

Políticas públicas y acción colectiva. El legado de Albert O. Hirschman en tiempos de pandemia¹

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Resumen: Albert O. Hirschman nos invita a tomar riesgos y asumir el posibilismo como un camino hacia el cambio social. En este texto, abordo esa invitación de un intelectual público auto-subversivo que construye sobre las lecciones prácticas y teóricas del pasado para enfrentar las oportunidades y los retos desde el debate público. La acción colectiva no resulta de la homogeneización de creencias y expectativas sino, más bien, de la confianza en nuestra capacidad de encontrar arreglos temporales que resuelvan problemas y de la responsabilidad de cada ciudadano en el ejercicio de la voz. La pandemia revela de manera patente uno de los principales problemas de la región: la desigualdad. Depende de la acción colectiva superar el aparente dilema entre salud y economía para recuperar el espacio de los proyectos de vida.

Palabras clave: Albert O. Hirschman; voz; acción colectiva

Policy-making and Collective Action. Albert O. Hirschman's Legacy in Times of Pandemic

Abstract: *Albert O. Hirschman invites us to take risks and assume possibilism as a way to social change. In this text, I explore this invitation coming from a self-subversive public intellectual, who built his point of view from the practical and theoretical lessons of the past to contribute to the public debate needed to face challenges and opportunities. Collective action is possible when citizens exercise their voice and embrace their responsibility to find temporal arrangements to solve distributive problems without renouncing to their differences, their own beliefs and expectations. The pandemic has brought to the light a standing problem in the region: inequality. We need collective action to overcome the apparent trade-off between health and economics in order to recover our right to decide and live lives worth living.*

Keywords: *Albert O. Hirschman; voice; collective action*

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I. Introduction

Albert O. Hirschman lived for some years in Colombia (1952-56) where, according to him, he developed a point of view (Adelman, 2013). This is particularly significant as Hirschman arrived in Colombia as an expert, someone who had been hired by the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) to advise the Colombian Government in the design and implementation of its plans and policies to guide the country through the path of development. Hirschman, as an expert, was supposed to know, to have the knowledge, skills and competence to tell Colombian policy and decision makers what should be done to accomplish development goals. This is, still today, what we expect from an expert. However, as his own words show, he was far from considering himself an expert, or, maybe with hindsight, he realized that when he arrived in the country, he was far from being one. He certainly had economic knowledge and skills as he had already been a Research Fellow at Berkeley (1941-43), and a policy adviser in the Federal Reserve Board (1946-52). So it was not lack of knowledge or experience that he was recognized in his assessment of his experience in Colombia. It was something else, something more. A point of view goes beyond any particular, scientific or disciplinary knowledge; it implies considering things from a certain angle, reflecting an opinion and taking into account the thoughts and feelings of those involved. It is, at the same time, broader than any particular knowledge, and narrower because it recognizes the specific angle of observation and the subjective assessment of facts and circumstances. Developing a point of view means being able to recognize our own subjective appraisal of shared experiences in a changing world. Hirschman's point of view can enrich our own and help us recognize our need, especially now, of sharing, contrasting and informing points of view.

Hirschman is mostly remembered as a development economist, associated with unbalanced growth and linkages. His legacy did not lead to a school of thought, nor did he have many students, nor were his analyses, more discursive than axiomatic, considered particularly sophisticated in economics. This should not come as a surprise for someone who described himself as a maverick (Hirschman, 1971). He remains, nevertheless, an influential thinker, especially because of his constant work in and call for interdisciplinary research. Recent efforts have been made to enlarge this view², and recover his status as a public intellectual. In this manuscript, I would like to contribute to this reappraisal of his writings and legacy, and show its relevance in times where we need to think under uncertainty and

beyond what is familiar to us or what we know. Keen observer, obsessive note taker, avid listener, transgressor of disciplinary boundaries and expert knowledge, Hirschman was also known as Beamish because he was always considering alternatives, other ways and possibilities to think through and around obstacles as opportunities. The challenge we are now facing appears as one of those occasions when this kind of approach is particularly welcome.

II. Dissenters and contrarians

Hirschman seems today more relevant than ever. He faced the abyss of uncertainty and death many times and remained open to every possibility. Contrary to what we are living today, however, Hirschman faced what, looking backwards, could be thought of as known threats and dangers in very diverse ways. Most of these threats and dangers resulted from political and social turmoil, persecution, exclusion and extreme intolerance. He had to flee from his home and his country at a very young age, leaving his family behind; he took part in at least two wars, helped refugees cross the ocean to safe havens; suffered the loss of his brother-in-law and possibly one of his closest friends assassinated, the death of one of his daughters; was suspected of communist sympathies during McCarthyism; lived in unfamiliar lands. And all throughout his life, he was known for his optimism. During all these trials he kept writing, asking, thinking, keeping track of himself, his learnings and discoveries. The uncertainty we face today has less of that sense of adventure, spontaneity and change. But what Hirschman showed us might still be useful.

We might call Hirschman a man of action, and we are facing times of standstill. Nevertheless, following Arendt (1958)³, I would like to qualify Hirschman as a man of action by recalling the idea that action is thinking through words. And words, language, was one of Hirschman's obsessions. We are what and how we think through words and language. Action is evanescent as it is through language, the words we think and then say to each other, that we do things together. Action, therefore, is what seems now most needed. We philosophize, according to Arendt, in the face of death, when we realize our mortality. Our words can be more powerful when, following both Hirschman and Arendt, we realize our responsibility to dissent. These two dissenters call on us to find the words to think together the times we are facing.

Dissenters might appear obnoxious but they have the virtue of making us see unintended consequences, perverse outcomes and the limitations of design and apparent unanimity. Contrarians are not extremists. Hirschman, as a contrarian, enjoyed the almost infinite shades of gray between the black

and white, we so much long for when looking for guide and certainty. His concern for the loss of voice in the public arena and for the exit citizens increasingly exercise shows the importance he gave to discussion, confrontation and the expression of different views, opinions and positions. It is also a call to humility and to listen to others. It is in the details, in the interstices of the conversation, of the plans and programs that hidden rationalities could be found. Unintended consequences and perverse outcomes are opportunities for ingenuity and for local, accumulated knowledge, to emerge.

III. Bold proposals

Some of Hirschman's proposals were bold and were criticized due to the risk they implied. Let us explore two examples that relate directly to Hirschman's relevance in the exceptional times we are going through: The Hiding Hand principle and public debate. They both relate to the possibility of understanding and influencing (designing, manipulating or nudging, to use a contemporary term) social order. They both have a high component of risk taking and, thus, of possible failure that can be costly in any situation and especially nowadays when we face unchartered territory.

The Hiding Hand principle, for example, materialized in the "pseudo-imitation technique" and in the "pseudo-comprehensive-program technique" (Hirschman, 1967: 19), meant framing information in such a way that projects with great risk and, therefore, high probabilities of failure would be undertaken so as to elicit action (Hirschman, 1967), trigger problem-solving skills and promote decision-taking. In Hirschman's words: "The Hiding Hand is essentially a mechanism *which makes a risk-averter take risks* and turns him into less of a risk-averter in the process. [...], risk-taking behavior is engaged in actively (though involuntarily)" promoting confidence and entrepreneurship (Hirschman, 1967: 19). For someone who centered most of his theory on human action and who promoted bottom-up solutions, recommending to push people to take risk they would voluntarily avoid, could appear contradictory⁴.

Another criticized risk had to do with tension between transgression, expert knowledge and public debate. There are two related aspects on this point: citizen engagement in political activity and the role of public intellectuals. The core of democracy is voice but citizens, as Hirschman saw it (Hirschman, 1970), were increasingly silent due to the lack of incentives and the frustration associated with participation in modern democracies.

However, Hirschman believed that in order to bring about social change and overcome the “notably limited” “human capacity to imagine social change” (Hirschman, 1982b: 94) citizen engagement was indispensable. There is a “social need for self-deception, that is, the need to magnify the benefits to be expected from collective action if the considerable exertions required for even modest advances are to be forthcoming” (Hirschman, 1982b: 94). This (happy) self-deception always leaves a gap between what is expected, total change, and what can be accomplished (Hirschman, 1982), and increases citizens’ disappointment with civic engagement.

And there is no satisfactory way of replacing citizen engagement and collective action. Expert knowledge could not and should not crowd out public debate, but experts could be better placed to recognize underused skills and hidden rationalities. They could act as a catalyst of sorts, inducing change. It is not necessarily their better understanding or ability to diagnose accurately, but rather, what could be seen, as their broader perspective. This could make them public intellectuals. It is not clear, however, why experts would be less risk averse or be in a better position to see broadly, except maybe, if it were Hirschman himself⁵.

Even on this second aspect, Hirschman seems to favor risk taking that does not necessarily fit with expert knowledge. Specifically, in social sciences, we tend to think the aim of social inquiry and research is to “discover and stress regularities, stable relationships, and uniform sequences” (Hirschman, 1971: 27). But Hirschman invites us to “the opposite type of endeavor: to underline the multiplicity and creative disorder of the human adventure and to bring out the uniqueness of a certain occurrence, and to perceive an entirely new way of turning a historical corner” (Hirschman, 1971: 27). Such an invitation, which has to do with his passion for the possible (*possibilism*), not only implies risk taking but also acknowledging the limits and opportunities of any attempt at social engineering. This seems particularly adventurous, to say the least, when we pass from research to public policy.

These two examples should make clear that Hirschman is not an uncontroversial author, nor would he want to be. He has been called a pragmatic pluralist (Özçelik, 2014), with the positive and negative connotations it entails. The renewal of interest in his oeuvre has given it a sort of second life that goes beyond economic development, branch he once declared dead (Hirschman, 1981). The paradoxes and tensions he presents to us are also invitations to pursue the debate, practice our voice, and not give in to anger, frustration or disappointment. There is no perfect solution, a view

that placed Hirschman between the French and the Scottish Enlightenment, with flat feet in modernity, with all the advantages and disadvantages of such a position. Between the idea of perfectibility and social engineering of the French Enlightenment, and “that of the unintended consequences of human actions and decisions” (Hirschman, 1982a: 1463) of the Scottish Enlightenment, Hirschman found the grounds for social change. According to him, society resulted from a complex and contradictory process (Hirschman, 1982a) that no single theory or interpretation could fully grasp. And if this were the case then no simple solution or recipe to solve social problems is available, but this should not deter us from persevering in our search.

Even if no there is no way “to demonstrate the irreducibility of the social world to general laws” (Hirschman, 1971: 27), and Hirschman believes there has been an (unconscious) desire to prove this, he does not call for complete speculation or abandoning of theory. We should not try to build from scratch, nor should we ignore the lessons from history and social theory. The social order, in all its complexities, is, nevertheless an order. *The Passions and the Interests* (1977) shows the importance of discovering and understanding predictability in human behavior. Interests counteract passions and human beings respond to incentives. This insight makes room for planning, but also to acknowledging the social order as a complex “web of interdependent relationships” (Hirschman, 1977: 52) rather than a balancing act. Hirschman’s detailed and reflexive accounts of his experience as a development economist, show the importance of drawing lessons from the past and of understanding any social experience as a learning process.

IV. Lessons from development

In *Journeys* (1965), Hirschman tells the story of three development projects in Latin America, their success and failure within the alternative of reform or revolution in striving for development and growth. The way he tells these stories, using literature, expert knowledge, interviews and official reports, reflects his continuous attempt at gathering as much information from as different sources as possible. Knowledge is not the exclusive realm of any agent. It comes from diverse, and oftentimes, unexpected places. Policies appear as the official response from public authorities to specific problems. But solutions do not come top-down, there can be spontaneous answers that obstacles and challenges bring forward and that policies replicate and systematize. Hirschman reminds us that processes, structures and reactions differ from one context to another, making unique solutions inadequate.

There is no single way of dealing with problems and social demands, and each situation and circumstance is an opportunity to learn and create. But not from scratch.

During his years in Colombia, and later in his many journeys, Hirschman searched for alternative paths to problem-solving and policy-making. He talked to everyone and anyone and developed a keen insight for micro level approaches. The knowledge, beliefs, expectations and experience of local communities had to be incorporated in policy design if projects were to succeed. Legitimacy, public acceptance and accountability are as important as attention to details, expert knowledge and careful design. Ignoring these would lead any policy to failure, and increase what Hirschman identified as a specific trait in Latin America: *fracasomanía*, a sense that any policy is doomed from the start and that everything has to be built anew.

Designing public policies is an open-ended and learning process. In *Journeys* Hirschman identifies a Latin American style in problem-solving and policy-making that he characterizes, using Flaubert's expression, as *la rage de vouloir conclure*. This anxiety to conclude makes it difficult to build upon past experience or recognize that there have been failures from which to learn but also successes that should be recognized.

Hirschman dedicates this book to Celso Furtado and Carlos Lleras Restrepo, "master Reformmongers", as he calls them. In a context where the alternatives seemed to be defending the status quo or revolution, they both took the path of reform. Reform, led by expert knowledge, combined with recognizing longstanding and neglected problems and not ignoring the political aspect of any policy implementation. It is naïve, he reminds us, if not purely hypocritical, to hold that these processes "could or should be entirely insulated from politics" (Hirschman, 1965: 45). Policies need to be legitimate in the sense of having been thoroughly discussed in the public arena. Experts should be willing to engage in this discussion, explaining, highlighting and bridging gaps in order for citizens and decision-makers to take informed decisions, and increase the accountability of policy-makers.

Moreover, in a particularly polarized context, where any claim of any abuse or inefficiency or failure, represents an opportunity for the opposition to increase its political capital, Hirschman presents Furtado and Lleras Restrepo as examples of the needed willingness to take risks. They embarked on large scale planning and public investment in development projects to promote social change, and were willing to assume the political costs

involved. Planning beyond political cycles, these two politicians undertook projects that would need more time than their period in office to show results, if there were any. They also relied heavily on technical advice and expertise, dealing with the political costs of undermining politicians' power to make policies and decide about investment projects. They did not, however, break with the so-called Establishment and took a rather piece-meal approach to institutional reform, leaving many public institutions and procedures untouched.

Hirschman reminds us that reform is always faced with harsh criticism for not being daring enough or for being timid. Besides, any public expenditure, especially in infrastructure, and nowadays in social programs, will be particularly susceptible to over scrutiny because "ordinary moral standards are likely to be in jeopardy when the lives of large masses [...] have been disrupted and when hunger, disease and violence are in the air" (Hirschman, 1965: 45). Furtado and Lleras Restrepo could be seen as having applied the Hiding Hand principle, but also as examples of possibilism. Even if planning was an important part of their agendas, they were willing to take more risks and defy uncertainty.

History has shown that their attempts were not all that successful. Both countries continue facing dire inequality, land reform did not lead to change in property nor to increases in productivity, and industrialization has not brought inclusive progress for all. But, there are lessons to be learned, if we are willing to look back. Lessons especially in possibilism,

meant to help defend the right to a non-projected future as one of the truly inalienable rights of every person and nation; and to set the stage for conception of change to which the inventiveness of history and a 'passion for the possible' are admitted as vital actors (Hirschman, 1971: 37).

Solutions to problems cannot wait until we have all the answers or until we fully understand the challenges. Many problems have been neglected because of this, but also because "of lack of *direct* access of the problem's victims to the policy-makers" (Hirschman, 1965: 304). People do not only fail to use their voice, they have also lost access to it. As Hirschman saw in his travels through the region, there has been a lack of desire to tackle longstanding problems because they have not been completely understood or because people have been excluded from the political process that has increasingly been conceived as a technical problem by policy-makers and as a way to maintain clienteles and votes by politicians.

Nevertheless, people are finding other ways to make their voices heard. The explosion of new media has decreased the cost of participating for those who are not part of the elites or those who have had less opportunity to exercise their voice. It has also allowed to contrast official information with other sources. There is a multidirectional production of truth (Bogliacino *et al.*, 2018) that confronts the production of knowledge until now associated with experts. The risk is all the fake news and false information that circulates, hindering the development of a market of ideas, that could gather, confront, and, hopefully, refine ideas into collective knowledge.

But maybe this is also the backlash of the tight leash in which experts pretended to keep knowledge and public debate. Any public decision is public, meaning, it involves specific communities and the people at large. In order to participate in the decision-making process, people need information that should be transmitted in simple, accurate and understandable terms, using familiar references and experiences. Nothing can stand in for democratic debate.

Hirschman avoided grand theorizing, and he was in constant search of the small ideas (*petite idée*) to understand reality by pieces and keeping in mind that any perspective is subjective. Any public or collective project or action must come to terms with uncertainty, with the risks of possible failures and mistakes in order to recognize the learning process we are all engaged in. Recovering everyone's and each one's voice might help us "prove Hamlet wrong": doubt should not immobilize us nor should we yield to overconfidence in our own skills and abilities, practicing Hirschman's example of his "propensity to self-subversion". *Possibilism* against *fracasomanía* requires a structural change beyond any specific policy.

What Hirschman also saw in Latin America was that when problems were recognized and governments begun working on them, they did so with more motivation than understanding. Policy-makers look for successful examples of how to tackle them, falling in a kind of "pseudo-creativity" (Hirschman, 1965: 315) that transformed into a rush toward hasty diagnoses and solutions:

Urged on by pressing problems and by the desire to catch up, and liberally supplied with recipes communicated to them by the advanced countries of both East and West, their policy-makers are only too ready to believe that they have achieved full understanding and to act on the basis of belief (Hirschman, 1965: 315).

Acting this way, they miss local knowledge and hidden rationalities that are behind bottom-up solutions, leading to a “tendency to consider the problems as either wholly unsolved or as totally solved” and thus “conceiving the role of the policy-maker as that of a demiurge who is called upon to create singlehandedly order out of chaos or progress out of backwardness” (Hirschman, 1965: 323).

V. Change and creativity

Any solution implies change and, Hirschman thought, change requires creativity. But creativity comes from challenges that, most of the time, we do not know we will encounter. Tensions, conflict and disequilibria are opportunities that should not be avoided (Hirschman, 1958), because they bring into the light underutilized resources and give us the opportunity to practice the most important and neglected skill: decision-making.

Creativity, says Hirschman (1967), comes as a surprise because we would not engage in a task that we know would require it. Such a task would present itself as a huge challenge we would not know how to overcome:

Hence, the only way in which we can bring our creative resources fully into play is by misjudging the nature of the task, by presenting it to ourselves as more routine, simple, undemanding of genuine creativity than it will turn out to be (Hirschman, 1967: 13, italics in the original).

Hirschman calls this general principle of action the Hiding Hand (Hirschman, 1967). We underestimate the challenge and are forced to find creative solutions once we are faced with it. Once in the challenging situation we are forced to exercise our problem-solving abilities.

The Hiding Hand principle leads, according to Hirschman (1967), to a bias in project selection. Transferable projects, or policies, seem preferable to those that have not been implemented elsewhere. Challenges should not appear too early if projects are to be seen through and arise problem-solving skills. Both expressions of the bias nourish the *rage de vouloir conclure*. Facing problems with more motivation than understanding, we tend to import what appear to be ready made solutions and give in to *fracasomanía* at the sight of the first, unforeseen, obstacle. Difficulties and disappointments are especially hard to handle in this context, a context similar to the one we are facing today.

We are living, what until recently, would have been unthinkable times. Times of isolation, lockdown, uncertainty and fear. Contrary to Hirschman's life, full of action, journeys, encounters, and challenges, we seem to be going through times that call for stillness and distance. But in these times Hirschman's call for clarity and his concern about communication and rhetoric seem particularly appropriate. He was well aware of the difficulties associated with language and communication, especially when we are addressing different audiences. He wrote *The Rhetoric of Reaction* (1991), or at least its first chapters, with a sense of danger, anger and disappointment with what, today, we could identify as the polarization of public debate. His concern about the rise of neoconservatism and its threat to the Welfare State as an essential part of the social project of a liberal democracy has a familiar ring.

We are now facing the consequences of past (policy) decisions. The health crisis has brought painfully to the light our inability to effectively deal with inequality. We seem condemned to decide between lives and livelihoods as if we were facing a trade-off where more (less) health, or rather more (less) survivors from the pandemic, means less (more) ways to guarantee our own subsistence. We are caught in the debate between experts, epidemiologists, on one side, and economists, on the other. Governments and politicians are caught in the short-run, political-cycles are short and public opinion is volatile; counting deaths is a terrible form of accountability. The greatest challenge we face is learning to count on each other, being aware of the externalities of our own behavior on others, trusting. Trust stands as the neglected problem of the moment. Why should citizens trust national and local authorities that have been unable or unwilling to improve their opportunities? Why should experts trust citizens who have been reported to act recklessly, ignore information and disregard health measures and protocols? We seem trapped in what Hirschman called the tunnel effect. Once we were all trapped in the tunnel, but, then, one lane starts advancing and the other stands still. Those in the standing lane might run out of patience because there can be no satisfying explanation of why others advance as they are caught in the same place.

Our tolerance to poverty and inequality depends upon the expectations of those in poverty and suffering the consequences of inequality. There is more tolerance because there are low expectations of any policy or policy-maker being able or willing to change anything. People give up making their problems known, they give up on voice. Public policy is doomed because there

is no public support due to lack of hope that things might change. When this happens, public policies that sustain the status quo are reproduced, evidencing path-dependence and the importance of beliefs and expectations.

Frustration moves in, citizens lose interest in democratic debate and public life, reducing their participation and any support to public initiatives. And if they perceive increasing opacity and corruption in public officials, it is the perfect combination to use their voice even less, leading to a decay of the social network that sustains liberal democracies. Hirschman associates all this with an increase in intolerance (Hirschman, 1991), further deterioration of the communities' political life, and escalation of violence.

People and communities become what policy-makers seem to think they are: beneficiaries or passive receptors or public policies. That is until there is a crisis or social upheaval. We are living both. Compliance to strict sanitary measures is defied every day, not only because material conditions make it almost impossible to follow them, but also because people might fail to see their benefits or because they have alternative (be it accurate or inaccurate) information or because their assessment of the negative effects on their lives, their livelihoods, their plans, their emotional and mental health outweighs all else. Hirschman, as his life and work attest, gives a central place to individual agency. People are not only passive receptors, they are also potential agents of change, change that might not go in the direction policy-makers or authorities intend. This should be a crucial consideration in any social engineering attempt. Any social change requiring collective action, as the one needed today, goes beyond policy. Following Hirschman's bottom-up approach, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, in brief, individual agency is central in dealing with people as active citizens instead of inert consumers (Hirschman, 1970).

And, at the same time, we might be facing the opportunity of tackling a problem that has long been neglected because it is linked with another that policy-makers must deal with presently (Hirschman, 1965). Preserving lives and livelihoods has proven particularly hard given the inequality associated with highly informal labor markets, the stark differences between the center and periphery in terms of infrastructure, resources and access to public services, and individual opportunities to project and live a worthy life. The pandemic will exacerbate inequality, erasing years of slow social progress, strengthening path-dependence and leaving deep scars in the lives of many and in the already fragile social tissue.

VI. Concluding remarks

There are two components of Modernity that Hirschman studies carefully: the passions and the interests, and the construction of communities. Modernity, contrary to a generalized perception of social order, implies violence. That is, Modernity searches for ways to control, contain and direct violence within and without, what was called a long time ago, the body politic. A political community, made of interested human beings, is violent due to the clash of individual interests, not to any sort of evil human nature. Freedom and self-agency come with confrontation and disagreement. If the political community does not have adequate mechanisms to engage and, hopefully, resolve confrontation and disagreement, exclusion and open violence will emerge.

Social order in a well-ordered society then, as the Enlightenment conceived of it, strives at the (natural or artificial) harmonization of interests, but it does not eliminate conflict. Social conflict entails tensions that can be handled and opportunities for social change. Between design and spontaneous order, lies the realm of possibility. We can read Hirschman (1995) as a form of denunciation of the experts', the intellectuals' and the professional politicians' goal of achieving harmony and equilibrium. He explicitly criticizes the rationalization of history that has lost the true meaning of democracy (Hirschman, 1995). Democracy is not the result of any agreement about some kind of fundamental meanings or values; it is rather a mechanism to deal with violence once we recognize our inability and unwillingness to dominate others. Conflict is the characteristic feature of a liberal democracy and of a market economy. Rather than a conflict about this or that, the conflict relies on how much of anything for whom, that is, we are constantly dealing with distributive justice. All we can strive for are temporal arrangements that need to be revised and renewed ever so often, preferably through voice than exit.

In times of uncertainty, Hirschman invites us to take risks, so that we will have the opportunity to be creative. He invites us to discuss and participate, to make our voices heard. There is no way of knowing what the future will bring, but we should accept our responsibility in whatever it might look like with all the frustration and disappointment this might entail. Dealing with pending issues, respecting individual agency, beliefs and expectations, protecting freedom, using the lessons of the past, and taking risks might be the way to the type of collective action needed.

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¹ I thank Gonzalo Carrión for his generous invitation to participate in this issue on Albert O. Hirschman. This paper has changed from its original intention of reminding once again, as has been reminded many times in the scholarly literature but, in many other outlets, Hirschman's relentless call for open and informed democratic debate, and his skepticism regarding isolated expert knowledge and top-down policy making. This message still remains, but the times we are living has brought a more contextual approach to Hirschman's (and Colomi's) goal of proving Hamlet wrong.

² There is an increasing number of contributions in this direction. Adelman has been an exceptional contributor to this purpose. His authoritative biography builds upon his previous work on Hirschman and brought renewed attention to Hirschman as a public intellectual. For the purpose of this paper, those contributions from Latin America or building upon Hirschman's Latin American experience are especially relevant. Among these, see Bianchi (2016, 2011 and 2007), Carrión (2019), Sunna (2013), Revista Desarrollo y Sociedad (2008, special issue), Blanco (2013), Hurtado (2014), Guiot-Isaac (2017, 2020).

³ It is too tempting to recall that Hirschman actively took part in the rescue operation that led Arendt to America (Adelman, 2013).

⁴ He does however advance that the Hiding Hand is a transitional mechanism to foster learning to take risks, and it is not without dangers not only because it can lead to pursue risky ventures for too long and create a sort of habit or taste for risk but especially because it "is a way of inducing action through error" (Hirschman, 1967: 20-1).

⁵ One of Hirschman's major concerns has to do precisely with the inability of economists and political scientists to go beyond their disciplinary borders and engage in a beneficial dialogue for both (Hirschman, 1971). Besides social sciences tend to search for laws and regularities, bringing them, in some cases, closer to the futility thesis that indicates that "political or economic change are shown to come to naught because they disregard some 'law' whose existence has allegedly been ascertained by social science" (Hirschman, 1991: 70). Both situations would make it very difficult for experts to become public intellectuals willing to go beyond, what they would consider, safe boundaries in terms of their fields of expertise and action.