

GERMANY

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BUSINESS

AS  
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# RESPONSES TO THE PANDEMIC

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The debate on COVID-19 in Germany has been closely associated with the power of the technology sector. Most of the German debates in regard to the power of technology are associated with data protection, whereas other important aspects such as transparency, accountability, technological dependency or competition policy are not discussed to the same degree. Notably, there is a stronger than usual tendency in Germany (and elsewhere in Europe) to promote the local development of technology so that German companies profit from any economic benefits associated with technological development. It is also frequently suggested that technology development for COVID-19 is seen as a key strategic resource that cannot be allowed to leave the country. Importantly, the technological developments that we can see in Germany are not massively different than would otherwise be expected in less exceptional circumstances. Technological development during COVID-19 seems to be business as usual in Germany.

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How is information about people who have tested positive for COVID-19 being shared?

Healthcare in Germany is organised at the level of federal states. As a result, each of the 16 states has a list of individuals who have tested positive within that state. It seems that lists of positive patients have been shared with police forces

in four states: Baden-Württemberg, Schleswig-Holstein,  
 1 Lower Saxony, and Bremen.<sup>1</sup> Beyond this, no lists of specific  
 individuals who have tested positive seem to have been  
 shared between individual states, or between states and the  
 federal government. The state police forces in Hesse have  
 2 been using Palantir's Gotham product for several years,<sup>2</sup>  
 and it seems plausible that through this system Palantir may  
 also gain access to German patients' data. There has also  
 been a broad public debate in Germany about privacy and  
 data sovereignty concerns associated with government  
 3 agencies using Palantir.<sup>3</sup>

#### How is COVID-19 contact tracing being implemented?

Originally, Germany's contact tracing implementation was  
 to be based on the Pan-European Privacy-Preserving  
 Proximity Tracing (PEPP-PT) standard. PEPP-PT is a European  
 initiative primarily driven by Hans-Christian Boos, the  
 founder and Managing Director of Arago AG, a German IT  
 4 company.<sup>4</sup> A recent conflict between the Decentralized  
 Privacy-Preserving Proximity Tracing (DP3T) standard, a  
 privacy-protective technical approach for contact tra-  
 cing, and PEPP-PT makes it unclear whether PEPP-PT  
 will indeed provide a European framework for developing  
 contact tracing. This conflict is because PEPP-PT pursues a  
 centralised server-driven approach to users' records while  
 5 DP3T is focused on a decentralised client-based approach.<sup>5</sup>  
 Privacy advocates have legitimately questioned the need  
 6 for any centralised server infrastructure at all.<sup>6</sup> This conflict  
 led to wider questions about the maturity and quality of the  
 software being developed by Arago AG in the context of  
 PEPP-PT, raising the question of whether contact tracing  
 7 would be used in Germany at all.<sup>7</sup> In no small part because of  
 this conflict, Germany abandoned PEPP-PT at the  
 end of April 2020 and instead began developing an  
 8 app on the basis of the DP3T framework.<sup>8</sup> Beyond  
 136 D3PT and PEPP-PT, the German government is also  
 considering using an app developed by Accenture  
 and the Red Cross in Austria. Finally, the German  
 Chaos Computer Club has published a list of 10 test  
 criteria, based on which contact-tracing apps  
 9 should be evaluated.<sup>9</sup>



### How is hospital resource management being implemented?

The German federal government has implemented a centralised hospital bed management system, in order to ensure that it has an overview of all hospital and ICU beds in the different federal states in Germany.<sup>10</sup> However, beyond this information no personal data about COVID-19 patients is shared between the central government and federal states. One notable exception to this is the state of Hesse. Separately from its police implementation of Palantir's Gotham software, Hesse now also intends to use Palantir's Foundry to respond to the current COVID-19 crisis.<sup>11</sup>

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### Additional new technologies used during the COVID-19 pandemic

Another notable technological implementation is the request for voluntary submissions of personalised health data by the leading German public health institute (similar to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States), the Robert Koch Institute (RKI). For this purpose, the RKI has developed an app that is publicly available and requests gender, age, weight, height, health and activity data on sleeping patterns, heartbeat, and body temperature, and postcode.<sup>12</sup> It seems that, based on this data, the RKI is planning to develop algorithms that will attempt to guess whether a user is likely to have COVID-19 or not.

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The development of technologies in Germany is going in numerous different directions, with so many actors involved that it is remarkably hard to predict how it will develop in future. Notably, there are no significant changes to existing patterns of technology and power that have developed due to COVID-19. Thus, while COVID-19 has provided a new case for the existing German technology-power matrix, it has not served to destabilise or question it. If anything, existing patterns of technological development and management in Germany have been replicated for a new challenge without significant innovation to be observed.

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## References

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