people when it would result in a Taliban victory.** More than 71,000 of those

# Latest World Economic Outlook Growth Projections

(real GDP, annual percent change)	ESTIMATE	PROJECTIONS	
	2020	2021	2022
<b>World Output</b>	-3.5	5.5	4.2
<b>Advanced Economies</b>	-4.9	4.3	3.1
<b>United States</b>	-3.4	5.1	2.5
<b>Euro Area</b>	-7.2	4.2	3.6
Germany	-5.4	3.5	3.1
France	-9.0	5.5	4.1
Italy	-9.2	3.0	3.6
Spain	-11.1	5.9	4.7
<b>Japan</b>	-5.1	3.1	2.4
<b>United Kingdom</b>	-10.0	4.5	5.0
<b>Canada</b>	-5.5	3.6	4.1
<b>Other Advanced Economies</b>	-2.5	3.6	3.1
<b>Emerging Markets and Developing Economies</b>	-2.4	6.3	5.0
<b>Emerging and Developing Asia</b>	-1.1	8.3	5.9
China	2.3	8.1	5.6
India	-8.0	11.5	6.8
ASEAN-5	-3.7	5.2	6.0
<b>Emerging and Developing Europe</b>	-2.8	4.0	3.9
Russia	-3.6	3.0	3.9
<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>	-7.4	4.1	2.9
Brazil	-4.5	3.6	2.6
Mexico	-8.5	4.3	2.5
<b>Middle East and Central Asia</b>	-3.2	3.0	4.2
Saudi Arabia	-3.9	2.6	4.0
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	-2.6	3.2	3.9
Nigeria	-3.2	1.5	2.5
South Africa	-7.5	2.8	1.4
<b>Memorandum</b>			
<b>Low-Income Developing Countries</b>	-0.8	5.1	5.5

Source: IMF, *World Economic Outlook Update*, January 2021

Note: For India, data and forecasts are presented on a fiscal year basis, with FY 2020/2021 starting in April 2020. India's growth projections are -7.6 percent in 2020 and 11.0 percent in 2021 based on calendar year.

*While much is familiar, everything has changed.*

killed in the war were civilians. The enfeeblement of the Afghan government's position continued during 2020 and through the end of the Trump Presidency, and with the decision of the new Biden administration for a precipitate but inevitable withdrawal, the bloody conflict reached its tumultuous end, with the installation of a Taliban government. The end of the education of generations of Afghan girls is a likely sad footnote, and a loss to the aspirations of many colleagues in the international education field.

- There were plenty of **continuing geopolitical trends** about which we were concerned at the end of 2019 and which might have an impact on our field: the bubbling territorial claims and disputes in the South China Sea; the ambitions of Vladimir Putin vis à vis Ukraine that had been active at least since the annexation of Crimea in 2014/15 (and now surfacing in an appalling tragedy in 2022); the seeming stalemate between Iran and the USA; the ambitions of China's Belt and Road initiatives, particularly in Africa; and increasingly totalitarian inclinations in various countries (Brazil and Hungary, to name but two).

None of these lists, forecasts and insights for 2020 that were produced in 2019 included the onslaught of a vicious global viral pandemic that took the lives of some 3 million people worldwide.

While virologists had predicted for decades the possibility of a highly contagious viral infection of the kind that SARS-CoV-2 manifested, the rapidity and intensity of the infection and its effects was tragically difficult to calculate. To a great extent the pandemic onset was made possible by the interdependence of global societies and economies that were, and are, a feature and a cause of celebration in the 21st century and which make possible the whole field of international education. Ironic.

The Covid pandemic was, however, more than anything, an intensely human tragedy, touching the lives and livelihoods of almost everyone on the planet. As someone who lost a dearest loved one during 2020, I celebrate the more open approach to emotional distress and to grief that seems to have emerged from

this shared or common experience. Likewise, the importance of emotional health and the recalculations of the meaning of work and workplace are welcome after-effects that we hope will remain when the immediate memory of these times begins to fade.

However, the test of our resilience in the face of such a disaster is ongoing. There are generations of children and young people whose lives and whose educational experience have been marked by the dislocation, and whose needs we must accommodate in our education infrastructures for many years to come. Tony Lee's piece on the pandemials in this book is a welcome discussion of the implications of this topic. No Going Back 3 includes pieces from institutions and organisations who have sought to respond and adapt to the complex global education environment we now inhabit. From Douglas Proctor, Bulut Sahin, Sabine Klahr and Graham Wise there are efforts to present new ways of thinking strategically and of providing leadership in our field. Lindsay Addington, James Richardson and Bee Gan, Tom Buckley, Jim Crawley and Elisabeth Grindel-Denby present case studies on the wide and varied ways of working through the pandemic and beyond – new locations, new technologies and new modes of discourse. While much is familiar, everything has changed.

We cannot strive to go back. There is no going back. There is only learning, to move through and beyond.

*See page 272 onwards for biographies and references.*

