

# The tapestry of citizen perspectives: Utilizing Cultural Theory for effective crisis response

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it abundantly clear that in times of crisis, governments need to reach out to all their citizens and engage them in a strategy for action. While the effect of "rallying under the flag" wears off quickly, effective crisis management over longer periods of time requires customized communication and measures that are tailored to the various social groups. Under time pressure, the complexity of the social world must be reduced to remain capable of action. The Cultural Theory approach offers a parsimonious model, known as grid-group-typology, for analyzing and developing citizen-centered solutions that sufficiently account for the social differentiation of society without getting lost in the complexity of real life. By applying the grid-group typology, this study examines the personal and societal disadvantages perceived during the pandemic to (a) evaluate the explanatory power of the CT approach and (b) demonstrate how the typology can serve as a heuristic for designing more citizen-focused crisis responses.

## Key words

Cultural Theory, grid-group typology, citizens' perceptions, crisis management, crisis measures

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## Extra information

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## **Introduction**

In an era of escalating volatility and uncertainty, the inevitability of major crises demanding swift and effective responses is apparent [1, p. 1120]. Impending crises force governments to make critical choices quickly and without sufficient preparation. The measures taken can be drastic, such as extensive restrictions on the freedom and autonomy of citizens, and thus collide with societal core values [2, p. 9]. Yet, the collective well-being depends on citizens adhering to mandated behavioral changes and abiding by prescribed regulations ([3], [4], [5], [6]). Navigating these tensions and preserving trust, compliance and societal cohesion requires both citizens and government to reframe the sudden and profound policy changes and the perceived threat to associated societal norms and values ([7], [8]). Consequently, the implementation of crisis measures not only poses capacity challenges but also raises legitimacy issues, particularly regarding citizen perceptions ([9, p. 1], [10], [11]).

This confluence of factors presents formidable challenges for governmental crisis management. The credibility of the government becomes paramount, as citizens' acceptance of strict crisis measures hinges upon perceived trustworthiness [11]. Effective crisis and risk communication emerge as linchpins in this endeavor ([5], [12], [13], [14], [15], [16]). However, communication efforts are only effective if they meet the citizens' diverse "needs, values, background, culture, and experiences" ([17, p. 45], referring to Murray-Johnson et al. 2001). Recognizing the heterogeneous nature of citizenry, governments face the challenge of engaging not only sympathetic constituencies but also the entire populace, which may hold divergent fundamental values. This challenge is exacerbated in highly polarized societies, where reaching consensus becomes increasingly arduous. In times of crisis, when societal values are put to the test, existing divisions become more apparent, and polarization tends to intensify ([18], [19]). Hence, an understanding of how different segments of society perceive crisis interventions and their ramifications is imperative to fostering effective communication and achieving widespread societal buy-in.

Given the differentiation of modern societies into various forms of social organization and associated patterns of thought and belief, it is essential to underscore the importance of culturally anchored basic assumptions that shape perception and consequent behavior. Such an understanding holds pivotal importance during periods of crisis, particularly concerning the formulation of culturally attuned crisis communication strategies and interventions. One of the rare studies to elaborate the context of perception, Ball et al. [20] offer insight into crisis communication by adopting a dramaturgical perspective. By conceptualizing communication recipients as audiences, the study aims to elucidate the varying levels of legitimacy evoked by crisis discourse. To explain effects on the legitimacy of actors and their policy, they focus on "the alignment between an actor's performative habitus and the prototypical expectations that an audience will have about characterization" [20, p. 596]. Nonetheless, Ball et al.'s reliance on typified role expectations, such as those of a prime minister or expert, limits its ability to fully capture the diversity of audience perspectives and their nuanced role expectations.

Therefore, this study proposes an alternative approach to theorize the relationship between citizens' diverse perceptions and the cultural fabric of their social context. The research employs Cultural Theory (CT) ([21], [22]) to investigate the perceived impacts of citizens during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing the following questions: (a) What disadvantages do citizens perceive during a crisis when the rigid constraining measures of an unprecedented lockdown are in place? (b) How do citizens frame their perceptions of these disadvantages, and what different conceptualizations are represented in their statements? To



achieve this, the research design comprises two stages: First, a representative survey featuring open-ended questions to capture perceived disadvantages during the initial COVID-19 lockdown in Austria. Second, an exemplary in-depth analysis of select statements to identify different conceptualizations or framings of disadvantages. Leveraging CT offers both theoretical and practical advantages for this investigation.

From a theoretical perspective, CT allows for the theorization and examination of citizen perspectives with regard to the differentiation of modern societies into different forms of social organization. Specifically, CT offers a powerful model (called *grid-group typology*) of four elementary types of social organization (referred to as *cultural types*) and associated value and belief patterns (referred to as *thought styles*) [22]. In every social system, all four cultural types are present in a competing relationship to each other. Consequently, this also applies to the associated thought styles. The model therefore provides an excellent, theoretically sound framework for “tracing different conceptions of the crisis” [23, p. 595]. Moreover, CT holds promise for providing new insights into existing research on crisis communication and management, particularly to explain its varying success among groups of citizens ([5], [24]) and over time [25].

From a practical perspective, CT helps policymakers and public administration executives to reach out more effectively to their citizens in crisis situations and beyond. Lack of understanding of how differently citizens with opposing thought styles interpret government actions can be seen as a major threat to successful crisis management. In contrast, dealing with their fears and concerns in a culturally sensitive manner can strengthen trust in the government and thus increase compliance with government measures, even among those with different values and beliefs. To this end, knowledge of the spectrum of citizens' thought styles is of essential value. This study aims to identify traces of the different thought styles by way of analyzing the perceptions of disadvantages (and hence burdens, fears and worries) of citizens.

The study aims to make several contributions. First, it contributes to theory development by examining whether all four thought styles can be traced in citizens' perceptions of crisis measures and the resulting individual and societal disadvantages. This exploration is important as it illustrates the relevance of the CT approach in explaining variations in reactions to government crisis measures within a single national context. Second, the study contributes a citizen perception perspective to crisis management as a phenomenon. In particular, it provides insights into how individuals experience and evaluate the effects of unprecedented government actions taken to manage a crisis. However, the analysis of citizen perceptions extends beyond mere description. By applying the analytical framework of CT, the study demonstrates that citizens' perceptions and evaluations during a crisis, even when confronted with completely new circumstances, are still based on underlying thought styles. This implies that even with limited data, it is possible to draw conclusions about these underlying patterns in order to comprehend citizens' reactions and develop appropriate responses. Third, the study contributes to governance practice. Effective crisis management requires an understanding that distinct thought styles are linked to different ways of assessing means and measures. A heuristic for systematically classifying citizen perceptions, based on a theory-driven consideration of the social context and its associated thought style, facilitates tailored approaches to garner citizen engagement and compliance. This is particularly crucial during times of crisis when gaining support from all segments of the population is imperative, in contrast to stable times when governments may rely on (varying sizes of) majorities.

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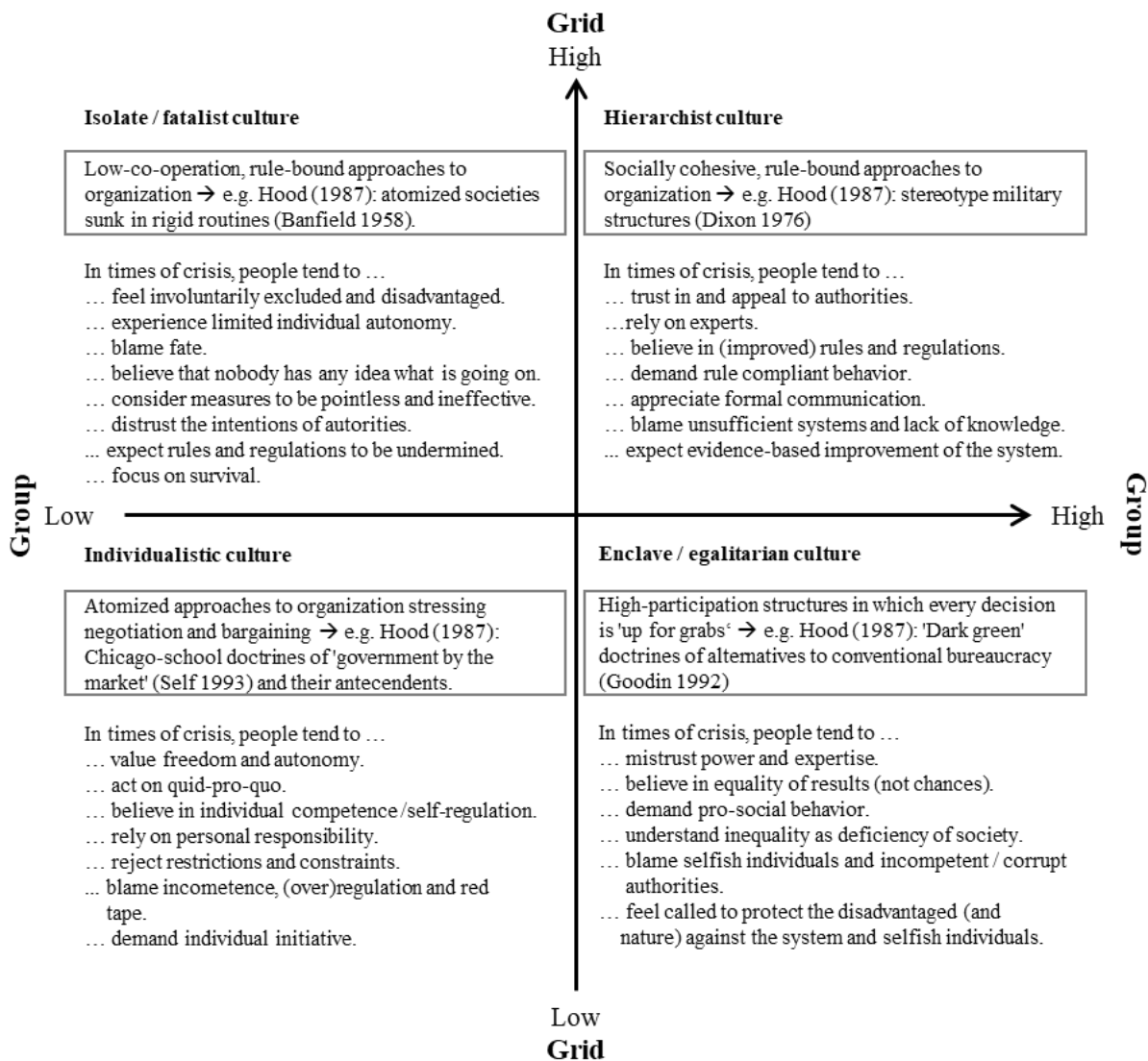
## Analytical Framework: grid-group typology and thought styles

In the interest of a powerful yet parsimonious model of forms of social organization, CT cross-tables two dimensions (regulation and integration) resulting in a matrix referred to as the *grid-group typology*. The typology depicts a model of four cultural types ([21], [22]), providing a powerful framework for analyzing forms of social organization and related cultures ([26], [27], [28], [29]). The Framework has been widely adapted, modified and applied ([30], [31], [32], [33], [34]; for an overview see, e.g., [22], [35], [36]). However, this also resulted in a variety of different names for the four types, like ways of life [30], cultural biases [32], worldviews [37], solidarities [38], elementary forms [36], or simply A/B/C/D [22]. For the purpose of this study, the four types of the grid-group typology are referred to as *cultural types*. Individual cultural types are named *hierarchical*, *individualistic*, *enclave/egalitarian*, or *isolate/fatalist culture*.

The four cultural types of the typology are each “emanating from a specific form of [social] organisation” [22, p. 411]. Drawing on Durkheim's dimensions of regulation and integration, Douglas theorizes the four forms of social organization as the extent to which individual decisions and actions are constraint by rules and norms (regulation = grid) and the strength of group boundaries (integration = group) [34, p. 6]. On the vertical axis (see Figure 1), the grid dimension denotes the extent of constraints imposed on individual actors in a social system through formal as well as informal social norms and standards about role differentiation. It thus describes how much people's lives are constrained by conventions or rules, reducing the realm of life that can be individually negotiated [30, p. 8]. The group dimension (horizontal axis) denotes the relevance of group affiliation in a social system, the level of commitment and compliance expected from members and the extent of sanctions for deviating behavior as well as kind and likeliness of entry / exit opportunities or barriers. Together, grid and group constitute the four cultural types.

The *hierarchical culture* (quadrant top right) is characterized by tradition and order, while an *individualistic culture* (quadrant bottom left) is organized based on competition and merit. These two thus correspond in virtually every respect to Weber's distinction between bureaucracy and market [22, p. 411]. An *enclave/egalitarian* system (quadrant bottom right) is a rather closed – sometimes even sectarian – community with far-reaching mechanisms to maintain equality while rejecting any form of hierarchy and authority. Therefore, these high-group communities are characterized by complex and strongly differentiated, yet not hierarchical, structures. Instead, relations are based on bonding insiders together against outsiders [39]. However, purely voluntary association is highly valued which makes enclave environments low grid [34] and vulnerable to uncontrolled exit of members [39]. In an *isolate culture* (quadrant top left) with little individual distinction and weak social integration, people live secluded lives with few or no alliances, while the prescriptions imposed on them are severe [34]. Therefore, individual autonomy is low, and competition is largely limited.

**Figure 1: The four cultural types of the grid-group typology**



*Note: The four cultural types of the grid-group typology with examples for the forms of social organization (in box per quadrant) and associated thought styles (underneath the box in each quadrant) (adapted from [30, p. 9], [40, p. 728], [41, p. 56])*

The short description of the cultural types (further elaborated in the findings section) already indicates that these forms of organization go hand in hand with a distinct set of knowledge, beliefs and values (see examples in Figure 1), referred to as *thought styles* [21]. That is, each cultural type is associated “with attitudes and values that justify the [form of social] organisation” [22, p. 411]. By the same token, however, each thought style shapes the perceptions, beliefs and values of the people in that environment [21].

One central theoretical argument for the study is exactly this claim of CT: Thought styles are derived from the particular institutional form of social organisation and disorganisation (i.e., from cultural types), which "shape and thus causally explain 'thinking styles' [thought styles in this study's terminology], i.e. the way people classify, remember and feel" [36, p. 10]. Hence, thought styles shape how citizens classify events (crisis, measures, effects), "how rigidly [they] treat their classifications, how flexibly they accommodate fallback options, how far they are prepared to contemplate compromise, how they conceive of the past and future, how they deal



with things that appear anomalous within their implicit schemes for classifying problems and opportunities, and what emotions they attach to their beliefs" [36, p. 10].

Furthermore, and this is the second important theoretical claim for the study, cultural types with their distinctive forms of organization and associated thought styles "tend to recur in social life in dynamic relations with one another" [27, p. 996]. Therefore, they are present "in differing proportions and patterns of interaction" in every social system [32, p. 1f]. However, they do not coexist in harmony but are in constant tension and competition with each other, vying to determine "which opposed set of normative values and its attendant social forms shall win" [22, p. 413]. This further means that while there will be one dominant cultural type in each system, this position must be perpetually defended against the constant attacks of the others [22, p. 413].

Summing up, the grid-group typology provides a framework that reorganizes "the potentially infinite diversity of ways of thinking and doing into a few specific cultural types" [42, p. 395]. Each of the four cultural types is characterized by a distinctive form of organization and an associated thought style that shapes peoples' perceptions, beliefs and values. As each cultural type is invariably associated with a specific thought style, it also explains "at a general level just which kinds of cognition and rituals could be expected to be cultivated in exactly which kinds of social organizations" [36, p. 51].

This study applies the grid-group typology to examine the perceived disadvantages of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated measures among citizens. Through this examination, insights can be gained into how different thought styles among citizens indicate preferences for varying and sometimes conflicting forms of organization during public crises. These insights will inform authorities on how to design, implement, and execute interventions, as well as accompanying communication strategies, in a manner sensitive to the diverse contexts, needs, and values of different citizen groups, thereby enhancing their effectiveness. Following a brief description of the methodology in the next section, the discussion will further explore the four cultural types along with the findings, incorporating exemplary original citations.

## **Methodology**

### ***Setting, data and sample***

Nations as social systems are generally characterized by a dominant culture type. However, CT emphasizes that all four cultural types are nevertheless always present in every system. From this perspective, traces of all four related thought styles should be found, albeit to varying degrees. The study focuses on Austria, which is considered a prime example of a society and corresponding governance system characterized by the hierarchical culture ([43, p. 128]; for details, see also [44], [45], [46]). Austria, with its dominant hierarchical culture, is therefore an ideal example for investigating whether all four cultural types are indeed present in a national system.

The start of the COVID-19 pandemic is a prime example of a large-scale crisis situation which posed "an acute threat to basic structures and fundamental values" [9, p. 1]. Challenged in unprecedented ways ([47], [48], [49]), the way public administrations implemented prevention measures varied strongly ([50], [51]). Austria was an early, pro-active mover regarding the implementation of fast, strict, and pro-active prevention measures when COVID-19 hit first in spring 2020. In the months of March and April 2020, the Austrian population was confronted with an exceptional situation, unique after WWII, as the government took draconic measures to contain the COVID-19 virus (for details, see Appendix). These policies massively intervened



in people's day-to-day lives and had profound psychological and emotional repercussions. The imposition of such strong governmental intervention marked an unprecedented occurrence for most Austrians, as well as for the majority of European nations. Consequently, there was no precedent to gauge how citizens would perceive this sudden breach of 'normal' life. Nevertheless, it is to be expected that the upheavals in personal rituals and routines caused by these measures will diverge from the rituals one has in mind when thinking about society as a whole. Thus, the study seeks to (a) identify what effects citizens perceive when exposed to rigid constraining measures and (b) trace different conceptions of these effects. It hence investigates the perception of personal and societal disadvantages from the perspective of Austrian citizens during the lockdown period in April 2020.

Data were collected from 17 to 29 April 2020, i.e., weeks 6 and 7 of the most stringent government measures taken in response to the COVID-19 crisis. A random selection of 482 respondents were asked one of two open questions: (Q1) What are the greatest personal disadvantages for you due to the current corona crisis? (Q2) In your opinion, what are the biggest societal disadvantages due to the current corona crisis? By randomizing the questions throughout a larger survey (see Appendix), a systematic bias from previous questions can be ruled out. The sample consists of 46% women and 54% men, broken down by age as follows: 9% are 18-24 years old, 25% are 25-39 years old, 31% are 40-54 years old, 23% are 55-64 years old, and 12% are 65 years and older. About a quarter of the answers consists of less than 10 words (Q1=74%; Q2=78%), with a mean of 9 words and a median of 5 words.

The two questions serve to illuminate the distinct realms: One deals with the personal level of individual experiences and concerns, while the other points to fears and risks that respondents believe threaten society. Furthermore, the open questions allowed respondents freedom in choosing topics and the depth of their responses. While limited to simple frequency measures of topic occurrence, this approach provided valuable insights into the respondents' relevance structures and likely thought styles. Despite its limitations, it was appropriate for this research, as it enabled to understand the nature of perceived disadvantages and select statements for further analysis (see next section). Moreover, given the novelty of the situation and resource and time constraints, the exploratory approach was the method of choice.

#### ***Analysis approach. On coding and interpretation***

From a CT perspective, the reported statements are not only individual impressions, but also manifestations of the thought styles associated with the four cultural types. Reconstruction of the underlying thought styles seeks to (a) verify that all four thought styles are indeed manifested in the responses, and to (b) draw conclusions for successful crisis management in relation to the different social contexts represented by the associated cultural types. This required a multi-stage procedure, which is outlined briefly (see Appendix for details on the methods and procedures of analysis).

In the course of a qualitative content analysis ([52], [53], [54]), the perceived personal and social disadvantages were first thematically analyzed and categorized. The main categories represent thematic dimensions, with responses often briefly addressing more than one topic. The analysis revealed a relatively homogeneous range of topics, with *social distancing* emerging as a particularly prominent disadvantage.



**Table 1: Descriptive statistics for perceived personal and societal disadvantages**

Personal Disadvantages 239 Respondents; multiple categories possible		Societal Disadvantages 236 Respondents; multiple categories possible	
[1] Economic-financial issues	39	[9] Economic issues	90
[2] Everyday Life (personal & professional)	57	[10] Societal Climate   Media   Politics	54
[3] Infrastructure	40	[11] Infrastructure	25
<b>[4] Social Distancing</b>	106	<b>[12] Social Distancing</b>	83
[5] Freedom (of movement)	56	[13] Freedom (of movement)	31
[6] Health Issues	30	[14] Health Issues	49
[7] Other Disadvantages	10	[15] Other Disadvantages	10
[8] No Perceived Disadvantages	26	[16] No Perceived Disadvantages	6
Topics Q1 in total	<b>n = 364</b>	Topics Q2 in total	<b>n = 348</b>

Unlike responses at the individual level (Q1), those at the societal level (Q2) often express concerns about negative societal trends, such as rising poverty, inequality, unemployment, lack of social consideration, or a deteriorating societal atmosphere. Consequently, responses to the second question also suggest notions of an ideal or desirable society. Therefore, statements on social distancing in the societal perspective (Q2) were chosen for the next stage: an in-depth examination of how respondents articulated this topic and the insights it offers into underlying thought styles.

Since objective hermeneutics aims at reconstructing latent patterns of interpretation (Deutungsmuster; [55], [56]), its elaborate procedures are well suited to reconstructing the latent thought styles of the present study. Thus, selected statements were analyzed in depth with an adapted fine-grained analysis as used in objective hermeneutics [57]. As with all hermeneutic approaches, the methodological logic is not to redundantly code all data ([58], [59], [60]), but to work with a few selected data.

Applying this approach, thought styles can be understood as latent patterns of interpretation. These patterns represent "collectively shared ways of thinking, stable understandings and considerations of a social group" [61, p. 549] in the sense of "interpretive necessities" that are anchored in central problems of lifeworld practice rather than "interpretive possibilities" related to individual situations [62, p. 54]. These "collective reservoirs of knowledge and meaning" serve to organize and structure the actors' "daily perception, interpretation and action processes" [60, p. 88]. Through the chosen formulations, respondents classify and categorize the perceived disadvantages and thus give an indication of the thought style that has shaped these perceptions. The exact wording of the answers as well as any justifications are therefore of crucial importance, as they relate directly to the rituals and routines affected by the measures and thus allow conclusions to be drawn about the underlying cultural type and associated thought style.

## Findings

The data provide valuable insights into the burdens, concerns, and fears of citizens during this highly critical time characterized by the full enforcement of prevention measures. The reporting of the findings follows the advice of other scholars ([63], [64]) and integrates authentic voices from the data into the presentation and discussion. Each of the four cultural types is introduced with a theory-based discussion of the organizational form and associated thought style with regard to times of crisis. Based on the governing logic of the respective cultural type, the phenomenon of *isolation* as a corollary of government measures is discussed, elucidating how





citizens could be expected to perceive and evaluate isolation in such an environment. This elucidation is illustrated through the interpretation of a specific quotation, rendering the reconstruction of thought styles transparent while showcasing the potential of the applied approach. Additionally, a detailed argumentation for the analysis of the exemplary quotations is provided in the Appendix. Please note that the analysis was conducted in German, and thus, certain nuances may be lost in translation due to differing meanings of words between the two languages.

***The hierarchical culture: You are entitled to be helped and protected.***

In a hierarchical culture, governance systems are legitimate when unconditionally committed to the rule of law as represented in Weberian bureaucracy. Guided by rules and procedures to maintain order and structure at all times, social systems organized according to this cultural type provide clarity, reliability and predictability as well as elaborated instruments for conflict resolution [65, p. 205]. As long as they are commonly understood, guiding rules can be written or unwritten [27, p. 997]. Furthermore, "firm, long-lasting, and trustworthy institutions" ([66, p. 332]; see also [29]) are the base for the discretionary power of responsible authorities [35, p. 496]. While asymmetric status based on institutionalized authority (specialization, division of labor) is seen as a necessity for social harmony and effectiveness [34, p. 6], evidence-based decisions are the backbone of action in this culture. Hence, decisions have not only to be legal but must also be based on the impartial authority of experts ([29, p. 820], [67, p. 24]). In addition, decision-makers must abide by "the norms and interests of the collective", as any inappropriate (e.g., self-interested) behavior "would constitute an abuse of power and a violation of the hierarchical culture" [68, p. 256]. Obviously, "misplaced trust in authority and expertise" is the weak spot of the hierarchical setting [30, p. 28].

With regard to the related thought style, citizens in a hierarchical culture agree in general with the "up-down bonding of individuals" within social groups [39, p. 176]. Furthermore, compliance and cooperation are considered a duty to society in times of crisis. Therefore, the necessary cooperation for crisis management is easier to achieve than in other cultures. Draconic measures gain wide acceptance as long as the rule of law is obeyed, and decisions are based on expertise and objective knowledge. For the greater good, fellow citizens are not only expected to behave according to the rules but subject to social control regarding compliance. In return, government is expected to equally protect the status and interests of its citizens to the best of knowledge and certain. Therefore, government will aim to communicate the scientific foundations of decisions and measures as well as refer to the big picture of developments to assure their citizens that their place in society is secure and safe.

***Response to isolation in the spirit of a hierarchical thought style***

Isolation is a kind of antithesis to the hierarchical setting. People are embedded in tight social webs where they know their place and the rights and duties that go with it. At the same time, they share a thought style that appreciates the governing hand from the authorities as well as the value of expertise. Hence, no fundamental criticism of the social-distancing-rule would be expected, rather a demand for evidence-based measures as well as expert advice on the appropriateness of measures. Since the authorities are required to take care of negative effects such as isolation, obedience is in consequence expected from fellow citizens. In the hierarchical culture, therefore, stating isolation as a disadvantage would probably be supplemented by further comments that either justify the disadvantage or refer to the negative emotions associated with this otherwise accepted measure.

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*Exemplary Quotation Respondent 37: „Loss of social contacts, isolation of elderly people, social decline through unemployment" (Q2/R37).*

This statement implies an appreciation of community, a life in (familiar) social groups (inclusion and belonging), especially for elderly people, as well as a wish that social position should be maintained, which seems in this environment only possible through employment. Conversely, this also expresses fear of losing the elements described. How does this respondent think about isolation in terms of cultural types and thought styles? There are traces of the hierarchic thought style represented in the statement as well as, due to the focus on vulnerable groups, an egalitarian (in any case: strong on integration). Individualistic principles show up in the form of fears and worries only. No signs of a fatalist one. Rather, the thought style of a hierarchical environment that sees itself (temporarily) threatened by the measures is to be assumed (see also Appendix).

***The individualistic culture: Help yourself OR no one will help you.***

Individualistic cultures are based on the deep conviction that market mechanisms are superior to other allocation principles. To maintain legitimacy, governance systems must therefore provide a regulatory framework that ensures fair play (equal access and equal competitive opportunities) and the enforcement of obligations under contracts [42, p. 393], albeit with as little external interference as possible [34, p. 6]. Only proven success gains and sustains authority and discretionary power. By relying on self-regulation as a guiding principle [34, p. 6], however, collective response capacity is weak and undesirable societal developments are hard to correct in this culture [69, p. 531].

Citizens in this competitive environment are "inherently self-seeking and atomistic" individuals [29, p. 820] that insist on a high level of individual discretion (e.g., regarding commitment, cooperation, alliances) to pursue their interests. Individuals are self-responsible regarding fate and wellbeing. Fair play provided, inequality caused by competition based on "quid-pro-quo [sic] exchanges of individuals" [39, p. 176] is consequently considered natural and just. In general, nature, society and individuals are believed to be resilient and adaptable.

Cooperation in this culture is subject to completely different framework conditions than in the hierarchical culture: Good citizens have to be rewarded. Compliance and cooperation are considered an investment that demands an appropriate return to be regarded fair and just. The government will have to emphasis on the (personal) gain citizens receive in turn for behavior compliant with restraining rules and regulations. Furthermore, it will be held accountable for any distortions of competition, because even – or maybe in particular – in a crisis it is considered right and "fair that those who put the most in get the most out" [29, p. 820]. Hence, people are to make an effort in order to successfully cope with the situation and will have to bear the consequences of their individual decisions. Any violation of this principle by the government will be noted and punished at the polling-booths in the long run.

***Response to isolation in the spirit of an individualistic thought style***

Built on quid-pro-quo-principled orderings of social life, individualism is permeated by a strong belief in the individual and his or her freedom and personal liberty. An individualistic thought style would mention isolation as a simple fact that restricts and hinders action. In this thought style, individuals aim to take on the challenge and make their own decisions. Convinced that they are perfectly well capable of protecting themselves, they would demand the necessary means to do so (e.g., technical information on the virus, availability of masks or disinfectant)



but reject regulations and prohibitions. Hence, one would expect a notion of annoyance faced with ordered isolation in this culture. The fittest shall prosper and be rewarded.

*Exemplary Quotation Respondent 1133: „Isolation, being on your own“  
(Q2/R1133)*

The person considers isolation as a disadvantage on a social level and ads: "being on your own". While being on your own could indicate an individualistic thought style, this is not the case in the context of this response. There is no indication of resourceful individuals who start, for example, building alliances based on quid-pro-quo to handle the situation. On the contrary, the statement problematizes the individuals' falling out of groups and structures. At the same time, it is implied that people should be integrated into a social system in which they are helped or in which they help each other. Thus, belonging and the existence of a support system are desired, while the loss of the group in social terms and the loss of support / support systems are feared.

Like in many other responses, the individualistic culture is not an appreciated but rather feared one in R1133. In fact, there are no positive traces of an individualistic thought style in the data that would point to the self-responsibility of people, demand adaptability and entrepreneurial spirit from them and call on the government obligation to ensure a fair playing field during and after the crises. Even when business issues are addressed (e.g., emphasizing the existential threat to small and medium-sized enterprises or the gastronomy industry), individualistic values such as entrepreneurial spirit are not mentioned. Only one statement points to fraudulent behavior of companies regarding subsidies granted as a crisis measure, thereby indirectly referring to issues of fairness. In a nutshell, 'every man is the architect of his own fortune' is not a principle Austrians seem to embrace, particularly not in times of crisis. What is found in the data, however, are negatively connoted traces of the individualistic spirit in the form of fears and worries (as, e.g., statement R1133 shows).

***The enclave/egalitarian culture: Help the underprivileged because no one else will.***

In the egalitarian culture, governance has to ensure not only equality of opportunities (like in an individualistic setting) but additionally equality of results ([29, p. 820], [70, p. 400]). However, discretionary power has to lie with the community: "we decide" [35, p. 470] is the ground rule that opposes any form of superior authority. In the quest for the highest possible equality of condition ([34, p. 7], [39, p. 176], [70, p. 400]), perpetual renegotiation and permanent participation [65, p. 204] are necessary to legitimize decisions. However, the absence of authority makes the system vulnerable to feuding, deadlocks or opportunistic free-riding ([30, p. 28], [69, p. 531], [70, p. 400]).

As this culture rejects mechanisms of coercion or authority, unity is achieved by opposing the outside world which Douglas describes as "the source of scorn routinely poured on the bureaucratic concerns of the [hierarchical] type and on the materialist goals of the [individualistic] type" [71, p. 130]. Furthermore, citizens in this cultural type constantly aim to guard their society and its systems from unfair competition, inequitable hierarchy or detached fatalists. Hence, groups at the edge of society are considered victims of the system who need support and protection. Fellow citizens are expected to refrain from formal authority but respect community decisions, put common interests before their own, support those in need, protect nature, and execute peer pressure in case of deviating behavior.

Cooperation and in particular compliance in the egalitarian culture is difficult due to a genuine lack of confidence in institutionalized authorities. Citizens will call for transparent and open discussions on alternative decisions. Beyond the goal to master the crisis, however, measures



in this culture will be evaluated regarding their contribution to more equality. Furthermore, common interests like climate issues will be firmly brought to the debates to push for correction of the malfunctioning systems. While the government might count on occasional support from its citizens when measures serve these demands, it has to be prepared for constant criticism in general. In case of catastrophic events or a severe crisis, however, a charismatic leader with a strong sense of (the) mission might find broad support.

#### *Response to isolation in the spirit of an enclave/egalitarian thought style*

Enclave / egalitarian cultures usually occupy societal niches characterized by outstanding and fiercely demanded principles that all revolve around notions of rejection of other cultural types and thought styles. Enclave settings could be very diverse, from conspiracy theorists to highly committed volunteers with strong ideological orientation. For example, the citizens organized in enclaved social systems might share a commitment to protect vulnerable and underprivileged citizens against authorities and/or ruthlessly competing individualists. In this thought style, isolation could, e.g., be seen as a result of incompetent bureaucrats (red tape) and interest-driven experts, hurting the weak instead of protecting them through the implemented measures. Hence, they demand measures to help the weak and alleviate their suffering (from isolation).

*Exemplary Quotation Respondent 1816: "Isolation for families where the interpersonal relations are not working" (Q2/R1816).*

The person focuses only on one social disadvantage, the observed isolation (separation, atomization), and relates it to a very specific group: dysfunctional families (where the interpersonal is not working). Implicitly, concern for this type of family is expressed (without, however, explicitly naming or addressing the negative consequences). It also signals that a community should be organized so that members of dysfunctional families are not at each other's mercy, but have agency, options, and help when they need it. Focusing exclusively on the group of dysfunctional families suggests that this is a deviation from the normal, i.e. that such families usually have ways to cope, get help or otherwise improve their situation. However, being the only stated disadvantage that draws attention exclusively to the group at risk, this could more likely be read as a call to stand up for this group (implicitly: since the ruling system is obviously not taking appropriate action) (see also Appendix).

#### ***The fatalist culture: No one ever helps.***

Governance in a fatalist culture is considered as one of many things imposed on people who have to live by the rules others make and only share the experience that "others decide" [35, p. 470]. Fatalist societies tend to develop despotic characteristics like unpredictable and arbitrary measures, severe prescriptions, little individual discretion, a common attitude of "whateverism" [29, p. 820] on individual as well as institutional level and a ubiquitous feeling of powerlessness. In this environment, surviving equals coping, resulting in opportunism and indifference which in combination with mistrust might lead to "inertia and passivity in the face of major threats or opportunities" ([69, p. 531], see also [30, p. 28ff]). When stagnation and resignation have spread, coping and surviving are the strategies all actors pursue in isolation.

Citizens in a fatalistic environment are "atomized individuals" [35, p. 470] who live according to the conviction that life is unfair and the own existence insignificant. Fellow citizens, as all men, are seen as "fickle and untrustworthy" [29, p. 820], doing whatever it takes to survive. Achieving cooperation is a particularly tough task in an environment where collective action is highly unlikely. A crisis might be seen as another stroke of fate, with even more restrictions to



bear for the citizens who might behave to the rule at best, as they do not believe in any impact of their actions. From individuals and authorities, they expect the same opportunistic behavior as ever.

### *Response to isolation in the spirit of an isolate/fatalistic thought style*

The main characteristic of an isolate/fatalist environment is its atomized individuals that are bound to rules others impress on them. These individuals are not only isolated, but they also expect to be isolated - what else? You are on your own, and you have to survive on your own.

*Exemplary Quotation Respondent 585: "People are dependent on social contacts. If they are confined to their homes for too long, they become disoriented and tend to use alcohol and drugs uncontrollably. Aggressive behavior is generally to be expected" (Q2/R585).*

The respondent expresses a fear of a change towards the down-scoring/devaluation of the group dimension, but less in terms of people being more dependent on themselves or possibly becoming losers. Rather, it is feared that they will turn against each other, turn on each other, no longer care about anything or anyone, and in their desperation also take refuge in addictive substances. This citizen fears the advent of a fatalistic world, with atomized individuals who no longer believe in anything and only want to survive somehow. However, apart from this negative image of humanity (*Menschenbild*), the expressed importance of social contacts and their socializing effects also indicate that the wider social environment might be characterized by a hierarchical culture that holds everything together (see also Appendix).

## **Discussion**

Cultural theory (CT) posits that all four cultural types and associated thought styles coexist simultaneously, perpetuating a constant tension within societies [22]. This study aligns with this notion, affirming the concurrent presence of the four cultures. Moreover, the findings indicate that the three thought styles distinct from the dominant hierarchical culture (i.e., individualistic, egalitarian, fatalist) manifest themselves primarily in indirect and negative forms, often associated with what is feared or deemed undesirable. This observation may appear counterintuitive, especially considering the prevalence of individualistic culture alongside the hierarchical culture in many democratic societies. One plausible explanation for this phenomenon is the "rally-around-the-flag" effect, wherein political actors, media, and the general public collectively suppress skepticism and criticism in favor of unified support for governmental actions [7, p. 79].

This effect was notably evident in Austria, where all political factions explicitly rallied together in a "national closing of ranks" during the initial stages of the pandemic. Similar effects have been observed in various studies related to COVID-19 ([72], [73], [74]), including assessments of government performance during the pandemic's onset in Austria. Notably, citizens' positive evaluations of governmental actions peaked at the end of March 2020 before gradually declining, alongside a sustained perception of solidarity among the populace ([75, p. 15], [76]). In addition, citizens from across the left-right spectrum had similar attitudes towards anti-COVID measures in the early stages of the pandemic. Later, however, a dynamic of polarization along political orientation emerged [77, p. 3], confirming other studies on the polarization of positions on COVID-19 policies between groups belonging to different parties [18]. These observations indicate a transitional phase where the initial unity sparked by a novel threat like



COVID-19 fades relatively quickly, allowing underlying belief patterns to resurface or intensify. However, survey-data on COVID-19 underlines the importance for policy “to understand collective behaviour, shared values and effects on marginalized populations to be effective at minimizing harms during a pandemic” ([78, p. 135]; see also the studies this synthesis of evidence is based on). Such findings resonate with a Cultural Theory (CT) perspective, affirming the significance of all four cultural types in times of crisis.

The findings also resonate with the exploration into how citizens experience crisis interventions and their adverse effects during the lockdown period. Although reflective of the multilayered nature of the crisis posed by the pandemic (e.g. a health, a social/humanitarian and an economic crisis [79, p. 357]), the descriptive thematic analysis reveal that the array of concerns expressed by citizens in this exceptional scenario is relatively limited and homogeneous. This suggests at least a temporary commonality in the challenges faced. However, by naming the biggest personal and social disadvantages they perceive, respondents implicitly reveal what they value and what they fear losing, comparable to a photographic negative. Focusing on these latent layers, the investigation delves beyond the identification of perceived disadvantages to examine the framing of these perceptions, aiming to reconstruct the underlying thought styles as proposed by Cultural Theory (CT).

The second main finding of the study indicates a prevailing appreciation for the hierarchical culture in Austria. While traces of the other three thought styles are found in the data, they predominantly appear as undesirable, feared or hopefully only temporary developments that should not become the “new normal”. This observation confirms the dominant hierarchical culture in Austria [43, p. 128], with citizens endorsing a strong state that assumes responsibility not only for governance but also for citizen welfare during crises (“directing state” [80, p. 86]). These results are in line with the findings of van der Voet [79], who examined the effect of negative economic prospects resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic on politicians’ policy preferences in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Spain. He identified a trade-off between the directive state, in which the government intervenes heavily in economic activity, and the coping state, which reduces spending by cutting public services. Despite a tendency towards a coping state in the face of negative economic outlooks, on average a directive state approach appeared to be the preferred policy response on average across the four countries [79, p. 369]. Given the similarities between the directive approach and the principles of the hierarchical culture, the results suggest that (Austrian) citizens with their strong anchoring in this cultural type and associated thought style are likely to fit seamlessly into this picture. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with the crisis interventions reported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), including compensation for wages or loss of revenue, higher unemployment benefits or deferral of tax payments ([79, p. 369], [81]). Similar measures were prominently communicated in the Austrian media during the survey period, accompanied by robust political messaging, exemplified by Chancellor Kurz’s statement on April 3, 2021: “Our approach is clear: ‘Whatever the cost.’” [82]. Notably, although the study focused on discerning disadvantages, it is significant to highlight that neither the implemented measures nor the associated political messages were addressed by respondents.

### ***Practical implications***

This has very practical reasons and implications. Governments need to reach out to all their citizens in times of crisis and rally them around a strategy for action. However, the *rally-under-the-flag effect* only works in the short term and is not suitable for coping well with longer periods of crisis. Communication and measures must therefore be varied and adapted to the



mind sets of the various social groups ([17], [83]). At the same time, the complexity of the social world must be reduced in order to remain capable of action. This is what the CT approach does: It offers a parsimonious model for analyzing and developing citizen-centered solutions that sufficiently account for the social differentiation of society without getting lost in the complexity of real life. Hence, for practitioners, the theory-based grid-group-model can serve as a heuristic for designing more citizen-focused crisis responses.

This can be illustrated by the issue of vaccination hesitancy, a particularly polarizing measure during the COVID-19 pandemic [84]. As the findings discussed above indicate, vaccination refusers might be a heterogeneous group of people with different thought styles. How can communication be adapted to these thought styles? What language, what argumentation is suitable when there are objectors from all four cultures? But it goes beyond mere communication campaigns. CT also allows conclusions to be drawn about the organizing principles of the respective cultures. Measures can be based on these. Who can be reached with rules and regulations or through institutionalized forms of cooperation (clubs, associations); which offers resonate with people in individualistic contexts; how can the mobilization potential of egalitarian groups be harnessed; and where and how can people in isolated / fatalistic environments be found and involved? These are highly relevant questions, as crisis management can only succeed through successful adaptation at various levels (cultural types *and* thought styles), while keeping a critical eye on possible lasting damage to the system's fundamental democratic values. CT can make a valuable contribution to achieving resilience in this sense.

Summing up, governments can utilize the heuristic in three complementary ways: First, the -organization of social groups can be analyzed using the grid group dimensions of regulation and integration to determine the respective cultural type. Knowledge of the cultural type in turn allows conclusions to be drawn about the thought style shared by the members of these groups. Second, by surveying and analyzing citizens' perceptions, evaluations, and judgments, governments can infer the thought styles and associated values and beliefs of the social groups, as demonstrated by this study. The latter approach would benefit greatly from the development of scientifically validated item batteries, which underlines the need for further application-oriented research.

Third, the heuristic can be employed to assess government interventions concerning their anticipated reception by the populace. Analogous to the analysis of the example quotations in the Appendix, measures can be scrutinized for their resonance within each of the four cultural types. Should an intervention align well with the hierarchical culture, it is reasonable to anticipate criticism from individuals adhering to a different thought style. However, in the development of interventions and communication strategies, particularly within crisis contexts, broad citizen engagement is paramount. A systematic evaluation of interventions against the backdrop of the governing principles of all cultural types and their associated thought styles facilitates the anticipation of skepticism or potential resistance. Leveraging scenario techniques enables the refinement of proposed interventions, including the exploration of alternative iterations. In cases where adaptability is limited (e.g., due to legal requirements), the development of culturally sensitive approaches to implementation and communication becomes essential.



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## **Limitations and further research**

This study confirms the presence of all four cultural types as described by CT. Future research should focus on the forms of social organization associated with these cultural types to gain deeper insights into how they manifest within society. Specifically, analyzing the current manifestations of the four basic forms of social organization, including their associated thought styles, would be crucial for a comprehensive understanding. Moreover, conducting quantitative research, possibly experimental, to compare how citizens from social contexts characterized by different cultural types frame the issues identified in this study could offer valuable insights into governance implications during crises. Additionally, the findings emphasize the importance of rituals in organizing social interaction and highlight the strong impact of their sudden prohibition. While this study could not explore this avenue, delving into existing research on risk, risk perception, and uncertainty ([36], [85]) could offer promising directions for understanding how disruptive events effect the way of organizing social life and how this interacts with governance efforts.

However, it is important to note that this study has certain limitations due to its exploratory nature. While the traces of thought styles in the responses were carefully reconstructed, no numbers are reported to avoid the impression that these traces were quantitatively measured (see method section). Quantifying and testing these traces would require a different research design with a meticulously developed set of items. While this study could inspire such development, it was not designed for quantification or testing purposes.

## **Conclusion**

The present study traces different conceptions of perceived disadvantages, which according to CT can be attributed to different cultural types and their associated thought styles. Furthermore, it offers a strategy for addressing the diversity of perceptions and underlying conceptions present within a society. Particularly during major crisis such as pandemics, governments are compelled to engage with segments of the population they normally do not (have to) reach. Even more, they need to get them to cooperate. To achieve this, different forms of communication should be developed to accommodate different thought styles in order to encourage citizens from all social contexts and related cultures to cooperate and comply.

Moreover, tailored forms of organization for measures and processes may be necessary, aligning with the characteristics of different cultural types and their corresponding thought styles. A Cultural Theory framework, especially the grid-group typology, can serve as a powerful theory-based heuristic for governments and authorities to effectively adapt communication and intervention strategies to these demands.

Future research endeavors could delve deeper into empirically exploring the interplay between organizational forms and thought styles to gain a nuanced understanding of the diverse manifestations of the four cultural types within a population. Such insights would not only enrich theoretical understanding but also inform the development of practical tools for crisis management purposes.

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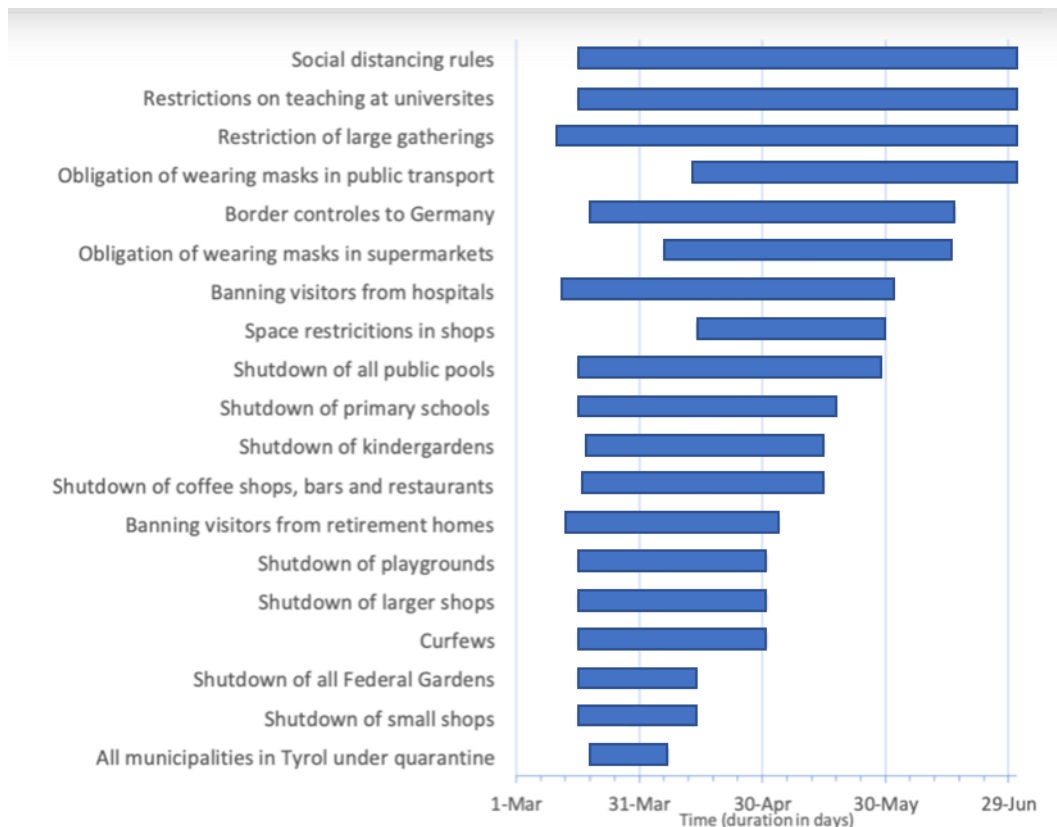
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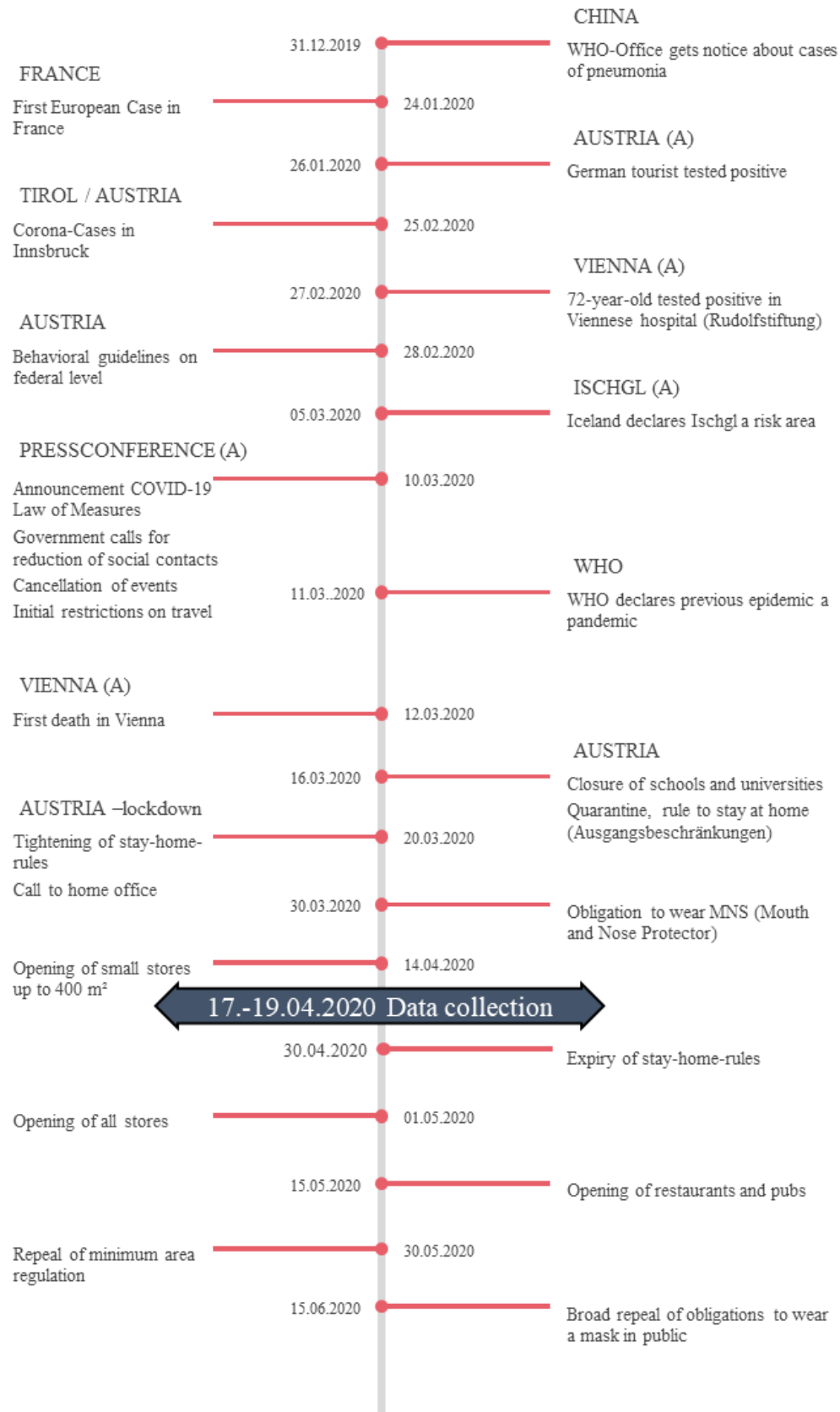
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## Appendix

**Figure 2: Measures being in force in the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in Austria 03-06 2020 [86]**



**Figure 3: Timeline Austria of COVID-19 related events until June 2020 ([87], [88], [89])**





**Table 2: Data and Interpretation Respondents 37, 1133, 1816,585**

	<b>Hierarchical culture</b>	<b>Individualistic culture</b>	<b>Enclave / egalitarian culture</b>	<b>Isolate / fatalist culture</b>
<b>R37</b>	In a hierarchical order, one is kept and integrated, everyone has his/her place. Social contacts are important, are maintained and are to be maintained. The contacts are long-term and "safe" and cannot easily be lost. Older people also have their place and a right to be cared for. If unemployment strikes through no fault of one's own (i.e. a citizen fulfils his duty and still becomes unemployed), then that person is also to be helped. All these principles are challenged in the stated disadvantages as it sounds more like (the fear of) an environment where only the fittest survive.	In an individualistic environment, everyone is the architect of his/her own fortune and thus always primarily on his/her own. Although the statement points to individualism (society produces losers and marginalized groups), it is framed as disadvantage. By losing your job, you lose your status too. No capacity for action is expressed here, in the sense that everyone should have the opportunity to master the crisis through their own actions. For an individualistic thought style, unemployment would be an incentive to come up with something and pick oneself up, dust oneself off and start again (so to speak). No sign of those values in the respondent's answer.	While showing strong integration features, enclave/egalitarianism is always defined by a demarcation against others and at the same time as a protective power for the losers of the other system logics. Here, it is not only the loss of social contacts that is feared, but also a reference to a vulnerable group - the elderly - who are becoming isolated. Furthermore, the unemployed are stigmatized by society through loss of status (respect), which creates another (growing) group of vulnerable citizens. This is framed as a disadvantage (and fear).	In an isolated/fatalistic social order, isolation would be normal here and social declines would not be a danger, since it has already occurred anyway. No indication of this thought style in the statement.
<b>R1133</b>	Strong believe that every individual has its place in society and that those with more power will protect the weak or nobody cares by way of rules and regulations. You have the right to be helped! The big worry in the respondent's statement is that the group dimension goes down. Isolation is complemented by "being on one's own" which indicates that this is the major threat to have to rely on oneself - instead of relying on others / the system.	In an individualistic culture, people take on the challenge and show that they are fit for survival. In other words, they mainly rely on themselves and in this sense appreciate to be on one's own. It is part of their identity to be independent and to cope with problems on their own. However, the remark "being on one's own" following the term isolation indicates the opposite. This person does not appreciate being on one's own; no indication of an individualistic thought style (but possibly fear of such an environment).	Enclave or egalitarian communities are based on convictions and joint action against the establishment - manifest in inefficient and interest-driven systems of other cultures - which in this thought style usually is to blame. Their constant fight for equality of results, i.e. same outcome for all people, has inevitably a focus on disadvantages groups. Here, one would therefore expect the mentoring of vulnerable groups or the demand for measures to prevent negative consequences of isolation. No sign of that attitude here, no indication of an egalitarian thought style.	In an isolate / fatalist environment, people would expect to be left on one's own, struggling to survive. Isolation would be the normal, not the new or special. So why mention it? - No indication of a fatalist thought style (but possibly fear of a development in such a direction).
<b>R1816</b>	In the hierarchical culture one is kept and integrated, everyone has his/her place. Social contacts are important, are maintained and are to be maintained. In this thought style, authorities and institutions would be responsible for the problem. However, only the group of risk is mentioned which means that the respondent worries about a group of people in need for help. Presumably, this only makes sense if there is a perception that this help is (currently) not being provided by the authorities, or that there is no trust in the authorities to adequately address the problem.	In an individualistic environment, everyone is the architect of his own fortune and therefore always primarily on his own. Autonomy has a high priority, as does individual responsibility and the demand that people look after their own well-being. There is no reference to individual agency or the demand for it in this statement.	Egalitarian cultures highly value equality of results, i.e. same outcome for all people. Those communities/groups define themselves in demarcation from other cultures and, moreover, see themselves as a protective force for the losers that the other cultures inevitably produce. Here, reference is made to a vulnerable group - dysfunctional families - and a caring attitude is expressed. Since this is the only stated disadvantage and attention is drawn exclusively to the group at risk, this could be read as a call to stand up for this group (implicitly: since the ruling system is obviously not taking appropriate action).	In fatalistic cultures, limited room for maneuver, isolation, and the fact that dysfunctional families are left to their own devices are part of lived normality - and are therefore neither particularly noteworthy nor exceptional. The emphasis on at-risk families and the implicitly implicit in this statement does not indicate a fatalistic thought style.
<b>R585</b>	In a hierarchy, every individual has its place in society and that those with more power will protect the weak or nobody cares. Furthermore, there are clear rules of how to behave, and deviation of the rules is sanctioned. The answer indicates that this person believes that humans need to be embedded in a stabilizing (and hence stable) social environment in order not to lose orientation. However, the underlying view of humanity seems to be fatalistic.	The individualistic culture assumes resilience of people and (social, economic, ecological) systems. An individualistic thought style would express no fear of temporary problems due to its believe in successful citizens. In this culture, individuals take on the challenge and show that they are fit for survival. No sign of that thought style here.	An egalitarian community is based on convictions and joint action against the establishment. An egalistic culture blames other approaches (hierarchical, individualistic) to fail and create harm vulnerable groups. Hence, they would call to help and protect those who have lost orientation. Furthermore, they believe in unifying values and convictions that are durable and "true" - and would not be gone in isolation. No indication of "we have to help those poor people" here.	In the isolate / fatalist culture, people do not care, systems do not care - nobody cares. In this environment, pro-social behavior cannot be expected, instead, socially desired behavior has to be enforced by rules and norms. Furthermore, people in such an environment need others to show the way, to give orientation and stability. If that is lost, they will turn against each other, turn on each other, no longer care about anything or anyone and in their desperation also take refuge in addictive substances. There are strong indications of that kind of <i>Memento Mori</i> in this answer.
<b>Respondent 37</b>	Loss of social contacts, isolation of elderly people, social decline through unemployment" (Q2,R37).			
<b>Respondent 1133</b>	"isolation, being on your own" (Q2,R1133).			
<b>Respondent 1816</b>	"Isolation for families where the interpersonal relations are not working" (Q2,R1816).			
<b>Respondent 585</b>	"People are dependent on social contacts. If they are confined to their homes for too long, they become disoriented and tend to use alcohol and drugs uncontrollably. Aggressive behavior is generally to be expected" (Q2,R585).			



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## Long version: Method and procedure in detail

### Data and sample

To tackle the research questions of (a) identifying what effects citizens perceive when exposed to rigid constraining measures and (b) tracing different conceptions of these effects, this study investigates the perception of personal and social disadvantages from the perspective of Austrian citizens during the period of the lockdown (April 2020). This first lockdown represents a unique situation, as most Austrians had never before experienced such a strong governmental intervention. As the same goes for most European countries, there was no reference point to how citizens would perceive this sudden breach of ‘normal’ life. However, the rituals and routines in personal life that got shaken up by the measures can be expected to differ from the rituals one has in mind when thinking about society as a whole. The two questions therefore draw attention to two different spheres, firstly personal experiences and concerns, and secondly the fears and risks that respondents believe threaten society.

As part of a larger data collection during the strict lockdown measures ([90], [91]), a selection of 482 respondents was asked one of the following open questions (original German wording in online supplementary materials): (Q1) What are the greatest personal disadvantages for you due to the current corona crisis? (Q2) In your opinion, what are the biggest societal disadvantages due to the current corona crisis? Data were collected from 17 to 29 April 2020, i.e., weeks 6 and 7 of the most stringent government measures taken in response to the COVID-19 crisis. By randomizing the questions throughout the larger survey, a systematic bias from previous questions can be ruled out. After excluding five responses (four empty, one invalid), 475 subjects (Q1 = 239; Q2 = 236) were included in the study. The sample consists of 46% women and 54% men, broken down by age as follows: 9% are 18-24 years old, 25% are 25-39 years old, 31% are 40-54 years old, 23% are 55-64 years old, and 12% are 65 years and older. About a quarter of the answers consists of less than 10 words (Q1=74%; Q2=78%), with a mean of 9 words and a median of 5 words.

Despite the differing perspectives presented by the two questions, an exploratory approach using open-ended questions was chosen. This allowed respondents to determine the topics, number and sequence of topics, depth of their responses, and whether to provide reasoning. By permitting respondents to select and order disadvantages according to their own preferences, this study gained valuable insights into their relevance structures and hence indications of their probable thought styles. However, this approach does not allow for any measures beyond simple frequencies of subject occurrence as this would have required a carefully developed set of items to test specific hypotheses derived from theoretical claims (and presumably from public discourse at the time). Nonetheless, for the research objectives of this study, this approach was deemed appropriate. Based on the results of a content analysis of the open-question responses, insights into the nature and significance of the perceived disadvantages were gained, forming the basis for the selection of statements for the fine analysis to reconstruct the underlying thought styles (see next section). Moreover, the exploratory approach was also the method of choice given the novelty of the situation (albeit not in a historical perspective but in terms of novelty for today's Austrian population) and the situational circumstances in terms of resource and time constraints.

### Analysis approach. On coding and interpretation

To prepare the re-construction of the underlying thought styles, the first step was to thematically analyze and sort the perceived personal and societal disadvantages by means of a *qualitative*



content analysis (e.g., [52], [53], [54]). After inductively generating sixteen main categories (8 per question) from the data [53, p. 79ff], the entire material was coded accordingly (see Table 3/Figure 1). Please note that the main categories represent thematic dimensions and are not mutually exclusive; the majority of responses were in brief only and addressed more than one dimension. The results of the thematic analysis showed a relatively homogeneous landscape of topics, with *social distancing* as a particularly prominent disadvantage. In contrast to the individual level (Q1), responses at the societal level (Q2) tend to reveal fear of detrimental societal developments such as increasing poverty, rising inequality, growing unemployment, social inconsideration, or a cold societal climate. Thus, answers to the second question also implicate ideas of a "good" / desirable society. Therefore, the statements on social distancing in the social perspective (Q2) were selected for the next step: The in-depth examination of how the topic was formulated by the respondents and what conclusions could be drawn about the underlying thought styles.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics for perceived personal and societal disadvantages**

Personal Disadvantages (239 Respondents; multiple categories possible)		Societal Disadvantages (236 Respondents; multiple categories possible)	
[1] Economic-financial issues	39	[9] Economic issues	90
[2] Everyday Life (personal & professional)	57	[10] Societal Climate   Media   Politics	54
[3] Infrastructure	40	[11] Infrastructure	25
<b>[4] Social Distancing</b>	106	<b>[12] Social Distancing</b>	83
[5] Freedom (of movement)	56	[13] Freedom (of movement)	31
[6] Health Issues	30	[14] Health Issues	49
[7] Other Disadvantages	10	[15] Other Disadvantages	10
[8] No Perceived Disadvantages	26	[16] No Perceived Disadvantages	6
Topics Q1 in total	n= 364	Topics Q2 in total	n= 348

Through the formulations chosen, the respondents classify and categorize the perceived disadvantages and give a more or less clear indication of the thought style that has shaped these perceptions. The exact wording of the answers as well as any justifications are therefore of crucial importance, as they relate directly to the rituals and routines affected by the measures and thus allow conclusions to be drawn about the underlying cultural type in each case. Since the reconstruction requires a fine-grained textual analysis, selected statements were analyzed in depth with an adapted fine analysis as used in objective hermeneutics [57].

The analysis and interpretation procedures developed within the objective hermeneutics approach can be well adapted for this study due to their similar methodological foundations. Objective hermeneutics aims at reconstructing latent patterns of interpretation (Deutungsmuster; [55], [56]). These can be understood as "collectively shared ways of thinking, stable understandings and considerations of a social group" [61, p. 549] in the sense of "interpretive necessities" that are anchored in central problems of lifeworld practice rather than "interpretive possibilities" related to individual situations [62, p. 54]. These "collective reservoirs of knowledge and meaning" serve to organize and structure the actors' "daily perception, interpretation and action processes" [60, p. 88]. The elaborate procedures developed to reconstruct these latent interpretive patterns are therefore well suited to reconstructing the latent thought styles of the present study. As with all hermeneutic approaches, the



methodological logic is not to redundantly code all data ([58], [59], [60]), but to work with a few selected data.

In *fine analysis*, the unit of analysis is the smallest possible unit of meaning. Longer statements were therefore split. The units were then examined sequentially in the five steps described in Table 4 to reconstruct the underlying thought style. This was supplemented by an approximate analysis of the remaining statements that gives indications of the general tendency, applying steps 1-3 as far as considered important. In this way, it was possible to verify whether traces of all four cultures could also be found in the responses focusing on the same disadvantage from the same perspective (Q2=social disadvantage), as claimed by the theory. Since the results are exploratory in nature, they would need to be examined and tested in further research.

**Table 4: Interpretation scheme for fine analysis adapted from [57, p. 1163]**

Steps	Questions to be asked
1.Paraphrase	What is the information in the unit according to common sense? Which issue has been chosen?
2.Intention of the respondent	Taking the viewpoint of the respondent: What could s/he want to say without explicitly speaking it out? What meaning could it have for her/him? What could s/he thereby want to point out? What are her/his interests?
3.Extensive interpretation: Latent elements of the unit analysed and objective consequences for behaviour (or the system)  Explication of general structures	What are the different meanings that unfold if the unit is read with varying intonation? Linguistic characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meanings of generalizations (like: one, everybody, people, etc.)</li> <li>• Are the verbs explicit enough (regarding who, whom, what)?</li> <li>• Specific grammar used: active/passive voice, conditional clauses, etc.</li> </ul> Other linguistic specificities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of words, order of words, repetitions, etc.</li> <li>• Which people and issues are mentioned?</li> <li>• All other possible meanings of the unit.</li> </ul> What could this statement mean in different social contexts (= cultures)? What are the characteristics of a social system in which a statement like this is meaningful? Under which social conditions does a statement like this make sense?
4.Role distribution	What actors (individuals, groups, organizations, etc.) are referred to (directly or indirectly) in the statement? What are their characteristics? What are the relationships between them? What are the consequences for the structure and dynamics of the system?
5.What are the consequences for the subsequent unit of meaning?	What statements could be expected next (only applicable to longer statements)? Are there any restrictions?

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