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THE POST-PANDEMIC CITY: TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION AND PUBLIC POLICY

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Still, humanity boasts the potential capacity to avoid new totalitarian systems, whether the state or the market; it faces the challenge of overcoming a false dilemma or choice between freedom or equality, and of counteracting the fracturing between humanity and nature.

«**metapolis** is a pluralist space: it is a place to propose ideas that supersede the traditional borders of knowledge, mobilizing them to confront global challenges. **metapolis** is a territory of hyper-connection, liberated from past nostalgia, critical of the present and committed to a sustainable and just future. It does not wait for reform that maintains the status quo, nor does it aspire to do so, either. In fact, in **metapolis** everyone suspects that this future may never come, but still are not convinced to give it up for good. The latest political, economic, technological, environmental, sociological and health emergencies just reinforce the need for us to work harder.»

metapolis is an initiative by common action forum. A collective effort of caf's team, members, collaborators and participants. Our goal is to develop and support a progressive agenda as alternative to the current model that has led us to a world of increasing inequalities, environmental devastation and unaccomplished freedom for most of the global citizenry.

Editor-in-chief: **Rafael Heiber**
Managing editor: **Colleen Boland**

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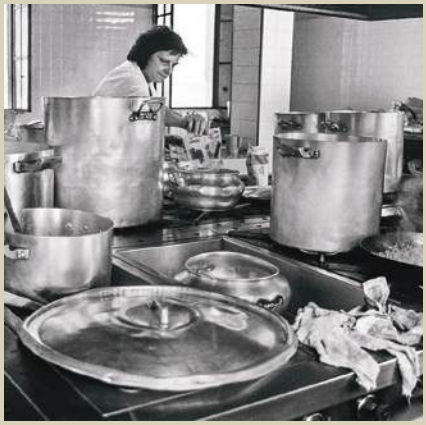

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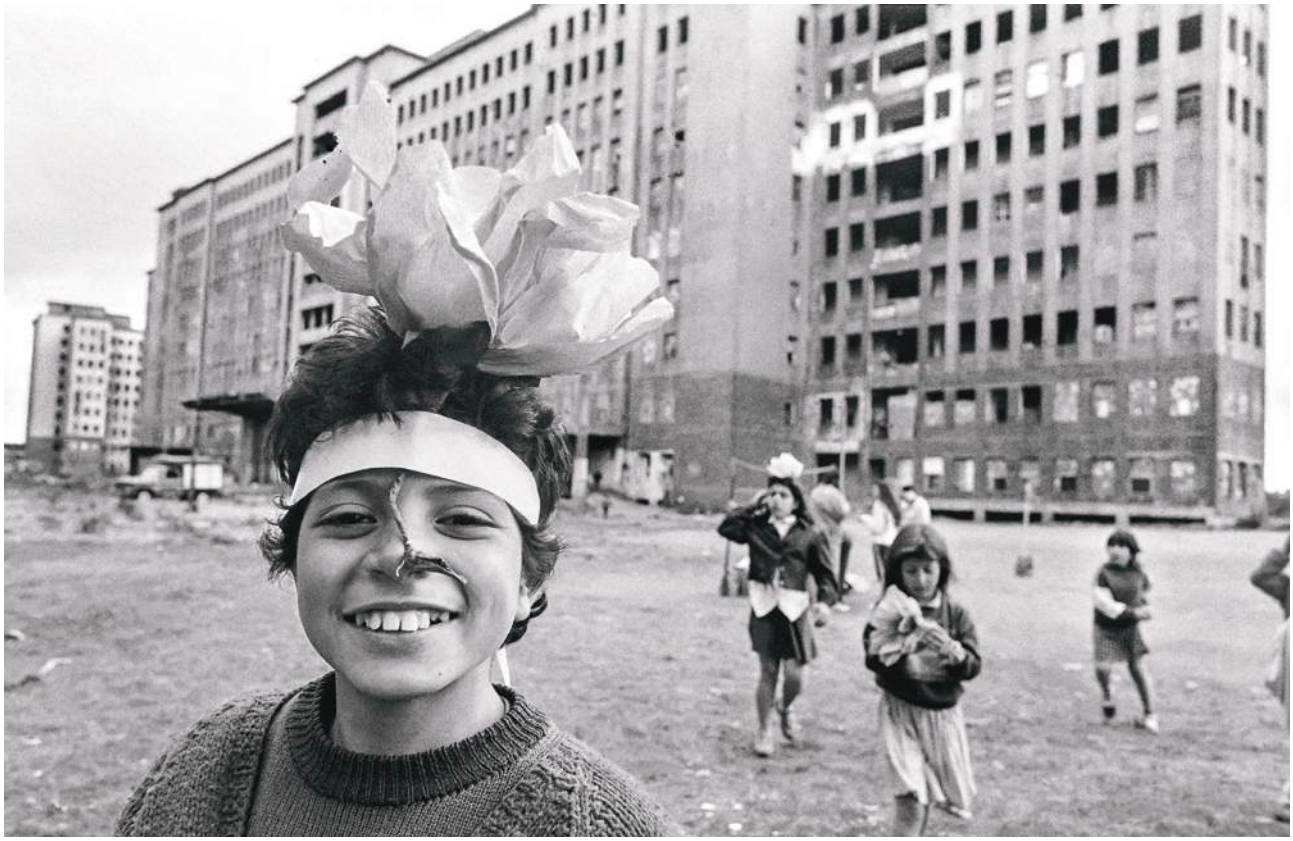

Photo_ **Tony Vacas**_ Warnes shelter

00.

THE POST-PANDEMIC CITY: TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION AND PUBLIC POLICY

Rafael Heiber
Colleen Boland

Jun, 2020

In less than six months, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about conditions and circumstances so exceptional they are even reminiscent of a wartime situation; in this case, however, the enemy is disconcertingly less tangible, with a vaccine solution hidden beyond an uncomfortable horizon.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus circumstances have affected all either directly or indirectly, in what seems an unprecedented manner. At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted many criticisms that were already fomenting, or even explicitly articulated, in our communities. Similarly, critics have long debated empathy versus unresponsiveness, between action and impotence. Many of these marginalized thinkers and voices that had called for change were not only cautioning as to the fundamental right of building, maintaining and providing access to health, but also understood and advocated for the overall *wellbeing* of citizens as an underlying and pressing societal challenge. These advocates have proven capable of providing analytical frameworks, and powerful accounts of failed sacro-capitalism.

In this vein, the true challenge does not just lie in the pandemic, but rather in finding an alternative to the hegemonic, neoliberal construction of the world, and the production of its subjects. A choice is presented: on the one hand, we can remain in a purportedly advanced modernity filled with triumphant promises, essentially a narcissistic vision that culminates in the *end of history* as we know it. On the other, we can revive solidarity and creativity in an effort to reevaluate the present and reframe it into a postmodern transition, continually engaging in this process of constituting the pandemic's *new normal* as a turning point.

We seek to support such a transformation, fueled by progressive ideas, in a modest, yet genuine and effective manner. In fact, we have been pursuing this as part of the Common Action Forum's mission from the start. It requires the development and implementation of critical frameworks, capable of uniting, building and promoting solutions to growing inequality, environmental devastation and distorted freedoms, ultimately achieving an authentic and optimized global citizenry.

Motivated by this objective, we decided to launch this magazine, publishing articles with comprehensive and rich content. While often in the form of extensive scientific publication, this knowledge production will attempt to remain independent of academic pedantry or bureaucracy, instead prioritizing the real-world knowledge and experience of authors, unique in how they are in touch with society's fundamental questions.

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reform that maintains the status quo, nor does it aspire to do so, either. In fact, in **metapolis** everyone suspects that this future may never come, but still are not convinced to give it up for good. The latest political, economic, technological, environmental, sociological and health emergencies just reinforce the need for us to work harder.

In facing structural problems all the more visible thanks to COVID-19, the first volume of **metapolis**, divided into two numbers, discusses «The post-pandemic city: transnational cooperation and public policy.» As the 21st century is characterized by predominantly urban life, it is within this space that society and institutions can make an impact in a way that transcends, but at the same time operates in conjunction with, national, regional and transnational structures. The city has emerged as relevant in a twofold manner: in the first instance, it has played a key role in the march forward or regression in terms of human advancement, a trajectory more recently characterized by collapsing financial systems. In the second, it serves as a microcosmos that can act as a unifying basis for an unprecedentedly diversified and interconnected world.

In the first case, the crisis of modern democracy is directly linked to a global financialization that qualifies its success in how it objectifies cities and citizens as products or assets, with a market that not only subsumes a great amount of attention and energy, but also impacts life aspirations. The process of capture, accumulation and exploitation applies a veritable range of psychological theories (positive, cognitive, etc.) and business doctrines that have served as dangerous placebos in the self-interested regulation of individual freedoms and the incessant search for self-absorbed meritocracies.

In this vein, the true challenge does not just lie in the pandemic, but rather in finding an alternative to the hegemonic, neoliberal construction of the world, and the production of its subjects.

Human curiosity sought to understand the processes of social adaptation to the idealized conditions of superabundance made possible in particular since the Industrial Revolution, leading to an infinity of attempts to transform the world into a laboratory. Half a century ago, ethologist John Calhoun experimented with creating a utopian universe for mice: an environment with an abundance of food, comfortable space and time that resembled an eternal succession of quiet Sundays. The initial population of eight specimens exponentially grew during the first weeks, until finally slowing, and surprisingly, coming to a halt in birth rate after 600 days. The population had reached two thousand, in an environment that had provided for almost four thousand.

In these types of analyses, care must be taken to refrain from applying Hobbesian, Cartesian, Kantian or Durkheimian notions to explain the behavior of a species that does not act according to the state, a method, the moral or the social facts [1]. The experiment, however, ultimately demonstrated profound intergenerational changes in this group of mice: social ties began to break down and isolation became the rule. Some segregated violently, repressing the young. Others were indifferent and participated in hedonistic enjoyment. And even with all available resources, the utopian mouse universe disappeared in less than five years, when the final mouse died alone.

Unlike Calhoun's mice, humanity is reflexive, has potential and aspirations of its own, and is capable of predicting the unpredictable; it can conceive of good and evil, and either via one or the other, is capable of developing abstract ideas that allow for collectively overcoming biological fragility, ultimately establishing itself as one of the main forces of nature [2]. At the same time, human ingenuity heightens the complexity of this world, a world with an ethical maturity that evolves more slowly than the pace of technological development. Still, humanity boasts the potential capacity to avoid new totalitarian systems, whether the state or the market; it faces the challenge of overcoming a false dilemma or choice between freedom or equality, and of counteracting the fracturing between humanity and nature.

These challenges demonstrate why urban spaces hold key relevance, due to the unique ways of coexistence, participation, articulation and solidarity they afford.

Individuals, communities and nations have been experiencing the consequences of imperfect democracies and threatening authoritarianism; both regimes have failed not only to provide for wellbeing at all levels, but have also proved unable to cultivate true life philosophies.

The local level, found within a global network of relations, provides a unique space for rootedness and shared human experience, which can feed into and reflect an openness and universality so key in our modern era of hyper networked societies. In effect, in response to the breakdown and decline to date, these communities serve as concrete, real world, grounded inspiration to establish new bases for social cohesion.

For all of these reasons, it is an honor to introduce the prestigious authors that have provided their fresh and original insight on these themes, allowing us to chart a course towards a more hopeful future.

The local level, found within a global network of relations, provides a unique space for rootedness and shared human experience, which can feed into and reflect an openness and universality so key in our modern era of hyper networked societies. In effect, in response to the breakdown and decline to date, these communities serve as concrete, real world, grounded inspiration to establish new bases for social cohesion.

Manuela Carmena begins this issue's discussion with the article «Before and after the pandemic: a city of solidarity, creativity and participation.» In it, the former mayor of Madrid upholds the city as a space of emancipation *par excellence*, asserting that solidarity, creativity and participation are the three principles on which cities should be based. While air pollution is a constant threat to health, COVID-19 has stressed that we will never enjoy healthy cities if governments and citizens do not embrace the principle of solidarity. Participation, meanwhile, is inherent to cities as public spaces of freedom. Finally, the author proposes that creativity is essential in that it allows us to imagine better worlds; only if conceived of first can they become possible. In order to achieve such possibilities, the former mayor suggests conceiving of caring for the city «like a good mother in a family.» This metaphor seems apt in that women leaders have proved some of the best crisis managers over the course of this pandemic.

The pandemic has also exposed some weaknesses in the dialogue between science and society, in a phenomenon termed denialism. The reasons for these deficiencies are varied, ranging from the manipulation of public opinion, to low levels of cognitive dissonance, to social resentment when science is perceived as an element of class distinction. An example from recent years includes how economic, political and social sectors have acted to discredit global warming. **Alfredo Aguilar**, former head of the units of Biotechnology and International Scientific Cooperation at the European Commission, demonstrates that in the face of this pandemic, science is the fundamental pillar upon which to build effective policies, guided by joint public and private initiatives. «Let us give the future another chance,» illustrates how humanity's upcoming challenges are closely related to the biosphere. Instead of global silence, such challenges will require global, synergistic response. The author proposes bioeconomy and biodiplomacy as two new tools essential in integrating local, national and global initiatives in order to effect necessary transformation.

Meanwhile, Germany's former Minister of Justice, **Herta Däubler-Gmelin**, questions these transformations in the article «The post COVID-19 challenge: a simple reset or a real change?» The author makes a case for how the state of emergency triggered by the pandemic is a dangerous threat to fundamental human rights. At the same time, it is noted that civil society in several countries has demonstrated itself capable of cooperating in order to stop the spread of COVID-19, as opposed to major failures in global cooperation. The most developed regions of the world have been shaken in their false confidence, and populations in developing regions, the most disadvantaged, have suffered the most acutely. In addition to recounting experience of confinement in Germany, the author highlights how democratic societies were no less efficient in managing the crisis than authoritarian ones, and is optimistic about the potential for change resulting from this current crisis, despite a growing social gap. Finally, the author concludes that far-reaching solutions are feasible if the threat is perceived as sufficiently serious.

Alfonso Zegbe, head of the Strategy and Public Diplomacy Unit at the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, presents a proposal in the form of a multi-level approach to public policies, linking all levels of decision making. «Socioemotional wellbeing: a revisited approach,» examines the immediate effects of COVID-19, advocating for a cross-cutting approach and framework that includes several sectors and civil rights, including: general health and wellbeing, long-term emotional education and learning; food safety; urban and rural spaces and social flows; and finally, housing and other forms of human habitat. The author concludes with reflections on institutional action that would address concepts of communal happiness and wellbeing, incorporating the state and civil society into a discussion that should not be delegated exclusively to the market.

Precisely in keeping with this train of thought, **Laura Basu**, academic and Editor of the ourEconomy section of openDemocracy, offers us her article, «The post-pandemic city beyond state and market: a thought experiment.» Examining eco-social fiction, theories of the commons and real-life examples of race and gender resistance, the author invites us to imagine a reality in which nation-state borders and the capitalist model, rooted in colonialism, are ultimately overcome. It serves as an invaluable exercise of scales, moving between communal localism in daily life, to production and consumption relationships, to the potential for network connections hidden in these communities. The reader will also note a utopian notion different from that of Calhoun: a utopia in which human communities are destined to break free of systems of domination, and participate in the creation of their own universe.

In closing the issue, **Wadah Khanfar**, President of Common Action Forum, offers a series of historical precedents in the analysis «COVID-19 as a meta crisis and our post-pandemic order,» which affirms that we are not alone in the midst of this health, political, economic and social crisis. All of these crises combined together represent a meta-crisis with repercussions for all aspects of human life throughout the world. The pandemic provides a time-space continuum, with geopolitical trends accelerating in favor of China and to the detriment of the United States, as a new world order approaches. This transition involves new disputes that will require reimagined institutions and societies, with the power of ideas providing for the possibility of a new world history. The post-pandemic world may not be fair or secure, and in many places fear will give way to setbacks and nationalisms. However, humanity is nonetheless incited to build a fairer alternative, moving towards a transnationally connected localism, under a new value system that enables the common good to prevail.

In sum, the thoughtful insight from the authors first provides their various expertise in either observing or troubleshooting the COVID-19 crisis. Ultimately, however, the issue utilizes the COVID-19 discussion as an impetus for designing and implementing change. In particular, this change is contemplated simultaneously at both the local and transnational level, acknowledging the individual and universal in all of our communities, and the collective goal of the common good. We hope this issue provides food for thought in this regard, as well as real world experience and solutions that put such thought into action. The conversation is far from finished, however. **metapolis** will continue to publish an article monthly, with a second number available in December 2020, completing our inaugural volume.

Rafael Heiber

Rafael Heiber is the Co-Founder and CEO of the Common Action Forum. Geographer, MSc. in Spatial planning and PhD in Sociology, his expertise includes mobilities, climatology, politics and the links between territory, technology and citizenship. He advises journalists, provides commentary and publishes in the international media.

Colleen Boland

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[1] Praxeomorphic behavior is the objective attempt to explain the behavior of a certain group or species, based on the criteria available within an observer's reality.

[2] This leads many thinkers to adopt the notion of the Anthropocene, a geological epoch characterized by anthropogenic impact on the planet.

Photo_ **Alexis R**_ Branch so Bright_ CC BY 4.0

Zebra crossing in the Puerta Cerrada Park, Madrid, January 2019.
Photo_ **Irene López Alonso**

01.

BEFORE AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC: A CITY OF SOLIDARITY, CREATIVITY AND PARTICIPATION

Manuela Carmena

Jun, 2020

Much has been said in these months about the strange confinement of large cities which, with their concentrated populations, might have been more prone to contagion. This seems to indeed be the case; however, along with so many other issues relating to this tragic pandemic, it will have to be calmly considered once the crisis has subsided.

The city has always been a space of freedom, annexed from the domains of kings and lords. The city is a public space, for everyone. As such, **solidarity, creativity and participation** are the three great concepts on which cities must be based, and on which, in my opinion, their management must be focused. This is at least what I tried to do when I was Mayor of Madrid: **to strengthen solidarity, to promote creativity and to encourage/develop participation.**

In my opinion, these three concepts are of essential importance, both in the very conception of the city, and in its management. They are a definition of its essence, and at the same time constitute the objectives for achieving its development.

If we define ethics as that virtue which seeks to ensure that the essence of things is acted upon, I would argue that these three principles are in turn the design of what the city «should be.» In my opinion, this has been true in the past, currently, and even in an immediate albeit limited future, beyond the pandemic, albeit limited.

Solidarity

First of all, the city must manifest solidarity. This solidarity, however, goes beyond the more common, yet limited, concept of solidarity. It is not only a question of the necessary exercise of compassion and empathy with those who need it most. The solidarity I am referring to is **civic solidarity**.

Civic solidarity implies, above all, that all citizens, in return for the rights that the city offers them, must accept a series of obligations in solidarity, so to speak. These obligations allow everyone to equally enjoy the city itself, and what it means.

We can think of the city as if it were a human body. A reality resembling a united, venous system that connects each and every one of the parts of that body. If any part of it loses its blood supply, it can atrophy. The simile is especially valid in relation to public, collective health. In the face of the pandemic, this is all the more clear.

Of course, before June 2019, when I was designing these concepts and objectives for the city of Madrid, I could not even conceive of the terrible pandemic we are now experiencing.

Freedom must also belong to everyone. However, it cannot be exercised by some at the expense of others. As we have seen in this extreme case of pandemic, the collective health of all can demand measures that restrict individual freedom. The «freedom to infect,» which also entails the freedom to be infected, cannot be permitted.

However, this extreme situation that has pitted individual freedom versus common interest and freedom is not new. It has been visible in less extreme, or more gradual, public health cases. The supposed freedom to drink alcohol before driving, to smoke in enclosed places, or to pollute serve as less pronounced examples. These conflicts with the common interests served as precedents to the pandemic, which is also a question of public health.

The city as a public space is «voided» when it ultimately is unusable. We witness this in vacated cities. It becomes nonexistent when it no longer serves its citizens as an accepted measure of collective protection. The city is an act of solidarity-based protection. This is a defining characteristic of a city, or it should be.

However, we cannot forget that prior to COVID-19, **the city suffered a serious and increasing health problem due to pollution**. While it manifests differently, it can be considered another «pandemic.» Fortunately, the effects of pollution do not materialize with the virulence and speed of COVID-19. However, both pandemics must be **addressed to mitigate or decrease their harmful effects with public, collective action**. There must be an attempt to reduce contagion, as well as to pursue clean air and eliminate pollution. **If someone does not respect these rules, he or she does not exhibit solidarity with the city**, either in terms of respecting laws that reduce contagion (that may be caused or suffered), or those that protect air quality. In both cases, **the city demands responsible behavior from the individual, because it needs it**. We all have to fulfill our part. However wealthy you are, no one can buy virus-free air; no one can purchase contamination-free air. Fortunately, air cannot be privatized. Health cannot be either, although by privatizing health you can dream it could be.

If the city and its citizens do not embrace the principle of civic solidarity, we will not be able to maintain a healthy city. If there was any doubt in this regard, the current pandemic now proves it.

The city has always been a space of freedom, annexed from the domains of kings and lords. The city is a public space, for everyone. As such, solidarity, creativity and participation are the three great concepts on which cities must be based.

The pandemic is an absolute shock. However, it prompts reflection beyond the pandemic itself, reflection on the ordinary life of the city. The pandemic, urgent and dramatic, inspires and engenders civic solidarity. This is paramount to the everyday functioning of the city, and it must be maintained.

Civic solidarity encompasses, and indeed manifests itself, in what is increasingly viewed as an essential part of urban relations: **care**. Initially there was charity, or beneficence (which some social sectors still maintain), followed by social assistance or social services, which are sometimes even considered rights. When understood as rights, a new category surfaces: care, a manifestation of the support and services we provide to each other. Care becomes an essential and inherent part of our advanced, essentially urban, societies.

In the pandemic and confinement either its realization absence, we come to understand **what care, in a broad sense, means**. Healthcare workers are the protagonists in our «care.» At the same time, many other jobs, previously even considered as marginal (due to how they are valued in the labour market) have emerged as «essential» in maintaining life in confinement.

In this paralysis of care, we should keep in mind the 2019 feminist protest. It was unusually powerful. Although it did not paralyze all care, especially that care provided women, it was enough to suggest what could happen in the future.

Civic solidarity implies, as could not be otherwise, that all members of the city obtain a sufficient level of satisfaction. That is why there can be no civic solidarity if some citizens do not enjoy what is understood to be justice. A lack of social justice calls into question the balance of the city. If this balance is not ensured, the harmony of the city hangs by a thread.

Think about what it means these days when more than 70 American cities have declared a curfew. It is impressive that even this has not been able to prevent destruction and fires. It is difficult to understand the level of anger and resentment that has built up, exhibited in the violent responses at night, which are outweighed by the daily, mass, peaceful demonstrations.

I am shocked when hearing the mayor of Minneapolis asking his neighbors to stop destroying the city, because the city belongs to everyone. «We know the unjust situation you are living in,» he said, «but the solution is not to destroy the city. Register and vote, so that things will change.»

Given its continued and repeated presence, we should ask ourselves, aren't anger and rage, with destruction and arson, precisely an expression of a lack of civic solidarity? Isn't this violence indicating that there can be no balance and harmony, if there is no «urban» justice?

These violent confrontations demonstrate the constitution of different status of rights in the urban framework. And what is most worrying is not these occasional outbreaks, despite the damage they inflict on the city, but the permanent inequalities. These are the ones that end up generating different cities within the same city, and the overlapping cities are the niches of the very serious insecurity suffered by certain cities.

Insecurity, and the fear of traveling within a city, destroys the very essence of the city. A city, however important and powerful it may be, cannot forsake the equality and justice that guarantee a balanced city.

Creativity

The second principle that characterizes the city, and in particular a big city, is **creativity**. In urban management, an equally important objective to that of civic solidarity is that of promoting creativity. This human quality allows for the design of all kinds of cultural, economic or social manifestations that mean more or less essential changes in the way of living, feeling and enjoying the city. Creativity is, by definition, ethical and at the same time aesthetic. Moreover, I would say that it is fundamentally ethical because it is aesthetic.

Creativity is that intrinsic human quality that allows the human being to modify, change, and evolve. It allows him to invent and reinvent himself; this is increasingly demonstrated and occurs above all in cities, and especially in large cities. Some have said that they precisely gather this «creative class.» If only in statistical terms given the concentrated population, one would have to agree.

That is why I say that creativity is ethical insofar as it seeks those behaviours that demand change and, ultimately, the improvement of living conditions in the city.

Creativity is also, and in a very singular way, pure aesthetics. It seeks to generate beauty, and people need beauty. Cities also demand it.

Beauty is that quality or attribute which inspires emotion and pleasure in us, while broadening our capacity for perception.

Cities have always been, and continue to be, an inspiration for both the search for,

and expression of, beauty. We all know places, buildings or spaces in our cities that architects, town planners or builders, both of the monumental and of the everyday, knew how to make very beautiful. They are references and contribute to promoting creativity, from historical or modern parks to the most mundane of street corners, embellished with works of urban artists.

In continuous artistic fomentation, the ephemeral art is incorporated. It can be a contribution to the aesthetic content of the constantly evolving city. In 2018 in Madrid, almost overnight, sidewalks were filled with poems by the citizens themselves. More than 20,000 Madrid residents sent in their poems as an authentic expression of ephemeral art. There they remain, undergoing the constant footsteps, and readings, of passer bys.

Even in confinement, which the pandemic has forced upon us, creativity and its capacity to generate beauty have been at the front lines.

Madrid is a city full of balconies, as part of traditional architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries that understood their importance, along with terraces. Later and at the close of the 20th century, there was a setback, as less were built and terraces were closed. This meant that the lovely custom of filling them with plants was largely abandoned.

Confinement has rediscovered balconies and their role in Madrid. From them, health care workers have been applauded, there has been singing and dancing that overcame discouragement, or banging pots and pans in protest of the government. They have become so prominent that specific furniture has been built for them, including minimalist yet cheerful tables designed to anchor to the railings.

But creativity as an essential quality allows people to imagine a better world, and only by imagining it does it begin to be possible. However, special ingredients that serve as its oxygen are essential to make it possible: freedom and tolerance. Without them, creativity is exhausted. It shrinks and dies, like those plants you forget to water.

The city, in its continuous evolution, must reinvent itself, overflowing with creativity. Only by relying on creativity will we be able to imagine the new reality, which will be born later on temporarily, as a partial overcoming of this terrible pandemic, and as a response to it. We will have to take advantage of this situation, which still carries concerns and limitations. If we manage to overcome it, real reinvention will come, for the better. We will conquer the social and municipal weaknesses that this pandemic has revealed to us.

In the face of potential change and innovation, this has to be the attitude with which the citizenry undertakes and encourages the outpour of imagination yet to come. Creative imagination to contemplate how to redesign free cities, without fear of disease, insecurity or the wrath of those unable to enjoy the city, those who we will fight hard for so that they can enjoy it, too.

Participation

And finally, the third concept, **participation**. It goes beyond just a principle. It is the overarching principle of all the other principles and concepts. The city has to be managed by everyone. There can be no city without participation.

The need for participation has been advocated in all social discourses, at least in the past 25 years. And it is logical that, once the need has been recognized, how to structure it remains a constant challenge. The essence of the city functions poorly with vertical hierarchies, which limit the potential management capacity of each and every citizen.

Photo_ **Thierry ben Abed**_ on the balcony_ CC BY 4.0

If the city and its citizens do not embrace the principle of civic solidarity, we will not be able to maintain a healthy city. If there was any doubt in this regard, the current pandemic now proves it.

When we speak of participation, however, what do we mean? What does citizen participation in the city mean? Without a doubt, it is based on the need to listen to the community and to take them into account everything that affects their neighbourhoods. But what about everything that affects the city's projects overall? Should the decisions of the municipal administration be subject to community criteria? And if so, which ones?

What about management and purely municipal activity? Should participation be considered as something within the public-private cooperation space, with public-social participation in the construction of the city?

The pandemic experienced obligatory confinement has revealed an important quality among Madrid's citizens. I believe that it has shown a responsible and creative civil society-spontaneous creativity and solidarity at all levels. This took the form of recreational and creative activity from and on the balconies, as well as help and care, in several ways.

The applause at eight o'clock each evening was moving, which many of us still participate in today, 90 days later. It is a way of taking care of, as well as paying homage to, those who take care of us.

Well, yes, the citizens have responded. However, a lack of connection with representatives and authorities has also become evident. Something is not working in institutional representative structures. Something seems to be broken.

The fundamental task of mayors is to manage a plurality of interests and initiatives. They have to lead, they have to govern their cities, on behalf of everyone. And they have to do it as if they were conducting an orchestra, as I like to say. But given this simile, how should the orchestra be organised, how can it be ensured all instruments are present and, ultimately, what music are we going to play?

A few months before my term at the City Council came to a close, we had established an institution that I understand has to be one of the new forms of citizen participation. One more to be added to the existing ones. It is the **«representation by drawing lots.»**

In mid 2019 we created a new body for participation in citizen management. It was made up of almost 50 citizens chosen by drawing lots. With the necessary statistical weightings, by social group, age and residence, they aimed to reproduce as faithfully as possible a very complete universe of the different citizens of Madrid. The aim was to ensure that the sample was not «contaminated» by political or religious prejudices.

Only a few initial meetings could be held, but the truth is that they proved to be very interesting. The spontaneous responses of the citizens were noted. Sensitivities and opinions to be taken into account.

We cannot ignore the fact that at this time and due to a series of complex circumstances, institutional democracy is not going through its best moments. Perhaps the explanation for all this has to do with the fact that representative participation is still very much anchored in the structures of political parties, which do not respond to alternatives of action that could be demanded today in the cities and, more generally, in the changing society. Political parties have not evolved. Once they have become electoral platforms, it is doubtful that they will respond to the demands of a plural and changing society.

The political parties, instead of becoming the crucible of ideas for the collective from their own and different points of view, have become stagnant in the dry settlement of the alleged ideologies. Simplism, if not hatred, has become their usual expression.

Political representation seems to have forgotten that the essence of politics cannot be other than to improve the life of all. I am a lawyer and I know that the law, from time immemorial, when it wanted to give clear criteria for good management, alluded to that of «like the good father of a family.»

Well, now, in the new world that will undoubtedly come after this calamity, we must insist on how to build and strengthen our city. Solidarity, creativity and participation will continue to be useful principles and criteria for the care of what is ours, of what is collective. But we cannot forget that throughout the evolution of the world those of us who have been experts in caring have been women. For this reason, given the evidence of the protagonism of the so-called feminist culture, we should say that we should take care of our cities as «mothers of families» know how to do.

Manuela Carmena

A former employment lawyer and magistrate, Manuela Carmena recently governed as mayor of Madrid from 2015 to 2019. She served as a judge for over 30 years, as well as spokesperson for Spain's General Council of the Judiciary from 1996 to 2001. She co-founded the law firm targeted in an infamous far-right terrorist attack, known as the Atocha massacre. She retired in 2010 and founded an NGO to support underprivileged collectives through local trade. She has also served as Chair-Rapporteur of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and has authored several books.

Photo_ **Augusto**_ watermelon child_ CC BY 4.0

02. LET US GIVE THE FUTURE ANOTHER CHANCE [1]

Alfredo Aguilar

Jun, 2020

When the toasts and the fireworks celebrating the arrival of 2020 were already over and the news of New Year's Day arrived, they were boringly similar to the ones of the previous days: joy and tears about Brexit depending of your personal position; fires and droughts in Australia; a Shiite militia attacking the US embassy in Iraq; demonstrations in France by the *gilet jaunes*; negotiations for a leftist coalition government in Spain; and, of course, the myriad of New Year's resolutions that were carried over and repeatedly forgotten year after year.

No one was anticipating that the world's largest catastrophic event since World War II had already started in a popular market in Wuhan. The initial news several weeks later was scarce and contradictory due to the opaque communications policy in China and the rest of the world's indifference. What followed is well known. Nevertheless, what is shocking was the initial lack of reactions and the indifference and confusion of governments and international organizations: hence the perplexity of most people across the globe.

The forced and prolonged confinement is giving us another opportunity for deep insight regarding a few basic questions that the frantic activity of the pre-pandemic times did not allow us to consider. Some basic, fundamental questions are:

Do we care about global threats and global challenges?

We are learning the hard way that threats or challenges are global. They affect the entirety of the planet, and the problems raised are beyond any individual country's ability to confront or to solve them. They require a global, coordinated effort to address them in a meaningful way. There is a consensus that the current global challenges affecting the biosphere, the ecological system integrating all living beings and their relationships with the inorganic or non-living matter, may seriously endanger our future conditions of living and of survival as a biological species. The biosphere is an extremely thin and very fragile layer, extending from a few kilometers into the atmosphere to the deep of the oceans. However, most living beings live in a layer of less than three kilometers: two above the sea level and less than one below. We can easily visualize the fragility of the biosphere if we imagine that the Earth is of the size of a watermelon 40 cm in diameter. Then, the biosphere would be about 0.1 mm thick on the surface of the watermelon, thinner than a human hair. Frightening, isn't it? Therefore, there are good reasons for all to be concerned about global threats and global challenges.

As I was saying, there is consensus in the scientific community about the nature of the global challenges that affect the biosphere and, therefore, humans. These are, namely: climate change, food security (related to, but not the same as, food quality), human demographic increase, preservation of our natural environment, including

the oceans and affordable and environmentally friendly energy. To this list we must add another element: new and emerging infectious diseases.

How do we fight global challenges and promote economic and social prosperity?

This question takes me back to my school years, where I struggled in mathematics class, trying to solve problems featuring several equations with several unknowns. With more pain than joy, I finally learnt how to solve them. However, the aforementioned question is far more difficult to answer, as it has several unknowns. What is of more concern is that we do not even know the nature of all these unknowns. Anyhow, no matter its difficulty, finding a viable solution is key to maintaining human civilization as we know it.

In most of our societies there are quite a few homeland saviors with ready-to-use recipes prepared to solve all these problems for us. The caveat behind their pompous promises is that all these solutions have repeatedly failed already, in different continents and at different times. In all cases there have been catastrophic consequences for their populations. Attempting the same approach over and over will lead again to failure. Populist approaches, whatever their political sign, will not bring us any closer to a solution, no matter their number and the noise made by populist supporters. We need to consider three elements to be able to address seriously and efficiently these challenges: [2]

1. There is a need for a holistic approach which acknowledges that natural resources, and particularly biological ones, are finite.
2. There is a physical limit to the capacity of the biosphere to produce and renew the world biomass.
3. The current economic paradigm of unlimited economic growth based on a steadily increasing production of goods is biologically unsustainable and thermodynamically false.

The forced and prolonged confinement is giving us another opportunity for deep insight regarding a few basic questions that the frantic activity of the pre-pandemic times did not allow us to consider.

Until now, efforts to address global challenges have been approached in a haphazard way. Thus, most initiatives developed to fight and to mitigate climate change have been formulated ignoring other challenges, such as the human demographic explosion or the threat of food security. While all efforts made by the United Nations (UN), its agencies and many governments and non-governmental organizations all over the world are extremely useful and must be applauded, it is evident that this sectoral approach will have limited impact should a more holistic approach not be put in place. Two new tools have been recently suggested to conceptually and operationally integrate most challenges derived from global threats; they are bioeconomy and biodiplomacy. [3][4] It is beyond the scope of this article to provide deep insight into these two concepts. However, in the current context, it is important to understand that the bioeconomy is geared to lead the transition from a linear economy, dependent on fossil fuels, to a circular and sustainable bio-based economy, able to operate within the ecological limits and to generate jobs and economic growth. On the other hand, biodiplomacy's remit lies in the critical need of having a holistic approach for the effective and enduring global management of natural resources of the planet. This approach is a departure from the current economic paradigm of a limitless increase of production, geared towards more inclusive societies, reducing waste, unnecessary production, and consumption of goods. In summary, this would lead towards a circular and sustainable bioeconomy.

We cannot prevent new pandemics, nor other global challenges such as climate change, food security and others. Notwithstanding the above, we can, and we must act now to diminish, adapt, and mitigate their impact. All global challenges are intertwined and must be addressed in an efficient way. The Club of Rome has recently published a study addressing these issues. Their main message is to build

more rational and sustainable societies by generating a new social catharsis, with new values deviating from the mirage of unlimited economic growth. [5]

How much time do we have to react?

Procrastination is the preferred attitude of many, but it may be a disaster for society and for mankind. There are always solid reasons for leaving for tomorrow what should have been done yesterday. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has tragically evidenced the consequences of delaying important decisions. I wonder where those «experts» and «visionaries» are those who now, with arrogance and an air of superiority, said that COVID-19 was nothing but severe flu, that there was nothing to worry about: that panic was more dangerous than the virus, that the mortality rate had been severely inflated and, besides, that the flu also kills hundreds of thousands every year – so why make all this fuss? At the time of their «predictions,» the infection was out of control in China and extended to other countries, and the Ro [6] was between two and three. Everyone with a minimum knowledge of microbiology knew that, by then, the epidemic was already unstoppable. All these visionaries with their crystal balls have faded away, along with their tarot cards reading the future. At that time, some governments punished the scientists and doctors that crudely described the reality and who dared to say that the «king was naked.» Other government leaders chose to surround themselves only by experts ready to provide the advice the government wanted to hear. Finally, a large majority simply did not pay any attention until it was too late. For many politicians, COVID-19 was a nuisance interfering in the «grandeur» of their actions to go down in history. At the end, globally, reactions were late, hesitant, uncoordinated, and often with contradictory initiatives with respect to other countries. When this pandemic is over, epidemiologists will be able to write an «Atlas of avoidable deaths by COVID-19,» with the hope that future leaders may be more diligent than the current ones. Compared with the so-called «Spanish flu» of 1918, science and medicine have made tremendous progress in all domains since those times. Yet, when we compare the reactions of public authorities to the pandemic then and now, one can hardly see any significant differences. [7] Hence, the relevance of the question: What is needed for our governments to be concerned and proactive, and not just reactive, to future epidemics? The science and the technology are out there, but the political eagerness and leadership to deal with the pandemic is sadly missing. These leaders are not the ones capable of addressing the complexity and the strategic thinking required to lead initiatives towards mitigating the effects of the global challenges. One must agree with Greta Thunberg when she addressed the world leaders at the UN Climate Action Summit in 2019 and rebuked: «How dare you!» while they engaged in long circumlocutions, without making any decisions on the issue of climate change.

In dealing with global threats of the biosphere, it is necessary to have on the one side a Cartesian approach, and on the other hand, an understanding that the ecosystems forming the biosphere are the sum of all its components and of the multiple interactions among them. Only with this bifocal approach will future leaders and their societies be able to address the global challenges in a meaningful way. There is no other way. History will analyze with the perspective of time how we were able to face the COVID-19 pandemic and the remaining global challenges. Let us hope that history books will mention how in the 21st century, global and effective measures were taken to avoid irreversible damages to mankind. Ensuring this is now our duty to future generations.

The world needs more science

Human history is based on a successive series of certitudes, undisputed truths, and dogmas that time, wars, or oblivion fade away regularly over the course of time. These certitudes started with the conception of the natural world, and the supposed supremacy of man over all other living and inanimate objects in the universe.

Nowadays, our knowledge of the natural world has dramatically increased. Thanks to the work of many scientists in the last few centuries, we know today that *Homo sapiens* is just one species among several millions of other species cohabitating the planet. [8] We also know that all existing living beings are descended from one unique common ancestor, the Last Universal Common Ancestor (LUCA), which originated around 4,000 million years ago. In a certain way, we can legitimately say that all living beings around us are to a certain degree our close or distant relatives.

There is a clear singularity in *Homo sapiens* when compared with the rest of living beings. It has a unique ability of developing a brain capable of abstract reasoning. Our ancestors were able to harness the fire, develop weapons to hunt animals, invent agriculture, and develop large and complex societies. Over time, humanity has reached an extraordinary understanding of the natural world, the structure and composition of the universe, the nature of life and the universality of the genetic code. Philosophers, writers and musicians, have provided mankind a legacy of compositions, pieces of theatre, novels and new abstract conceptions of the mind and of the world.

Policy makers and politicians should listen to independent panels of scientists to develop evidence-based policy decisions. Science and empirical reasoning should be further added to the curricula of schools, as science education is one of the most powerful tools to understand the world, enabling citizens to make informed decisions.

Those of us who are lucky enough to live in the developed world, do not often realize that at the beginning of the 19th century, no country had a life expectancy of more than 40 years. Nowadays, most people in the world can expect to live as long as those in the richest countries in 1950. The UN estimates a global average life expectancy of 72.6 years for 2019. Globally, life expectancy has increased more than 30 years in the last two centuries. This enormous progress in human history has been largely due to contributions from technological developments, in particular to the availability of drinking water and urban sanitation as well as scientific progress that has led to the introduction of hygienic standards, the discovery of antibiotics and the development of vaccines. This incredible progress achieved over the last two centuries should not hide the persistent global inequalities in health that we see today, and should be an encouragement to realize what is possible and doable.

Despite this amazing scientific and technological progress, there is a puzzling mystery in human evolution. Contrary to science and technology, where advances rise on the shoulders of the preceding generations of scientists and engineers, other areas such as political ideologies, economic theories, and social sciences (among others) seem to evolve in a different manner. Scientific and technological advances proceed in a linear way. Every generation built their experience on the accumulation of knowledge obtained over past generations. Thus, in the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution started with the invention of steam engines and railways run by steam locomotives, which were replaced towards the middle of the 20th century by machines powered by diesel and later by electricity. The scientific and technological advances do not go backwards. Nowadays, no one attempts to produce a commercial steam machine, or a galena radio, or travel by mule. There have been obscurantist periods in history where the prevailing power of absolutist regimes and religions banned and punished any scientific endeavor. Apart from this, science and technology, once established, are universally accepted and adopted.

It is not my intention to discuss here the applications, nor the uses or misuses, of scientific and technological advances in different periods of history. This matter merits a separate article. It is also beyond the remit of this article to address the implications of the different methodological approaches used in the natural and social sciences. This is simply to point out the amazing fact that among the educated members of our societies, no one questions, irrespective of their political ideology, religion, or country of origin: Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation, Einstein's Theory of Relativity, the structure of DNA and the universality of the genetic code, or that the «pi» (π) and «e» (e) numbers are mathematical constants.

I would like to illustrate the basic foundations of international scientific collaboration with a hypothetical example geared towards the search for a vaccine for the current pandemic. Let us consider that a Chinese scientist in Shanghai may have sequenced

the genome of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes the COVID-19 disease, and sends the sequence to a colleague in Montreal, who may look for possible unique sequences involved in human cell infection. The Canadian scientist may well communicate these results to another colleague in Heidelberg to study the proteins or peptides coded by these sequences (the idea being to identify possible hints for a potential vaccine). Again, these results with the proteins and peptides could have crossed the English Channel to a spin-off company in Cambridge to develop a variety of potential antibodies, with the idea of neutralizing the proteins or peptides coded by the virus and, hence, its pathogenicity. But this is not the end, far from it: from Cambridge, a number of samples of the developed antibodies could have been sent back to Shanghai, but also posted to New Delhi, Mexico City, Berlin, Atlanta, Saint Petersburg, Cape Town, Boston, Alexandria, Madrid, Lyon, and many other cities across the globe to test its efficacy in culture cells, animal models and, and only if the results are positive, humans in many hospitals across the world. And, again, if the results of this long chain of international scientific collaboration prove positive, the candidate vaccine goes to the main regulatory authorities: the European Medicines Agencies (EMA), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and some other regulatory agencies scattered around the world. Provided the regulatory bodies are in agreement, the vaccine would then be produced on a large scale by pharmaceutical companies. Eventually, the vaccine would be delivered to pharmacies and patients.

This is how science works. Each of these steps is complex; results need to be verified, checked again, falsified and scrutinized, following Popper's terminology, before they are published in scientific journals following strict peer review systems. The entire scientific process is painstaking, often viewed by politicians and some societal sectors as slow and with uncertainties. However, history shows that those countries that have steadily invested more in science and in technology have higher standards of living, health, education, and democracy than those that choose not to do so. Sometimes, the political establishment in power have tried to repress or to bend the science and the scientists that contradict their ideology. This often has catastrophic consequences, not only for scientists, but also for societies at large. In science there are no shortcuts, nor absolute certitudes, but gradual and steady advances in the world of the unknown. Scientific progress is based on the veracity and reproducibility of results. Once scientific results are published in academic journals, they form part of the common human heritage.

Policy makers and politicians should listen to independent panels of scientists to develop evidence-based policy decisions. Science and empirical reasoning should be further added to the curricula of schools, as science education is one of the most powerful tools to understand the world, enabling citizens to make informed decisions.

Is the bottle half full or half empty?

There are several examples of human endeavors that have spanned beyond the lifespan of humans themselves. City walls, castles and cathedrals are the most familiar examples. But besides these, human nature wants a work to be completed as soon as possible, once conceived and started. This is particularly true of politicians, whose horizons, with some exceptions, do not go beyond their term of office. Long-term planning is one of the most outstanding characteristics not only of politicians, but also of humans in general. Biological species have extremely limited capability to learn from past experiences and plan accordingly. *Homo sapiens* have developed an extraordinary intellect, able to conceive awesome musical compositions, complex philosophical and mathematical concepts, and even abstruse physical theories, but they have not advanced much in developing what psychologist Martin Seligman has termed *Homo prospectus*. Paradoxically, the fact is that humans are extremely poor at long-range planning. Our notorious inability as a species to significantly affect the long-term is blatantly evident. There are man-made crises of population

growth or climate change, not to mention the wars and crises that result. The reason we are so poor at long-range planning might well lie in the relatively short time of our evolution as a human species. In purely biological terms, long-term planning is not one of the main drivers of human evolution. However, due to the threat of global challenges, such as a new pandemic, climate change, food security, population increase, water scarcity, preservation of natural ecosystems, ecological limits of the biosphere, and availability of cheap and clean energy, among others, our survival as a species largely depends on developing globally accepted strategies that are conceptually evolutionary, geared at dealing with these challenges and that those future generations might confront.

Recent history has shown that, despite our apparent lack of proficiency in developing long-term planning as a biological species, when there is a widely and commonly agreed will, such efforts result in tremendous rewards. I will explain this with three examples:

Global or regional institutions, such as the United Nations, their agencies, the European Union and others, should develop a number of «bio-diplomatic missions» on health, agriculture, food security and climate change, geared to develop and act in the interests of the human population overall; they should not be undone by legitimate, yet narrow interests of any single national or regional priority.

The first one is the **complete eradication of smallpox**, which is considered the greatest achievement in international public health. The endeavor started in 1959, when the World Health Organization (WHO) initiated a plan to rid the world of smallpox. Unfortunately, this global eradication campaign suffered from lack of funds, personnel, and commitment from countries, as well as a shortage of vaccine donations. The Intensified Eradication Program began in 1967 with a promise of renewed efforts. This time, laboratories in many countries where smallpox outbursts occurred regularly were able to produce more, higher quality freeze-dried vaccines. Several other factors also played a critical role in the success of the intensified efforts, such as the establishment of a surveillance system to detect and investigate cases, mass vaccination campaigns, and finally, political support. The Program made steady progress toward ridding the world of this disease, and by 1971 smallpox was eradicated from South America, followed by Asia (1975), and finally Africa (1977). In 1980, the 33rd World Health Assembly officially declared the world free of this disease. Smallpox has been so far the only human disease ever eradicated.

The second success story, still unfinished, is **the polio eradication program** initiated by the World Health Organization in 1988, which has also been one of the greatest success stories in global health. The vaccine has reduced polio incidence by 99.9%. More than 16 million people have been saved from paralysis or death thanks to vaccination efforts. At its peak in the middle of the 20th century, polio killed half a million people every year, primarily children. In 1988, there were more than 125 polio-endemic countries. Now there are only three: Nigeria, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, where ongoing political conflicts have made eradication efforts difficult. One part of the problem is indeed, a political one; the second part, however, is scientific. The complete banishment of polio requires the enhancement of the existing oral vaccine, as in very few cases, the current oral vaccine «reverts» and triggers the disease instead of protecting against it. The Polio Eradication Initiative is the largest-ever internationally coordinated public health effort in history, and is led by national governments with five partners: WHO, Rotary International, the U.S. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), UNICEF and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, demonstrating positive synergistic collaboration between governments, public institutions and private initiatives. This is a clear-cut example of the need for science, political will and global initiatives to go hand in hand, supporting each other in order to achieve global endeavors.

The last example of a success story is the **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs) of the UN, which were set up in 2000 to shape a broad vision to fight poverty, particularly in developing countries. That vision remained the overarching development framework for the world until 2015. The end of the MDGs period was one of the few occasions in the last years that mankind has had a good reason to celebrate. Thanks to concerted global, regional, national, and local efforts, the MDGs have saved the lives of millions and improved living conditions for many more. The results demonstrate that, with targeted interventions, sound strategies, strong

Photo_ **woodleywonderworks**_ Science on a Sphere_ CC BY 4.0

and close collaborations between science and health carers, adequate resources, and political will, even the poorest countries can make dramatic and unprecedented progress. The MDGs have demonstrated uneven achievements and shortfalls in some areas, but we know now that even gigantic tasks like the ones just mentioned can be a success if there is a will, clear objectives, and measurable targets.

Global or regional institutions, such as the United Nations, their agencies, the European Union and others, should develop a number of «bio-diplomatic missions» on health, agriculture, food security and climate change, geared to develop and act in the interests of the human population overall; they should not be undone by legitimate, yet narrow interests of any single national or regional priority.

Will we learn or will we continue to conduct business as usual?

Pandemics brutally remind us that whatever social, political, religious or economic differences we may have, we are a single biological species: *Homo sapiens*. However, one sometimes wonders whether the name of the species *sapiens* was the most appropriate one. Wars throughout history, political and religious persecutions, dictatorships of different color, nazism, fascism and communism have provoked at least as many deaths as all pandemics throughout history. In the 20th century, mankind had created international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, and many others to discuss and prevent armed conflicts. With all their limitations, these organizations have repeatedly proved their efficacy and their utility. We cannot completely prevent the emergence or the impact of future pandemics. Notwithstanding, with long-term, forward thinking and planning, we could largely diminish the emergence of new ones and, above all, mitigate their deleterious effects. We have the science and technology to address and to confront such threats. What is needed is political will and long-term vision beyond the boundaries of political parties or terms of office.

The scenario enacted by most leaders of the world in this pandemic crisis has been appalling. Societies need empowered citizens rather than centralized political control. Citizens should feel they are part of the solution, and their increasing participation in policy decisions should be promoted and encouraged. This can only be obtained with highly developed democracies, with empowered citizens and visionary leaders able to combine short-term tactics with long-term strategies. Social insight and catharsis are desperately needed to examine the factors that have led to this situation, but there is no point in a social «self-flagellation.» It is important to remember, once again, that an imperfect democratic society is always preferable to an efficient dictatorship. The times of such dictatorships or the modern version of «paternalistic governments» are over. What is needed, again, is that the job of a politician is understood as one of a civil servant, and that it becomes a desirable and socially recognized profession. For that, we need to bring to the attention of policy makers that political decisions, along with consideration of other elements, must be based on evidence-based science. Governments should not be tempted to twist or bias scientific advice. In turn, scientists should be required to provide scientific advice to governments or policymakers that reflects on the consensus of scientific knowledge at that moment, indicating all possible uncertainties, and including different options and their putative consequences, whenever this is feasible.

It is striking how children are required to study historic dates of wars, and names of forgotten kings or obscure political rulers. However, they are hardly taught anything about pandemics or «global epidemics,» the current terminology preferred by WHO. They are not told about the most recent ones: SARS [9] and MERS, [10] nor about the «big ones»: the so-called Spanish Flu that took place from 1918 to 1920, killing 20 to 100 million, or the Black Death, also known as «The Plague,» which reportedly killed between 75 and 200 million people between 1331 and 1353.

It is very evident that societies and politicians never forgot the lessons from past epidemics, due to the simple reason that they never learnt them in the first place. A post-pandemic society needs to abandon the current illusion and comfort of certitudes. There are not certitudes in social life, nor in science. History shows that science, and therefore society, progresses when it departs from trodden paths. A lack of initiative and imagination, added to a fear of intellectual challenges and an accommodative position, have led us to where we are now. The need for change will not come from political systems, which on many occasions have proven to be a failure. People with new ideas, particularly young people willing to set new bearings in our societies, must be given the chance to forge unbeaten paths and set new bearings. The future also belongs to them.

It is indispensable to trigger broad social dialogues in order to agree on a new basis for the relocation of production chains, and to agree on a fair balance between an autarchic and a globalized society.

The end of political dogmas: «The age of certitudes is over» [11]

Certitudes provide comfort, assurance, and the positive feeling of belonging to a group surrounded by like-minded people. Doubts, incertitude, and questions generate uneasiness, mistrust and fear. Politicians love certitudes. Regardless of whether they are based on solid ground, or are just wishful thinking, certitudes are the common language of politicians, irrespective of their political spectrum. Even when Winston Churchill became Prime Minister in 1940 and said, «I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat,» he was providing a certitude that sadly proved itself right, although he was also showing unparalleled leadership and charisma. On the contrary, doubts, prudence and caution are the way scientists achieve their results, because they know that no matter how solid scientific results may be, they are all provisional until a new theory, data or hypothesis generates new results on which is built science progress from generation to generation.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, society has behaved passively, acting as perplexed spectators in the ongoing cacophony between these two different ways of thinking and communicating. The difference is seemingly small, but it has profound implications: Scientists are people that love studying nature. They know a lot about a small territory of knowledge. They know that despite how much they know, there is much more that they themselves do not know, but which they know others know. However, the most important difference is that scientists are very prudent by nature, because they know that there is a huge universe of knowledge that they not only do not know, but also, they know that nobody knows. Hence, their prudence in arriving at assertions. On the contrary, politicians know few things and defend them with profound assertiveness. Depending on their political orientation, politicians know different things that, nevertheless, are defended with equal enthusiasm as their political adversaries do with the opposite. But they share one feature in common: what they know constitutes their universe of knowledge and certitude. They know that there are many things that they do not know, but most of them refuse categorically to know what they do not know, in case the new knowledge could wobble the foundations of their ideas and convictions. Doubt is a mortal sin for a politician. However, if accompanied by a rational approach, doubts may save a society.

Defending and fighting against COVID-19

It is hard to believe that man set foot on the moon more than 50 years ago, and despite that, our strategies today to defend ourselves from viral infections have hardly changed. Luckily, the situation with bacterial infections has experienced terrific progress, thanks to the discovery of a large number of antibiotics. This progress is

shadowed by the steady increase of antibiotic resistance in many bacterial strains generated by the massive use and, often, abuse of antibiotics. Despite the fact that bacteria and viruses are both microscopic, the differences are humongous: bacteria are autonomous organisms, capable of replicating themselves, whilst viruses are necessarily parasitic. They need another organism (bacteria, plant, animal or human cell) to hijack the host cell mechanisms, to be able to replicate and propagate. To give a rough idea of the size of the tiny dimension of a virus, I would like to note that the size of a blood cell ranges from 6 to 8 μm, [12] while the lower limit of vision of human sight is about 0.1 mm. A bacterium ranges from 1to5 μm, and the smallpox virus, one of the largest, between 250 and 400 nm. SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, has a size of 0.125 μm or 125 nm in diameter. Roughly, a human blood cell is about 50 times bigger than the COVID-19 virus. It may seem counterintuitive, but viruses, despite their tiny size, are terribly difficult to combat, and the main reason lies in their molecular simplicity and their frequent high mutation rate. It is exceedingly difficult to find molecular targets specific for the virus not found in humans. Like in any armed conflict, in the combat against COVID-19, what is needed are parallel strategies of defense and of attack.

The first line of defense is obviously to minimize exposure to the virus. This has failed catastrophically with COVID-19. Not only has the barrier between bats (which seem the natural reservoir of the virus) and humans been broken in the Wuhan market. but it has also extended all over the world, with currently over five million people infected, and over three hundred thousand deaths.

The second line of defence is to prevent the virus from entering in contact with human mucous membranes. For that purpose, skin is a good barrier. Implementing certain basic hygiene practices, and wearing masks, may also contribute in diminishing the transmission rate. However, once a small droplet of saliva from an infected person enters into contact with nose mucosa or the mouth of another person, there is a pretty good chance that this person becomes infected and contagious (albeit a significant proportion of 25% – 50% of the infected cases are asymptomatic or with mild symptoms).

It is indispensable to trigger broad social dialogues in order to agree on a new basis for the relocation of production chains, and to agree on a fair balance between an autarchic and a globalized society.

When an infected person needs medical care, doctors decide the specific protocol to follow, depending on age, pre-existing medical conditions, prognosis, evolution of the disease, etc. Concerning how to combat the virus itself, doctors have two main options: on the one hand, antiviruses, or medicines aimed to kill or to stop the propagation of the virus like antibiotics do with bacteria; [13] on the other hand, there are vaccines. Some critically ill patients could receive infusions of antibody-rich plasma from other patients who have had the disease and recovered. The concept is an old one, and it is called «passive antibody therapy,» because antibody-rich plasma is transferred from someone who has successfully recovered from an infection, to a patient suffering from the same disease. This technique was extensively used in the pre-antibiotics era.

When the defense becomes an attack [14]

a. The search for new antivirals

COVID-19 is a new disease. In the absence of a vaccine, doctors confronted with patients affected by COVID-19 are using the therapeutic arsenal available to combat the related virus. The most important ones are antiviruses. They are the equivalent for viruses that antibiotics are for bacterial infections. However, the number of antiviruses and their specificity and efficacy are significantly lower than their equivalent antibiotics. Also, some of them may have serious secondary effects. In the absence of a vaccine, however, they are the first ammunition to fight COVID-19. The most frequently used antiviruses at the beginning of the pandemic included: Remdesivir, a drug that was developed to block infection with related coronaviruses

and even Ebola; and Lopinavir/ritonavir, a drug combination used against viruses like HIV. These antivirals act by blocking key viral proteins called «proteases.» Chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine are currently used to treat malaria and the autoimmune disease lupus. They also seem to block viruses from entering cells, and as such prevent infection.

The medical literature indicates that the panoply of existing antiviruses is limited in fighting the virus. However, in many cases they allow for gaining time, and prevent or diminish the severity of infections. Laboratories all over the world are in a race to develop new, more efficient, and more specific antiviruses than current ones. In the meantime, at least 27 clinical trials of different antivirus treatments are now underway. It is important to note that antiviruses are given to patients infected when the viruses are still present in the body of the affected person. To protect a population against future infections of the virus, the answer is a vaccine.

b. The race for a vaccine

It is beyond the remit of this article to outline the process of vaccine development. In an earlier section of this article, I have presented a hypothetical example of the complexity and multistep processes necessary in the search for a vaccine. Here, I just present an outline of current efforts aimed at the development of a successful vaccine against COVID-19.

Soon after the first epidemic cases were observed in China and nearby countries, a race began to develop a vaccine, well before the epidemic became a pandemic. The amount of background knowledge is immense. Therefore, it is critically important to have a steady support of basic and mission-oriented research. This has allowed for the WHO to develop 8 candidate vaccines in clinical trials and another 110 in preclinical evaluations by 15 May 2020. [15] This unprecedented, terrific speed in the search for new vaccines did not happen by chance, but thanks to the huge accumulation of scientific results from previous epidemics (SARS, avian flu, MERS, Ebola, seasonal flu and AIDS, among others), and by the steady efforts of a large community of scientists working in different laboratories across the world. Some of the current approaches being used to develop a vaccine against COVID-19 are based on similar strategies that worked against the SARS outbreak from 2002 to 2004. It is interesting to note that SARS-CoV-2 and SARS share 79% of their genomes; this similarity is misleading, however, as the human genome shares 99% similarity to that of chimpanzees, our closest living relatives, and 98% with gorillas. Among humans, the similarity is 99.9%. Yet, it is the unique DNA, its expression, and its interactions with the environment, the epigenetic, which establishes the difference between individuals and between species. As a consequence, a word of caution and prudence is needed regarding sensationalist news that announces a vaccine being developed in an unrealistically short time. As I said before, there are no shortcuts in science.

Often, the problem with science is a lack of funds that prevents progress, although on certain occasions, the problem is intrinsic to the nature of the object of study. Let us illustrate this with concrete examples in vaccine developments.

Smallpox and polio vaccines, just to mention these two, have saved the lives of millions of people. It has been estimated that since the year 2000, vaccines have saved more than 20 million people, prevented 500 million infections, and saved 350 billion U.S. dollars. Perhaps these figures will cause us to have a different perspective the next time we cross paths with a doctor, a nurse, or a scientist. Not everything is rosy, however. It is well documented that 32 million people have died from AIDS-related illnesses since the start of the epidemic. Notwithstanding, the number of deaths has been significantly reduced, thanks to access to antiretroviral therapy. Sadly, despite colossal intellectual, economic, and logistical efforts, there is still not a vaccine, and there may never be. Malaria presents a similar situation, with 219 million cases of malaria per year, and nearly half a million deaths yearly. So far, there is not a reliable

and efficient vaccine. In both cases, the reasons are different, but lie in the molecular biology of the infective agent. In these two cases, current approaches include prevention: antivirals in the case of AIDS, and antiparasitics in the case of malaria.

We do not yet know the outcome of the current race for a vaccine against COVID-19, but in spite of the criticisms that efforts have not been united in the search for a single vaccine model, the approach of «multiple working hypothesis» seems advisable on this occasion, as it is unlikely that placing more funds or manpower into just one model would increase the chances of success. Many of those candidate vaccines will succumb during this race. The critical thing is that there will be at least one candidate vaccine that arrives at the finish line. Then, a global effort will be needed to produce billions of doses of this vaccine. The challenges are monumental, and of an unprecedented nature. This will not be achieved without a new attitude enhancing the synergies between scientists, health professionals, policy makers, social and economic actors, and joint public and private initiatives. No one should be discarded due to old-fashioned prejudices. The coming months and the coming years will be decisive in understanding what our chances are in allowing for a better future.

Concluding remarks [16]

If one must project the future based on the experience of the recent past, then, the History of the 20th century leaves us with mixed feelings: We remember with horror the two World Wars and many more regional wars scattered all over the planet and of the Century, the rise of military pushes and dictatorships in Latin America, Africa and Asia. But also, we welcomed the consolidation of old democracies as well as the rapid increase of incipient ones in many countries, following military regimes. We have also been witnessing the dramatic increase of the standards of living in many countries but concomitantly, increase of the inequalities between different regions of the globe. Science and technologies have made major breakthroughs saving the lives of hundreds of millions and enhancing the life of billions of people. Nevertheless, our duty in the 21st Century is to pay more attention to ensure more inclusive societies leaving no one behind of the benefits of science, health, and technology.

There are two characteristics of mankind that allow us to look at the future with a moderate optimism. They are innovation and resilience. Thanks to innovation, humans have been able to build our civilization and our societies and thanks to resilience, they have had eagerness and courage to recover from periodic and catastrophic events. I am convinced that we as humans will recover from this pandemic. The human and economic losses will be colossal, but we will be able to rise from this crisis. It may take years, perhaps a decade or more. But we shall overcome this pandemic as species. Hopefully, humbler, accepting that we do not have all the responses and with a new globally accepted social deal acknowledging that global threats require global solutions.

My hesitations come on whether we would be able to learn something from this experience. If we have been taken totally unprepared, uncoordinated and with late responses in a devastating pandemic, how we are going to react towards the already existing global threats to our planet? My hopes for a rational, coordinated, and decisive actions on the current political class is far less than mitigated. My hopes lie mostly on the young people. On their audacity and innovative approaches to find their own bearing in the remaining of the 21st Century, navigating by uncharted scientific, socio-political, and economic territories. Nothing is guaranteed in this journey. New paradigms are needed. There is no such a thing as returning to «business as usual». When I try to imagine the kind of responses that they would develop to challenge the new pandemics to come and to the increasingly threatening Global Challenges, my thoughts go with Bob Dylan in his song «Blowin' in the wind»:

«The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind. The answer is blowin' in the wind.»

[1] *To Lucía and Irene, they are part of the future*

[2] Aguilar A. & Patermann, C. (2020, in press). Biodiplomacy, the new frontier for bioeconomy. *New Biotechnology*.

[3] Aguilar, A., Twardowski, T. & Wohlgemuth, R. (2019). Bioeconomy for sustainable development. *Biotechnology Journal*. 1800638. DOI: 10.1002/biot.201800638.

[4] Aguilar, A. (2018). Bioeconomía y sociedad [Bioeconomy and society]. In Aguilar, A., Ramón, D. & Egea F.J. (Eds.). (Vol. 31, pp. 15-36): *Mediterráneo económico*. Cajamar.

[5] Ulrich von Weizsäker, E., Wijkman, A. (2018). *Capitalism, short-termism, Population and the Destruction of the Planet*. Club of Rome. Springer.

[6] R0 is the number of cases, on average, an infected person will cause during their infectious period. if R0 is less than 1, the disease will die out in a population, because on average an infectious person will transmit to fewer than one other susceptible person. If R0 is greater than 1, the disease will spread.

[7] Spinney, L. (2017). *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World*. Jonathan Cape.

[8] It is estimated that the number of Earth's current species range from 2 million to 2 billion of which about 1.74 million have been scientifically reported and over 80% percent have not yet been described. Of those, most of them are bacteria, viruses, and other microscopic living beings. More than 99% of all species that ever lived on Earth are estimated to be extinct.

[9] Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

[10] Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

[11] Statement pronounced at the last Octagon meeting «The era of (in)security: urgent matters and self-defeating prophecies.» Madrid, 22-24 November 2019. https://commonactionforum.net/octagon2019/

[12] 1 millimeter (mm) = 1000 micrometers (μm) = 1000 000, or 10^6 nanometers (nm)

[13] It is important to remember that antibiotics are not effective against viruses and should not be used in viral infections unless prescribed by a medical doctor to treat a simultaneous bacterial infection or as a prophylactic measure in certain medical conditions. Antibiotics and antivirals should not be used without the formal prescription of a medical doctor.

[14] This section aims to provide the reader with a succinct overview of some of the therapeutic approaches being used by the medical profession against COVID-19. It does not pretend to be exhaustive or up to date. This information does not replace the professional advice of a qualified medical doctor and is included to provide the reader with a taste of the huge difficulties that doctors are confronted with in dealing with a new disease such as COVID-19.

[15] World Health Organization. Draft landscape of COVID-19 candidate vaccines. https://www.who.int/who-documents-detail/draft-landscape-of-covid-19-candidate-vaccines

[16] I would like to thank Rosario Peláez López, Dr. Diana Aguilar Peláez (M.D.), Dr. Vanessa Campo Ruiz (M.D.) and Dr. Eduardo Aguilar Peláez for their advice, fruitful discussions, and critical reading of the manuscript.

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Photo_ **ResoluteSupportMedia**_ Refugees_ CC BY 4.0

03. THE POST COVID-19 CHALLENGE: A SIMPLE RESET OR A REAL CHANGE?

Herta Däubler-Gmelin

Jun, 2020

In the recent months of the COVID-19 crisis, many circumstances and expectations led to demands and action. However, governments have very simply and quickly returned to pre-COVID-19 policies and plans: the little change that took place is being reversed, and the very real weaknesses and gaps in public policy that were so glaringly evident during times of crises are already receding to a forgotten background.

On the other hand, citizens are increasingly demanding just the opposite of regression, calling for a further combination of innovation and improvement that would lead to a more sustainable society and political changes. They recognize that the crisis has shed a very clear light on the failings, weaknesses, injustice and harm in both local communities, as well as regional, domestic, and global cooperation.

As we continue to remain amidst the COVID-19 crisis, many of these demands still have the opportunity to ride on the current momentum. Some of them may change. And although the crisis is far from over, we can observe that many democratic governments have proven they are not categorically weaker or less efficient than authoritarian governments in responding to challenges. In principle, they are quite capable of acting quickly and efficiently, and, most importantly, are supported by civil societies and parliaments. Meanwhile, some more authoritarian governments have performed worse during this crisis, or even failed, in spite of their potential to issue and fulfill orders without delay. The potential of democratic governments is a key theme throughout the following insights.

The implementation of the first measures against the disease in Germany

As a Central European German, I was most impressed by the COVID-19 shockwave and some of its outcomes in our region. It brought a sudden end to our quotidien lives, and rattled the feeling of security and control of our lives to which we felt entitled. In pre-COVID-19 times we felt that grave diseases or unknown viruses could be quickly counteracted, or at least cushioned, by a strong health service, qualified scientists, and the existence of a powerful and efficient welfare system, as had worked before with public health crises including HIV and Ebola. COVID-19 proved to us that this was a false security, as the virus demonstrated that public health considerations were not only a threat to vulnerable populations living in far away, disadvantaged and underdeveloped regions, but could extend to the entire globe, with wealthy and secure Europeans included.

The shock caused by this revelation has led to many interesting developments: neighbors looked out for their neighbors, especially attentive to the vulnerability of the elderly, and made themselves readily available to help. Another especially unusual

occurrence in our democracies included how parliaments and politicians, often mistrusted, acted with unusual speed and received unheard of support from media and civil society. [1]

In Germany, a highly federalist country with very self reliant, autonomous regional states, this type of behavior is even more rare. These states all united together quickly to adapt to fairly constrictive federal emergency rules recommended by scientists to contain the infection: social distancing and a nearly total shutdown of schools and kindergartens, cultural events such as operas and theaters, businesses and special measures for public transport. Of course, compared to some other European countries, these activities were less restrictive than they could have been. Nevertheless, they touched upon the scope of several constitutionally guaranteed civil rights. In spite of the potential constitutional debate and implications, support for these emergency measures remained strong for weeks, although was of course influenced by additional and very expensive financial benefits that came along with these restrictions.

Accommodating the shock into a new everyday life

Many democratic governments have proven they are not categorically weaker or less efficient than authoritarian governments in responding to challenges. In principle, they are quite capable of acting quickly and efficiently, and, most importantly, are supported by civil societies and parliaments.

In looking at infection numbers, death toll, social and economic damage, this way of containing the COVID-19 crisis via new measures, engaging the participation and support of civil society, proved rather successful. It could in fact be described as more successful than in most of our neighboring countries, and even at least as successful as in authoritarian systems, in spite of their claiming to be more efficient in governing than in «Western democracies.»

As we enter into Phase 2 of eliminating crisis measures, most of the restrictions have been lifted, except for those of keeping distance and wearing protective masks. According to our federal system, each regional state was given the discretion to apply their own specific measures. While the central government worked closely with individual states in providing support and encouraging collaboration, the individual regions autonomously decided upon entering into Phase 2 and lifting restrictions on citizens rights and businesses. As such, the process of lifting the measures came about more quickly and was sometimes more efficient than in more centralized democracies like France, Spain or the United Kingdom.

Interestingly, during this stage, the unusual unanimous support for parliaments, parties and civil society quickly dwindled away. Conspiracy theories arose as the catastrophic scenes of Madrid or Lombardi did not happen, and many protests against the restrictions were initiated: some of the protesters denied the danger of COVID-19 entirely, but most of them focused on the costs that were entailed in containing the first wave of COVID-19. They especially highlighted the growing social divide, the lamentable isolation of many of the elderly in quarantined retirement homes and the neglect of children's rights, in that they were deprived of education via the closing of schools and kindergartens.

Added to this, of course, were protests and complaints due to economic suffering, as millions of workers were affected, often facing unemployment, and both individuals and businesses faced mounting debt. There were criticisms as to the failure of European cooperation and solidarity, as most EU Member States acted only in accordance with their respective national interests. This and closing the previously border-free movement contradicted the transnational character of COVID-19. The rights of EU citizens were suppressed, and millions of those who daily commuted across borders were affected. European values were jeopardized, in addition to the damage inflicted on the European economy.

Cooperation and solidarity equally failed migrants and refugees in the camps of Greece, Italy, the Middle East, Turkey and Yemen. Already vulnerable, these groups did not receive nearly enough protection and support. In many cases, they faced

restrictions or bans on movement, and were stigmatized as potential carriers of the virus by unfounded accusations, in large part due to an increasingly pervasive climate of xenophobia and scapegoating. Moreover, Asian and African countries, dependent on supplying industrialized countries as part of the current globalized system, were left on their own not only to deal with the virus, but also in facing mounting unemployment and poverty.

Five conclusions for a future of cooperation and sustainability

Given the above considerations, we must reflect on what needs to change in post COVID-19 times if we want to preserve the current momentum, and to contribute to an acceptable state of democracy and sustainability; we must continue to fight for the opportunities and rights of peoples and societies throughout the world. In light of this, I can draw at least five conclusions we can contemplate in moving forward:

1. Immediate change is necessary and possible

In many of the lengthy discussions as to how to overcome the climate crisis, democratic governments often argued that they needed more time, and were unable to act swiftly given the potential economic damage that might result. As we have learned during the current crisis, time is running out, and we in fact must act with this supposedly impossible urgency.

We know it is possible, given the quick measures we have recently taken. In order to impede further damage and to provide for the possibility of a sustainable, green economy, we must bring to a halt the overexploiting of global resources. It is now more necessary than ever to provide for a cradle to cradle economy [2], as time runs out. Our respective governments have acted in light of COVID-19, what proves that far-reaching solutions are indeed possible, if the threat appears to be urgent enough. This resounds with the clear consequences that the climate crisis presents; we must restructure our management of this crisis and understand it as an utmost priority.

2. Democracies are strong: civil society makes the difference

As previously mentioned, authoritarian governments have not proven to be either better, or more efficient. Purportedly, they face less restrictions in issuing orders, in comparison with democracies governed by rule of law, which have to incorporate civil society, legislatures and independent judiciaries. However, democracies arguably have important advantages: they receive more creative support from scientists and civil society, which is vital in handling a crisis. By comparison, China lost valuable weeks in fighting the virus, when instead addressing it as an imminent threat, they allowed the circulation of damaging rumors and unjustly prosecuting doctors that called for taking the threat seriously. Restricting free speech only to topics that are advantageous to the ruling structure is characteristic of authoritarian governments. This style of rule tends to impede the necessary transfer of unpopular news to high level decision makers, as lower officials fear their response and possible retribution and blame.

At the same time, in a paradoxical manner, even among our democratic regimes, emergency measures sometimes resemble a dangerous infringement on human rights. During this crisis, we have witnessed valiant efforts by civil society, with creative solutions and innovation in confronting challenges. Combined with these efforts, we must demand transparency and accountability from our governments. That is why strengthening democratic institutions and civil society is necessary.

Emergency measures sometimes resemble a dangerous infringement on human rights. During this crisis, we have witnessed valiant efforts by civil society, with creative solutions and innovation in confronting challenges.

3. With globalization, change is vital

It is equally important during this time to change our benchmarks, given the predominant economic globalization dominated by the big business interests. A system focused only on serving such interests leads to a deepening global divide, and neglects human rights and opportunities for peoples all over the world. As a result, we must remodel, renew and strengthen regional and global institutions, which requires cooperation at all levels. Additionally, we have to understand and mitigate or even remedy the harmful consequences of globalization, those which lead to the overexploitation of natural resources as a result of destroying more and more natural reserves in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These destructive patterns consequently contribute to the climate crisis, armed conflicts and to increasing migration flows, perhaps even adding to the possible epidemics and unknown illnesses that affect all populations.

4. More cooperation is needed

In Europe, Member States must focus on improved cooperation, not only in light of the current crisis, but also given the various challenges that the group faces. Recent decisions as to common EU funding directed towards supporting individuals, institutions and damaged economies might be a beginning; however, it must be followed by clear and efficient steps.

From a global perspective, it is clear that the unilateral decisions that have been pursued by certain countries during this crisis are not aligned with the spirit of urgent solidarity, and in fact works as a counterbalance to progress.

5. Bridging the divide in our society

Finally, we observed the COVID-19 crisis deepening the gap in society: the poor and weak became poorer and weaker. Most affected were migrants, single mothers, elderly people in pensions homes and homeless people. The most vulnerable in our societies, clearly facing insecurity and precarious situations, are threatened by even further insecurity and instability. The few social protections that they enjoy are put into a harsh focus.

On the other hand, a lot of people with stable jobs and a good income were barely affected at all. This has occurred in other societal crises, including health, economic and climate crises. Each time our societies face challenges, the gap between the vulnerable and the elite is brought to light, and becomes further entrenched. As we have witnessed in this crisis, we are capable of immediate action. We must ensure that rather than reactionary measures, we strive to incorporate fairness in addressing and structuring a post-pandemic society.

Herta Däubler-Gmelin

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[1] During the first weeks of the crisis, scientific institutions and experts such as the Robert Koch-institute, the Johns Hopkins University or the virologist Christian Drosten, became protagonists not only as advisors for public policy, but also reference for the public opinion.

[2] Like the one proposed by Michael Braungart and William McDonough, or other adepts of the circular economy, for an industrial revolution committed to ecology.

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Photo_ **Tony Vacas**_ Albergue Warnes

04. SOCIOEMOTIONAL WELLBEING: A REVISITED APPROACH [1]

Alfonso Zegbe

Jun, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has progressed rapidly, changing the world and the way we interact. It is triggering traumatic processes globally, and revealing profound structural failures in leadership, public institutions and societal forms of organization. It is also producing a *new normal* that affects, in a very asymmetric way, urban and rural communities, regardless of the countries' rates of development.

In a short period, the fragility of human beings became the center of a collective mood. The uncertainty of this new disease has challenged the agri-food industry, health systems incapable of offering universal care, public transportation and supply systems, as well as the economy, in a widespread manner. It has produced the worst effects among the most vulnerable people: the elderly, people with health deficiencies, ethnic minorities, migrants, asylum seekers, disadvantaged neighborhoods, unaccompanied minors and the disabled. We are now accustomed to quarantine as a strategy to manage risk, but the confinement also demonstrates further endemic problems including hate crimes, child abuse, and sexual and gender-based violence.

The limits of public institutions and private sectors can now be pushed towards new consensus, bridges, and proposals. Institutions should regain integrity in order to incentivize cooperation among people and inspire a sense of dignity, safety and security. They are legitimate actors to encourage interactions, strengthen the sense of community, develop emotional support networks and promote solidarity. Traditional leadership must make way for leadership with a transversal approach to design, implement, evaluate and adjust public policies that would carry out inclusive participatory processes oriented toward overall wellbeing.

Although the existing scenario of multilateral cooperation has left little room to evoke the social idealism of Thomas More, Henri de Saint-Simon or Robert Owen, and even less for the utopian perspective of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, can we not use this pandemic as an opportunity to rethink governance, and work toward a wellbeing utopia for all citizens? We have an opportunity to create frameworks for public policies and to orient stakeholders based on three criteria: a) the socioemotional aspects of individuals; b) the social dynamics of interdependence and collective interactions; and c) the promotion of trust, empathy, solidarity, equality and inclusion.

A restructuring of geopolitics and public diplomacy strategies goes hand in hand with how countries manage this new global situation. In these efforts, all actors must remain attentive to, and prioritize, the wellbeing of their communities.

A comprehensive institutional approach to wellbeing

Throughout the new normal, we are witnessing that improved measures can be achieved only if different fields and levels of the administrations work together for the public interest. We propose that fostering social wellbeing as a central aspect of public policies can generate collaborative dynamics among different levels of decision makers. Key objectives of this strategy include the reinforcement of global, regional and national decisions, to positively impact citizens and communities, and for them to have the proper channels to participation in policymaking.

Since the last century, political actors have had tools at their disposal to measure public opinion and to influence levels of fear or joy, but little was done to incorporate emotions as part of government effectiveness. Apart from some short-term management, there is still a lack of policy research on emotions and their role in encouraging responsible and participatory citizenship.

Citizenship cannot be separated from social positions, relationships, sense of belonging and other elements that influence individual experiences. This kind of approach means permanent negotiation within local contexts, and dialogue with socioemotional sensitivity, connecting all actors in the community. It is valuable to build bridges among diverse groups, and as such to identify what is needed in public policies.

For example, each social policy initiative should consider the relevance of a full range of economic, personal and sociocultural factors that influence individuals' potential wellbeing: income; subjective characteristics; socially developed traits; how we decide to spend our time; hobbies, entertainment, attitudes and beliefs towards self/others/life; relationships; and the wider economic, social and political environment. [2]

Good governance should seek to understand what makes a determined program work, why it is successful or unsuccessful, how to communicate results, and how it can be improved. Indeed, efforts to improve policy research require building systems that work to embed key normative principles regarding their utilization into policy processes that promote the good *governance of evidence*.

Sensitive leadership is also required to develop a wellbeing public policy. Such leadership not only recognizes problems and openly discusses possible solutions, but also engages in an «in house» debate among counterparts within government bodies, according to each country's legal system.

This is a complex task, though by diversifying it with different types of analysis, whether of institutions, social policies, gender or political economy, a more comprehensive understanding of complex realities can result. At the end, it is a matter of promoting real democracy in the existing institutional apparatus. Deep trust in democracy demands coordination, transparency, justice, accountability, participation and solidarity.

Wellbeing should be the epicenter of a new public policy approach: it should be incorporated into key legal frameworks, have a cross-cutting nature in national budget allocations, and incorporate regional and local similarities and common objectives, while simultaneously respecting differences. People are happier when social cohesion is established, when they possess sufficient preparation to make key decisions, when they have the possibility to dedicate their time with and for others in whom they place trust, and when they feel a sense of belonging in their communities and countries, or share cosmopolitan values that celebrate otherness.

Revisiting the approach to social rights

And so, we understand that society and its wellbeing should be the center of cross-cutting and comprehensive public policies. This invites a reflection on the current public policy approach and the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to outline some proposals for the redesign of social rights.

Social interactions take place within constant regulations of time, space and energy in all available forms, and the operation of these elements define living conditions: health, food security, employment, education, and poverty, among others. These are mutually affected by government policies and political stability, which should guarantee the principle of symmetry in the management of these processes, and ultimately provide universal access to social rights.

Luckily, we are also facing calls for a new social contract, in which social rights should be removed from the orbit of financial interests and given the status they deserve as a common interest priority, enhancing cooperation and coordination among various levels of government.

1. Health and wellbeing

COVID-19 is exposing the systematic shortcomings of delivering health to diverse communities around the world, as well as the profound regional differences in what is understood to be a public obligation. While most countries include health in their legal frameworks as a fundamental pillar of societal functioning, countries that downplayed the threat demonstrate little evidence that they can protect their populations from global events like this one. Moreover, widespread need for medical equipment caused tension in international relations, as public diplomacy was pushed aside, and the situation was manipulated in domestic political and electoral agendas.

Luckily, we are also facing calls for a new social contract, in which social rights should be removed from the orbit of financial interests and given the status they deserve as a common interest priority, enhancing cooperation and coordination among various levels of government. Populations that enjoy access to healthcare can experience enhanced quality of life, social inclusion, poverty reduction and (in combination with other living conditions) political stability. Poor health is one of the key barriers to successful public policies. [3]

Setbacks in health, such as the anti-vaccination movement, have also demonstrated that implementation of health programs delivers better results if dealing with a well-informed community. Concepts such as «herd immunity» might be unfamiliar to the majority of citizens, but the essential need for vaccines in prevention of epidemics could be perfectly communicated through campaigns, which could achieve both public health results and facilitate a pedagogical discussion about individual freedom and collective responsibility. Individuals become citizens only when they are aware of the benefits they inherited from collective achievement to date, and accept their duties within their society.

Unfortunately, while responsibility has not been limited to governments, they have often been accountable for downplaying the gravity of the issue and delaying the deployment of urgent policies for the improvement of wellbeing. They should now step up to the present challenges, committing budgets, allocating resources and reviewing legal frameworks that compel institutions to work in coordination. COVID-19 is a sample of the magnitude of impact, and geographic reach, of future disruptions.

2. Education and lifelong learning

Likewise, when considering comprehensive approaches to engagement and participation, another essential area of public policy is education. Its ultimate purpose is to foster development, to promote collaboration and, more recently, to prepare individuals for a society in constant motion. Education takes place throughout a wide range of contexts both within and beyond classrooms. Formal and informal

situations allow for the accumulation of cultural capital and skills for a social life: participatory activities within communities, families and schools, and recognizing the role that feelings and emotions play in their construction. «It takes a village to educate a child,» as the African proverb goes, refers to how the community shapes an individual's experiences and growth. Either in a local village or in McLuhan's global village, children need healthy and safe environments, as each individual, stakeholder, community or institution should play a role in education.

Living in a knowledge society, education policies should apply not only to educators, students and families, but to everyone, as lifelong learners. This also means that work can be complemented by activities such as volunteering, mediation and social activities, considered the most rewarding and pleasurable way to spend time. Nevertheless, as the current need for quarantine has shown, education is restricted by physical and digital spaces, and access to it is still extremely unequal. We must work towards rectifying this and educate regarding wellbeing as a global conception, along with the recognition, preservation and revaluation of cultural heritage, ancestral traditions, values and customs, as well as multiethnic diversity.

As Paulo Freire has noted in his pedagogy of the oppressed, human emancipation depends on education; it depends on instruction and intelligence to overcome unsatisfactory conditions and to subvert domination. It includes integration of socioemotional understanding, languages, sciences, arts, philosophy, or health, as well as teaching practices like cooperative learning and project-based learning,[4], in various settings.

Education is a permanent process that changes people, making the world a more fair and dignified place. It instills the hope of overcoming the existing social configuration, and fuels the pursuit of a better wellbeing. On the other hand, policy interventions must be dynamic, incorporating the institutional, intellectual and emotional tools required to endorse global citizenry.

3. Food security, urban and rural spaces, and flows

Food security is so closely linked with wellbeing that its deterioration has been a defining factor in social uprisings. Malnutrition affects educational performance, psychosocial function and psychological health. Most countries are not capable of meeting their own demand, and proper access to food is vulnerable to supply chain disruptions in the face of global crisis scenarios. Economic interest, natural processes, anthropic impacts, as well as economic and geopolitical decisions are the main factors that control costs of production, distribution and delivery of products to final consumers.

In response to lockdowns and restrictive measures throughout the world, widespread efforts in local food production have taken place. Urban cultivation of vegetables and other edibles has been undertaken not only to reduce exposure to COVID-19, but also because it is perceived as a mechanism for self-sustainability in the event of a production and distribution chain collapse. Beyond the optimization of farming production that represents the greatest supply, urban food systems have produced a variety of results in different cities, and many initiatives [5] are thought to have positive effects on democracy and participation. These kinds of policies, when integrated across government, social and economic sectors, are rooted in bottom up participation schemes capable of reducing food security vulnerability.

4. Housing and human habitat

A comprehensive approach to wellbeing in health, education and nutrition interventions must also consider the accessibility and allocation of safe environments. The living environment is a fundamental aspect of wellbeing, as all living creatures

require suitable conditions to be safe and comfortable.

Most of us, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, were enjoined upon to stay home as a measure to flatten the curve of infections. This has instantly placed housing and human habitat in the spotlight. Physical distancing and a variety of lockdowns have been adopted, with the assumption that everyone has adequate conditions of habitability. But what the pandemic is clearly highlighting are structural injustices, deterioration and marginalization, provoked by an urban model that transforms cities into a product. Although this is not a novelty, when we confront the current stages of capital accumulation and increasing precariousness, it becomes clear that access to dignified housing requires strong state interventions. The role of governments should not be limited to granting permits for construction or renovation, nor should it be restricted to issuing credits for low-income populations.

In this vein, every home must have access to basic elements such as water, energy, sewer systems, recreational areas and public transportation. The habitat is where humans grow and learn from nature and society, and as such, housing should be established as a fundamental right, explicitly mentioned in a country's legal framework and in its most fundamental documents, either in a constitution or the equivalent. Budgets should also reflect this as a priority.

Growing up in a healthy environment, versus one affected by violence and deficiency, does have implications for human development. Public policies should consider not only an individual's cultural, historical and socioeconomic background, but also their conceptions of happiness, and their aspirations alongside societal integration dynamics. The COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to evaluate, propose and innovate on the design and implementation of cross-cutting, inclusive housing policies that incorporate the participation of inhabitants.

What the pandemic is clearly highlighting are structural injustices, deterioration and marginalization, provoked by an urban model that transforms cities into a product.

Conclusions

We argue that it is essential to rethink our approach to the policymaking process, which should involve a collaborative vision that assembles individuals, communities and several stakeholders together. Within this perspective, it is pivotal to implement a framework that places wellbeing at its core, informed by research and analysis into social interactions and collective interdependence grounded in the promotion of trust, security, safety and values of empathy and solidarity.

There is a clear need for more policy research on long-term emotional wellbeing. Such analysis, relating psychosocial aspects within a population to the potential intervention of governments, are key to the design and implementation of wellbeing programs that involve participation of several actors and stakeholders.

In order to be effective, this reconfiguration of public policies should take place in the sectors of health, education, nutrition and housing, to mention just a few; local, regional and global actors must be involved. Good health is a direct cause of enhancing quality of life and achieving individual and collective goals. Likewise, education is developed throughout a wide range of contexts and it significantly contributes to the awareness of feelings and emotions. Thirdly, while dietary needs and cultural determinants may vary from region to region and community to community, decent food is fundamental for individual and collective improvements. Within housing sector analysis, it is crucial to rethink housing in matters of accessibility, affordability and design.

In adopting a transversal and inclusive wellbeing agenda, each nation should foster a bidirectional trust agreement, truly soliciting citizen input in determining the outcome of effective governance efforts. Governments, communities and organizations must have reliable data on emotions, as well as research data and

conclusions on wellbeing, to promote policies that improve quality of life. Through policies, programs and action, we can advance towards the construction of systems that are sensitive to human needs, conscious that social development goes hand in hand with citizen satisfaction.

The new normal that has emerged, from the combination of an «unpredictable» virus and our most recent stage in inequitable globalization, is a real challenge for democracy and its constituent actors, from local to transnational levels. It is also a task for public diplomacy to define a meaning among these spheres, and to streamline democracy to connect the highest levels of multilateral agreements with community participation. Depending on the measures adopted by each country, they will ultimately fall into one of the following groups:

The first group would be countries that work towards implementing an innovative, humanistic vision, with a more comprehensive view of wellbeing and development, positioning themselves as a global leadership reference. Such a leadership would view this juncture as an opportunity to redefine the current social contract, and place people and their emotions at the center of the policymaking processes. They will most likely position themselves as the leading nations in the newly redefined geopolitics map. They may also use these toolkits and strategic actions within their international cooperation and public diplomacy.

Alfonso Zegbe

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The second consists of those failing in this process, either due to mismanagement or because they lack a minimum level of trust in interacting with society. They can see this as an opportunity for self-criticism, accountability and the redesign of communication and social involvement in decision making. The current situation demonstrates how individuals and communities have experienced mistrust and anger, partly due to contradictory information and improper action or inaction by their leaders and international organizations.

The third group, and least desirable scenario, includes a cluster of nations that failed in managing the whole pandemic and continue denying its effects and consequences, or expect the international community to assist them in resolving situations.

As the pandemic's damage is already affecting the countries that historically or occasionally made the worst decisions in terms of welfare, we have a unique opportunity to develop agendas of wellbeing, and to exercise our maximum effort in gaining trust. COVID-19 has been identified as one of the worst global crises in history, and is even considered by some as the end of globalization. Paradoxically, it manifests the interdependence among nations, from the way the virus rapidly spreads, to medical and pharmaceutical production and supply chains, to the urgent need for cooperation within the international community to find a vaccine.

[1] This text expresses the results of a collective work by the Executive Department of Strategy and Public Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, with the participation of Angel Santamaria, Daniel Benet and Patricia Quiles.

[2] Some authors use the concept of Subjective Well-being (SWB). See: Dolan, P., Peasgood, T., & White, M. (2007). «Do we really know what makes us happy? A review of the economic literature on the factors associated with subjective well-being.» *Journal of Economic Psychology, 29(1)*, 94-122.

[3] For an example related to multi-level cooperation: Krech, R., & Buckett, K. (2010). «The Adelaide Statement on Health in All Policies: moving towards a shared governance for health and well-being.» *Health Promotion International, 25(2)*, 258–260. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daq034

[4] Several initiatives can be found among civil society organizations. One example includes the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), (2017) «Core Socio-Emotional Learning competencies.» http://www.casel.org/core-competencies/

[5] Cretella, A. (2019). «Alternative food and the urban institutional agenda: Challenges and insights from Pisa.» *Journal of Rural Studies*, 69(March), 117–129. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.04.005

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Photo_ **Jukka Kervinen**_couple_ CC BY 4.0

05.

THE POST-PANDEMIC CITY BEYOND STATE AND MARKET: A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Laura Basu

Jun, 2020

Ernest Callenbach's 1975 utopian novel *Ecotopia* [1] depicts a world in which Oregon, Northern California and Washington State seceded from the United States 20 years previously to form their own society. Its economy is «steady state» with a 20-hour week, and worker-collectives lovingly creating products that are built to last in an atmosphere which blurs the boundary between work and leisure time. High-tech public transit connects networks of decentralized «mini cities» that are somewhere between urban and rural. Inhabitants live in collectives, with chosen families in accommodation that is modular, so that rooms can be added and removed according to how the kinship group changes over time. Its political system combines direct with representative democracy, with decision-making forming a lively part of daily and social life.

It's a far cry from our current societies, where the triple crisis of climate catastrophe, the pandemic and the global civil unrest unleashed by the racist murder of George Floyd in the United States have led many to profoundly question our most fundamental social structures: capitalist markets and the nation-state. Questions are now openly being asked about whether capitalism is inherently hierarchical, imperialist and antithetical to the continuation of human life on planet earth. The abundance of mutual aid groups that have sprung up around the world, offering everything from grocery shopping to fund raising for emergency supplies to rides for key workers to fabricating equipment, to all manner of knowledge and skills sharing online—organized not as charity but solidarity—shows what the roots of an alternative society might look like.

An article in the United Kingdom's *Spectator* magazine frets that the 34,000 Brits that have recently donated a million pounds to Black Lives Matter United Kingdom are unwittingly endorsing an organization that «wants to dismantle capitalism,» thinks climate change is racist, wants to abolish prisons, wants to get rid of borders and wants to get rid of the police. I wonder if the author of that piece has ever considered that the 34,000 are not so unwitting, but actually might agree with those ideas.

If an increasing number of people are experiencing capitalist markets and nation-states as impediments to humanity flourishing on a finite planet, it is time that we think past these structures, beyond progressive calls for more constrained and humane versions of them. What would a society that was actually designed to deliver human freedom and flourishing within planetary boundaries look like? What would cities look like within them? Would cities even exist? With the help of fiction, theory and real-world examples, let's embark on a thought experiment imagining a utopian post-pandemic city—beyond both state and market.

How would provisioning work?

In *Ecotopia*, inhabitants work a 20-hour week, and the economy is finely calibrated to approximate as closely as possible a steady state, with almost zero waste and all technology developed to maximize harmonious living with nature. Though Herman Daly's *Steady State Economics* was published two years after *Ecotopia*, the novel was no doubt inspired by Daly's earlier works and most likely also by the early work of Murray Bookchin, founder of social ecology. Indeed, Bookchin's work, along with that of the ecofeminists that were beginning to publish at around the same time, is more visionary than *Ecotopia*, in which the alternative society is a bounded by national borders and does to an extent organize provisioning through markets for private profit—though ones that are quite different to what we are used to. In Bookchin's vision, on the other hand, resources—or what he calls «the means of life»—are treated as *commons* governed by the principle of usufruct: everybody has access to them as long as they do not deplete or spoil them. The principle of «the irreducible minimum» means that everyone has the right to the means of life no matter what they contribute—an even more generous maxim than Karl Marx's famous «from each according to his [sic] ability to each according to his need!»

Would cities even exist in such a vision? In *Ecotopia*, the line between urban and rural is blurred. New «mini cities» are disaggregated cities connected by high-tech, eco-friendly public transit, surrounded by farms serving the immediate community. Eco-feminist and Bookchin's ideas suggest a back-to-the-land politics, with relatively self-sufficient communities producing their own food and collectively managing natural commons like forests or lakes. On the other hand, it is often argued that in many ways the metropolis—and especially slums—are the most ecological way of organizing people. Squatter cities have maximum density and minimum energy and material use. People get around by foot, bicycle, rickshaw, or the universal shared taxi, and recycling is a way of life. However, even in the middle of the metropole, slums are blurring the boundaries between city and country. Residents raise pigs on third-floor roofs, grow vegetables in used bleach bottles hung from window sills, and keep chickens. [2] Sylvia Federici describes these squatters movements as «experiments in self-provisioning and the seeds of an alternative mode of production in the making… organizing their reproduction outside of state and market control.» Raul Zibechi suggests that urban land squats be considered as «a planet of the commons.» [3]

Slums are not the only places where city-dwellers are using guerrilla commons to feed themselves. Amidst the «new scramble for Africa,» landless women have migrated to towns and, using direct action tactics, appropriate and farm vacant lots of public and private land along roadsides, rail lines and in parks. In Accra, commons-based urban gardens supply the city with up to 90% of its vegetables. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, «manioc is planted all over the city, while goats graze along a central boulevard that is considered the Champs Elysees of Kinshasa.» In southern Nigeria, crops are grown on some university campuses, and at some points in the year, cows can be seen pasturing on campus grass before being brought to market. Through taking back land and sharing skills and experience, these women are reclaiming, using the words of Fantu Cheru, «the self-reliance that was theirs until the advent of the modern nation state.» Federici writes, «Urban farmers are breaking down the separation between town and country and converting African cities into gardens.» [4] Perhaps, then, instead of limiting our thought experiment to cities, we should instead think in broader terms about a «post-pandemic *community*»—which might combine the rural with the urban.

It is not just food that is being organized as commons. Commons of forests, fisheries, water, wildlife and other natural resources currently support two billion people for their everyday subsistence. In cities, repair shops, cultural centers, energy commons, swap shops, community currencies and time banks exist across the globe. In Athens, the autonomous neighborhood of Exarchia is home to squats and social centers that provide solidary housing, healthcare, social and cultural spaces and food to a highly diverse community of refugees, migrants and anarchists. However,

far-right and neo-fascist groups have been connected with multiple arson attacks on the squats. The Syriza government evicted multiple squats and now the New Democracy government has laid siege to Exarchia, with inhabitants giving accounts of homes being raided, residents being taken to underground car parks and beaten, and children left without parents as they are arrested and imprisoned. A media propaganda campaign paints the squats as being dens of iniquity involved with heroin dealing. Exarchia offers a stark reminder that these experiments in autonomy will always be in a state of existential threat while they remain under capitalism. Through a newly energized international solidarity movement, they require fierce protection so the seeds of a new society can grow and flourish.

On what scale would it operate and how would it relate to other communities?

In Callenbach's novel, the new state of *Ecotopia* is mostly self-sufficient and trades little with the rest of the world. Within state borders, communities, be they cities or some sort of urban-rural hybrid, are relatively small and self-contained but linked together. Conveniently, the region is agriculturally fertile and already boasted top universities, cutting edge science, conservation and other skills needed for its fair and eco-friendly society prior to secession. What is not mentioned is the context of the world economy in which the region built its wealth while part of the United States, from which it evidently continues to benefit. And within this fictional world, there is actually racial segregation, though its impetus comes from Black *Ecotopia*ns and there is supposed to be genuine equality (though the protagonist only seems to spend time in the White areas, among which there is even talk of a sort of genocidal «relocating» of the entire Black community to another region). Indigenous Americans, meanwhile, are discussed in nostalgic terms, as if they were only part of the nation's past.

It is worth remembering that capitalism was built on colonialism, slavery and imperialism and that there continues to be a global hierarchy and international division of labor. The point is that, when building a «good» city, it is necessary to think about the context in which that city operates. Is the wealth being enjoyed there based on exploitation and domination in other parts of the world? Who exactly is benefitting from that wealth and where is it coming from? The Black Lives Matter protests, with their growing internationalism and mounting calls for reparations, are showing how important a global understanding of our local economies really is. To this end, and the case for open borders—or no borders—as well as land redistribution, are all gathering strength.

But let us say that we are living in a post-capitalist, post-nation-state world. We can imagine a similar confederated network of communities but missing the borders of the state. Again, this is the vision of many anarchists and eco-feminists. In her «subsistence perspective,» Maria Mies envisions relatively small, decentralised communities, that are relatively self-sufficient in basic needs. Interestingly, while such concepts of relative local autarky trigger criticisms of nativism or isolationism, for Mies, a high degree of autarky is desirable precisely because of its potential to overcome the international division of labour. She writes, «only by consuming the things which we produce can we judge whether they are useful, meaningful and wholesome, whether they are necessary or superfluous. And only by producing what we consume can we know how much time is really necessary for the things we want to consume, what skills are necessary and what technology is necessary.» [5]

For Mies, a further consequence of such a reorganization would be the drastic reduction of «non-productive work,» in the sense that what David Graeber calls «bullshit jobs»—jobs that have little social value and which even the people doing them don't find worthwhile—would be eliminated. There would be no need for a state to decree a 20-hour week because an economy oriented to meeting needs within ecological boundaries, rather than private profit, and organized

around the principles of usufruct and the irreducible minimum, would have no need for wasteful, destructive or extraneous work. It would also lead to a much more environmentally friendly society. If one community were not able to dump ecological «negative externalities» onto others, it would likely take better care of its own environment.

It's a far cry from our current societies, where the triple crisis of climate catastrophe, the pandemic and the global civil unrest unleashed by the racist murder of George Floyd in the United States have led many to profoundly question our most fundamental social structures: capitalist markets and the nation-state.

If communities were relatively small and self-contained, would not this mean they would be unable to solve large-scale problems or build major infrastructure? Prior to European colonization, people in the Taita Hills region of what is now Kenya created complex irrigation systems that lasted hundreds of years. The infrastructure was common property, with households responsible for the section closest to them. Various customs and social arrangements brought people together for major repairs, and determined how much water each household could take, and the sanctions that those who violated these practices would face from the rest of the community. When the British colonized the region, they set up their own irrigation system, geared to cash crop production. This system failed spectacularly during the drought of the 1960s and many locals returned to the former system to feed themselves. According to one ethnologist: «East African irrigation works seem to have been more extensive and better managed during the precolonial era.» [6]

Environmentalist Ashish Kothari puts forward an alternative framework for human development to the standard development model, called RED—radical ecological democracy. We do not need to turn to the past or to an alternative reality to find initiatives that could be considered as operating within this framework. Again, RED combines the local with the translocal. Localization means that those living closest to a forest, sea, coast, farm or urban facility would have the most stake and the best knowledge to manage that resource (or at least they would, if it were not for centuries of policies de-educating communities about their own environments). Kothari points to thousands of initiatives in India for decentralized water harvesting, biodiversity conservation, education, governance, food and materials production, energy generation, and waste management, both in villages and cities.

A necessary complement to localization, however, is what Kothari calls «landscape and trans-boundary planning and governance»—otherwise known as bio—regionalism or eco-regionalism. This means communities coming together to solve problems affecting entire land and sea-scapes. Although this type of organization is in fledgling state in India—Kothari's focus—the Arvari Sansad (Parliament) in Rajasthan brings 72 villages together, to manage a 400 square km river basin through inter-village coordination, making integrated programs for land, agriculture, water, wildlife, and development. In Maharashtra, a federation of Water User Associations has been handed over the management of the Waghad Irrigation Project, the first time a government project has been completely devolved to local people. For Kothari, central to making bio-regionalism work is rural communities having more say in how their resources are used, and city-dwellers becoming more aware of the impacts of their modes of living. As villages are revitalized through locally appropriate development initiatives, rural-to-urban migration might slow down and may even reverse, as has happened with certain villages in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. [7]

Thinking beyond the nation-state, then, involves going both smaller and bigger, with small-scale communities the basic units of production, consumption, and daily life, but confederated in networks with other communities. Rather than this leading to parochialism, doing away with the borders of the nation-state could encourage the free flow of people, skills and ideas.

What would gender relations and family life look like?

The ruling «Survivalist Party» of *Ecotopia* is run by women, and women are supposed to be empowered in the novel, with full control over their bodies and with men

sharing housework. However, Callenbach's work still exhibits some of that 1970s chauvinism. Women, though athletic and «unadorned» «still seem… feminine,» while men, though sensitive, «still seem masculine.» At one point in the book, the main character is injured and admitted to hospital, and to illustrate the «holistic» approach of the health system, a female nurse gives him a hand job!

As well as making up an increasing proportion of the paid workforce (often paid less than men), women carry out 76% of reproductive labor—the work of reproducing life, through child rearing, care, cleaning, food and fuel provision. [8] Because they are the main providers of food and fuel, the United Nations estimates that 80% of those who have been displaced by climate change are women. On top of that, the family home can also be a dangerous and even deadly place for women, as one in three women suffer violence, usually by an intimate partner. The pandemic has intensified these problems and brought them further into the light.

It will not be possible to create a post-COVID-19 society without eliminating violence against women, queer, trans and non-binary people, and redressing the balance of reproductive work. On the subsistence perspective, Maria Mies writes, «The perspective of a relative autarkic economy based on non-exploitative relations to the ecology, other peoples, people within a region, on small, decentralized units of production and consumption is, for feminists, not broad enough if it does not *start* with a radical change of the sexual division of labor.»

The journey towards a free and non-exploitative society must start with women's autonomy over their bodies, sexuality and lives. The violence towards women on which patriarchy is based must end, as would state control over women's fertility. Ecologists often point to the perils of overpopulation, sometimes ignoring the evidence that, when women have a choice, they choose to have fewer babies: «true women's liberation will be the cheapest and most efficient method of restoring the balance between population growth and food production.»

Secondly, men would have to share reproductive work—childcare, housework, care of the sick and elderly, relationship and emotional work and so on. Despite the groundbreaking work of the 1970s «wages for housework» campaign of a fellow eco-feminist, for Mies, this work could not be paid: «It would have to be free work for the community. But each man, each woman, and also children, would have to share this most important work. Nobody, particularly no man, should be able to *buy* himself free from this work in the production of immediate life.» Crucially, for Mies, the drive towards ending violence towards women and sharing reproductive work should come from *men*—not for paternalistic reasons but to restore to themselves a sense of wholeness, dignity and respect: «Only by doing this life-producing and life-preserving work themselves will they be able to develop a concept of work which transcends the exploitative capitalist patriarchal concept.»

As the authors of *Feminism for the 99%* point out, the unique feat of capitalism was to separate the public from the private, delegate the private to women and banish it to the home. Without the unpaid and invisible domestic, care and emotional work of women, the capitalist economy would not be able to run. There are, therefore, rising calls to bring reproductive work out of the private sphere of the home and socialize it. Demands for a feminist Green New Deal, care revolution or a universal care income are taking up this call, to break down the gendered barriers between the public and private sphere.

In moments of struggle, revolution and resistance, reproductive work is indeed brought into the social realm, from Standing Rock to the movement of the squares. In the Oaxaca Commune of 2006, women created collective reproductive activities on the barricades as a means of sustaining the protests and resisting the gender domination of home life:

The barricades were places where the people of Oaxaca slept, cooked and shared

Thinking beyond the nation-state, then, involves going both smaller and bigger, with small-scale communities the basic units of production, consumption, and daily life, but confederated in networks with other communities. Rather than this leading to parochialism, doing away with the borders of the nation-state could encourage the free flow of people, skills and ideas.

food, had sex, shared news, and came together at the end of the day. Resources such as food, water, gasoline and medical supplies were re-appropriated and redistributed, and in the same way, reproductive labor was re-appropriated from the specialized sphere of the home and became the underscoring way to reimagine social life and collective bonds. [9]

The women of the Landless People's Movement of Brazil, once their communities had won the right to maintain the land they had occupied, insisted that the new houses be built to form one compound so that they could communalize the housework, together with men as they had during the struggle, and be ready to run to each other's support when abused by men. For Federici, this «commoning» of the means of reproduction «is the primary mechanism by which a collective interest and mutual bonds are created. It is also the first line of resistance to a life of enslavement and the condition for the construction of autonomous spaces, undermining from within the hold that capitalism has on our lives.»

Perhaps, instead of *Ecotopia*, another U.S. utopian novel from the 1970s should be our model when it comes to gender and the family: Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Here, not only the sexual division of labor is undermined, but so are gender and sex themselves. Women and men are often indistinguishable and instead of gendered pronouns, the pronoun per—short for person—is used for everyone. Children are not born biologically—instead they are «grown» in birthing pods, and do not share genetic material with parents. There are usually three parents who commit to raising a child together until it comes of age, and those you choose to raise a child with are not necessarily those with whom you have sexual relationships. Men are able to take hormones so that they can breastfeed. People live communally and there is much more community involvement in child rearing and intergenerational care and mixing.

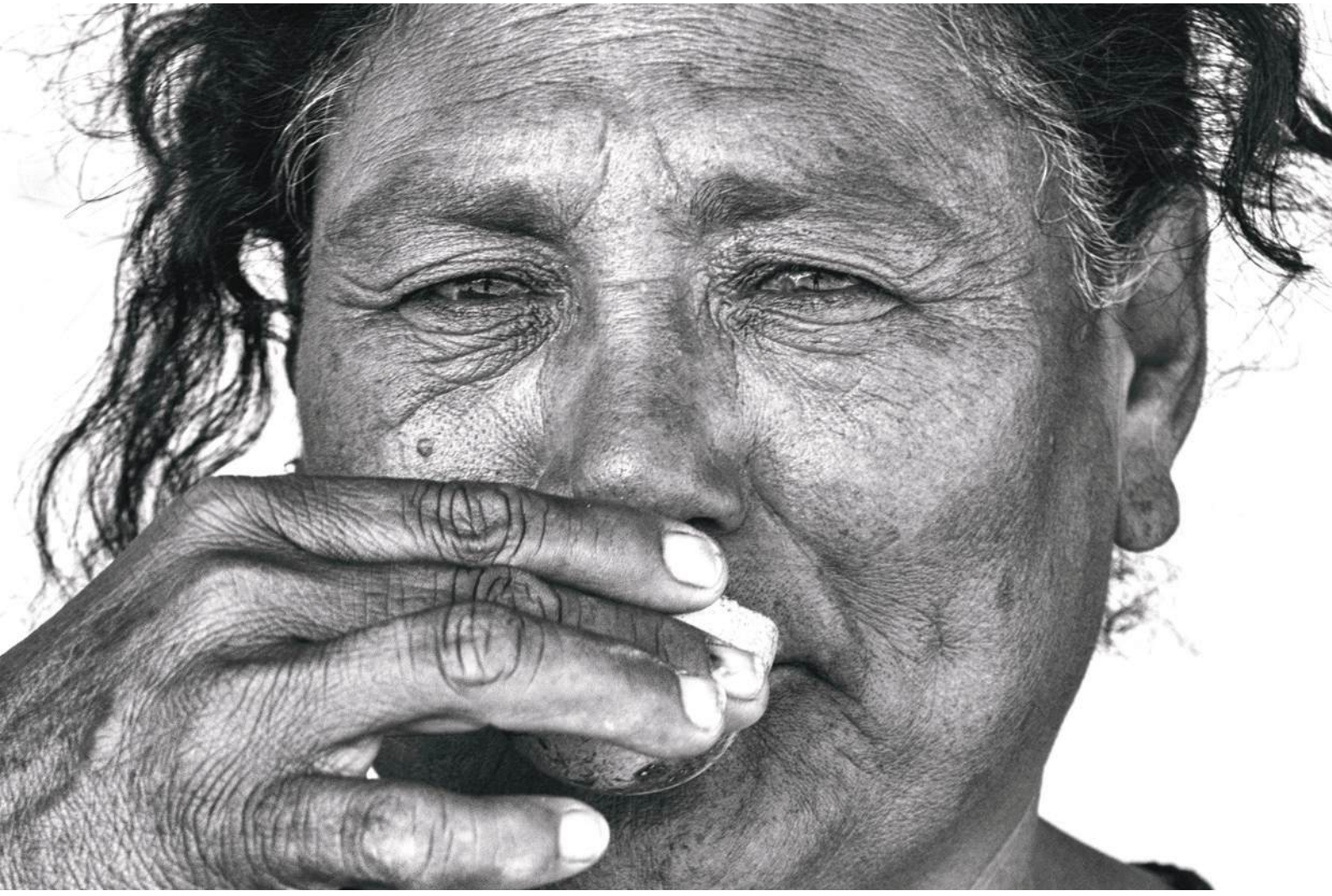
This brings to mind Shulamith Firestone's radical feminist *The Dialectic of Sex*, in which she advocates both collective living and child rearing and artificial reproduction (along with «cybernetic communism»). Sophie Lewis' recent *Full Surrogacy Now* takes the concept of surrogacy—under capitalism a highly exploitative practice—and applies it to a post-capitalism paradigm in which children no longer «belong» to their biological parents but are the responsibility of all. Overcoming the constraints of sex, gender and the biological family is not about imposing one family structure on everyone or eliminating the identities which we may hold dear, but creating societies that are flexible enough to accommodate a wide variety of different identities, family forms and kinship structures, supported by economic and political structures that allow these bonds to flourish.

What kind of political system would it have?

The principles of direct democracy, subsidiarity and confederation are favored by Radical Ecological Democracy as well as many anarchists and feminists. In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, decisions are made collectively at local councils. For larger-scale issues, a delegate is sent to a region-wide council and so on, in a nested manner. Through intense discussion, delegates strive to reach consensus. Where this is impossible, a vote is taken. To achieve reconciliation, it is custom for the winning community to host a great feast with the losing community as its honored guests.

Again, though, we do not have to look to fiction for examples of direct democracy in action. A well-known large-scale example is the Autonomous Authority of North and East Syria—aka Rojava—now under existential threat from ongoing Turkish invasion since Trump announced the United States was withdrawing from the area in October 2019.

After decades of fighting for an independent state, the Kurdish movement led by the imprisoned Abdullah Öcalan now rejects the nation-state as the locus



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of sovereignty, viewing the state as inextricably bound up with environmental destruction, repression and patriarchy. The fundamental political level in Rojava is that of the commune or neighborhood, comprising up to 200 households. People come together at regular meetings where decisions relating to daily life are made. Communes include committees working on different issues like peace and justice, economy, safety, education, women, youth and social services. Each commune is autonomous, but they are linked to one another through a confederal structure. The next level is the local assembly, composed of representatives of the commune, and then municipal councils, composed of representatives of local assemblies. Power is ultimately located at the grassroots level, with the «higher» units accountable to the «lower» ones.

Women's liberation is at the heart of Rojava's struggle for a free society. The autonomous Women's Protection Units (YPJ) were at the forefront of the fight against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the region. The new constitution or «social contract» produced in 2014 declares men and women equal under the law and «mandates public institutions to work towards the elimination of gender discrimination.» All elected bodies must be made up of at least 40% women, and a woman must co-chair all public institutions. Only women have the right to elect the female co-chair while the male co-chair is elected by everyone. Women are chief political negotiators on behalf of their region, and there are grassroots women's communes, assemblies, co-operatives and academies.

And again, thinking about local communities as the locus of sovereignty doesn't have to mean parochialism and isolation. On the contrary, going beyond the nation-state can mean removing borders to the free flow of people and ideas. Democratic confederacy in Rojava includes not only Kurds but Arabs, Christians, Turkmen, Chechens, Armenians, Syriacs, Assyrians and others.

This experiment in democracy is in grave danger from the onslaught by Turkey, which has used the language of ethnic cleansing and is deliberately targeting women. In the face of both the invasion and the COVID-19 pandemic, Rojava's revolutionary system is holding up remarkably well, using its grassroots structures to meet the basic and economic needs of its people during lockdown while facing shelling and drone attacks, while Turkey has cut off water supplies, increasing the risk of infection through the region's many refugee camps. Women's Houses or *Mala Jin* are continuing to fight for women in the face of systematic sexual assault, torture and murder. However, because it is not a nation-state and not recognized by the international community, The United Nations and the World Health Organization refuse to provide direct support. [10]

Once again, the story of Rojava is a stark reminder that within capitalism—a continually expanding world system driven by private profit and mediated through competing nation-states—true experiments in democracy will always exist in a state of peril. And it is another reminder of the need for internationalism, solidarity and mutual aid that the Black Lives Matter protests have ignited anew for all of those trying to build something better.

Laura Basu

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[1] Thanks to Andrés Lomeña for his comments about *Ecotopia* at Octagon 2019 that reminded me of that novel, which I first read as part of the Cardiff-based project Utopias Salon.

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06. COVID-19 AS A META CRISIS AND OUR POST-PANDEMIC ORDER

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Order-destroying and order-instituting moments in world history are usually unleashed by the same events. Of them, war is a consequential phenomenon. Another similarly formidable one is pandemic: plague or disease of global reach and consequences. From the Plague of Justinian (541-542 AD) to the Black Death (1346-1351AD), plagues and pandemic have played history-altering roles in world affairs and changed the landscape of entire cities. It is highly likely that future historians will count the COVID-19 disease as such a watershed moment in history.

The health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will be controlled over time, and mankind will overcome it as it did in previous epidemics, plagues and wars. However, its social, political and economic impact will remain for years and perhaps decades to come, setting the scene for a reconfigured global society.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a meta crisis. It is not a health crisis. It is not a political, economic, social, security or world crisis alone; it is all of these combined. As a meta crisis, it will bear consequences for all aspects of human life throughout the world. Global crises have shaped our political and economic systems throughout time, because they accelerate the movement of history in three directions. First, necessity drives people to embrace exceptional solutions in order to deal with imminent danger, providing societies and individuals with the energy needed to move away from the usual habits to the unfamiliar, not only at a behavioral level, but also in terms of thought and belief. Second, crises overthrow social, political and economic hierarchical systems, allowing for the implementation of alternative, promising systems. Third, crises accelerate a change in the balance of power: they can reinforce strategic directions, even if they are inherently weak, or likewise weaken others, even if they are strong and visible.

At this turning point, there is the possibility of going beyond a mere reshuffling of the balance of power. Obviously, this time, instead of the past, we are writing the history of the future. Instead of archives, our imaginations will be our reference point. As exceptional phenomena, these global crises accelerate the course of history, accentuate the already existing trends and produce exceptional outcomes. It is on the latter that we will focus: while our imagination will be historically conscious, taking stock of similar historical processes into account, it is best served to orient towards the future.

Historical context for a meta crisis

The world order being shaken today by the burden of the COVID-19 virus pandemic was born out of World War II, which resulted in the collapse of the British Empire, its withdrawal from its colonies and its unseating by the «American Empire.» Prior to World War II, the United States preferred international isolation,

remaining geographically removed from the conflict in Europe; in fact, before the war, their army ranked fourteenth in the world. However, after five years of war, the number of American soldiers grew to eleven million fighters. The United States boasted the largest military machine known to mankind, enabling it to play a critical role in the war. Its hegemony culminated in the invention of nuclear weapons, used against civilians in Nagasaki and Hiroshima without mercy.

American military superiority was accompanied by diplomatic and economic dominance: post-war spoils were all in America's interest: the United Nations was founded with its headquarters established in New York, the gold-backed dollar became a world currency as a result of the Bretton Woods Agreement, and the International Monetary Fund and World Bank were also headquartered in Washington, D.C.

As Europe plunged into an overwhelming economic crisis, the United States intervened, through the Marshall Plan, to rebuild Western Europe. The money that the United States provided to Europe was not pure charity; the United States gained the upper hand, while Europe lost its historical leadership, relegated to living in the shadow of American leadership.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of World War II, the «Western» versus socialist ideology led to a frenzied nuclear arms race, capable of destroying the earth multiple times over. The Cold War expanded the circle of polarization between the two camps to include the whole world. In this way, a mutually assured destruction doctrine was born, founded in the reciprocal nuclear threat of the two great powers. The revolutions of the Third World, which aspired to the promised socialist paradise, broke out. In turn, America pledged its support to despotic regimes, and the two parties fought proxy wars, the collateral damage of which included the whole world. The U.S. military machine, and the country's tightening control of the world economy, have led to an American culture of superiority based on two main pillars: military tyranny and economic greed.

Causalities of a dominant market and cultural regime

This economic greed also has an important history. Values and ideology played the elegant mediator in a very dirty game. Both liberalism, born in the 17th century, and socialism, born in the 18th century, were based on respectable human principles, but crises moved them from the field of human values to the field of strategic deployment.

When the Berlin Wall collapsed in 1989, and with it alternatives to a market regime, it seemed that Western liberalism had achieved ultimate victory. Most of the developing world, including Eastern European countries, rushed in the early nineties to organize democratic elections, with exaggerated claims to victory. Supposed global liberalism seemed to have crowned America the indisputable global hegemon. America worked to fashion this new order in its own image, employing its military superiority to become the world's policing force. Its dissemination of economic globalization led to the accumulation of the largest wealth known to mankind. This evidently created great disparities between rich and poor. The World Trade Organization was established in 1995 to foster economic globalization, promising the world a continuous supply of raw materials and commodities. All the while, the American economy was the first beneficiary, especially during the 1990s: it experienced high growth rates, low inflation, unemployment rates of less than 5%, and prosperous financial markets driven by a boom in digital investment.

Following the September 11th attacks, American strategy faltered as it conducted long, costly and absurd wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, losing its economic advantage along the way. While the superpower was busy chasing ghosts in caves and deserts, China and Russia continued building their own economic and international

influence. The American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were arguably the greatest strategic mistake ever committed by the United States.

Then came the global economic crisis in 2008, affecting the markets of the United States, Europe and the rest of the world. The crisis continued in reshaping the global economy, resulting in a gradual decline of American influence, and the rise of China as a young, agile competitor, bringing about a new Cold War of economics.

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In order to limit the rise of China and extend the life of American supremacy as long as possible, the Trump Administration has rushed with unprecedented steps to impose customs duties on Chinese goods, encouraging companies to keep their manufacturing within the United States. America has launched a ban on Chinese technical companies, including Huawei, in order to prevent them from building the fifth generation of the Internet globally. Simultaneously, the United States has pressured its allies to follow suit. In this new race, China might consolidate its leadership in key areas such as telecommunication, energy, mobility, quantum computing, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and biotechnology.

In achieving global economic might on the world stage, however, China is limited in building its own form of globalization. The United States established itself as a global hegemon not only through its military might and the machinations of Wall Street, but also through soft power: Hollywood, media and art platforms, the English language, its prestigious universities, the absorption of skilled migrants from around the world and the traction of democracy and media freedom. The dynamic and open nature of American society, a highly diverse immigrant community celebrating success and innovation, ultimately assisted the United States in making quick strategic leaps. Meanwhile, China's cultural isolation, the large gap between China's developed coast and its impoverished interior, the one-party dictatorship, the policy of centralized control, and media censorship did not serve in building a global system with China at its center.

Economic globalization takes on a political consciousness as the world economy recognizes its limits and dependence on China for production and manufacturing. In light of the crisis, companies may look to undergoing a process of partial re-nationalization in their economic activities. As this process will create losers, it will also create winners. Emerging markets with a better industrial base, skilled work force and proximity to major economic centers will be well-positioned to benefit. In economic terms, one can argue that in the balance between globalization or regionalization of the production chains, the tide will favor the latter. More concretely, in relation to the European markets, Turkey, as well as Central and Eastern European countries such as Poland, will be beneficiaries of this process. In relation to the North American market, Mexico might enjoy similar advantages. Old economic hierarchies, faced with energy and material changes, can give way to innovative approaches to sustainable consumption.

The trajectory of geopolitics before the pandemic

In keeping with these observations, it is clear that the grip and history of the market regime in the past century has worked hand in hand with geopolitics. And from the start, U.S. political culture sought to declare war on something. It began with Jimmy Carter's war on energy, and the long-lasting ramifications of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) cuts in oil production in 1973. It continued with Reagan's war on evil forces or empire (in reference to the Soviet Union). Then, successive United States presidents' «war on terrorism» have transitioned to Trump's current war on «the Chinese virus.» U.S. foreign policy has continuously declared war on something; even developing theoretical justifications for it, such as the Manifest Destiny doctrine. That theory, based on United States messianic providentialism, and on the supposed universality of American values, served as a pretext for all kinds of military interventions and preventive attacks.

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MADE IN CHINA

Of these wars, the U.S. «war on terror» has been the most consequential. It has sapped U.S. political energy and skewed its strategic orientation and geopolitical imagination. This war, to a large extent, found its premise in a political and strategic rendering of the Islamic world as the constitutive-other of U.S. foreign policy and its purported value system. Though this war gained global prominence with the September 11th attacks, the intellectual foundation of this war had been established long before.

Scholars including Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis argued that clashes were inevitable between the West, the definition of which was nebulous and arbitrary, and the Islamic world, which was grounded in civilizational differences and aspirations. In this narrative, Islam essentially replaces Communism or the Soviet Union as the constitutive-other of the West, in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. This intellectual and political orientation has blurred the U.S. strategic vision and squandered an immense amount of U.S. resources. It also has created space and opportunity for China and Russia.

In a discussion of the West, Europe of course plays a significant role. In the modern history overviewed here, the European Union was established as the deserving Western victor over the Soviet Union. Similarly, as the 1990s brought prosperity to America, the European continent engaged in a comfortable retirement. The European Union promised its citizens collective security and economic prosperity. During the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) managed to secure the continent against a tired Russia. It provided support to countries that emerged from the mantle of the Soviet Union, to the point where it provoked the most Western-friendly Russian politicians. This prompted a Putin-led Russia that was moving towards a more defensive and strategic position. Nevertheless, when Russian forces invaded northern Georgia in 2008, NATO appeared shocked and paralyzed. Moreover, once again, when Russian forces later invaded eastern Ukraine and annexed Crimea in 2014, the European Union enacted an ensuing series of restrictive measures that could have been stricter.

European Union economic prosperity reached its climax in the nineties and beginning of the century, coming to a halt with the euro crisis of 2009. This exposed the multiple tensions within the European economic system: the dispute between the Northern countries, with Germany as protagonist and the most important influence on the European Central Bank, versus the relatively poor southern European countries, hampered by Greece's debt crisis. This two-speed Europe shook the concept of European solidarity at its core, and remains a key challenge today. While post-2008 measures created divisions, the European Commission has recently committed to a sustainability approach meant to address widespread inequalities throughout Europe. However, national splintering has still increased with the refugee crisis, and European Union institutions seemed unable to achieve a unified policy. Moreover, the COVID-19 virus crisis has led to action subverting European ideals: borders were closed, and collective coordination faltered; this was accompanied by an escalation in national self-centeredness and an increase in mutual accusations over piracy and the seizure of medical necessities. The impact felt by South Europe during the European debt crisis, as well as their lesser economic strength in comparison to the North and Eastern Europe (the latter of which has been experiencing substantial gains), has continued to be a source of contention, with disagreements as to the causes of the disparity. Both systemic problems or policy differences are cited as causal factors, and the differing perceptions as to responsibility for these issues are contested.

The current health crisis, exacerbated by an aging population, is also compounded by the economic hardship facing the European Union, which requires collective coordination. The success or failure of the European Union hinges on this coordination, but it does not bode well. The European Union needs rehabilitation now more than ever. A country capable of taking the lead in this rehabilitation is Germany, but this country, like so many right now, is also facing political crises caused by the rise of the far right.

Potential in the pandemic aftermath

With this backdrop, the rise of China and Russia in the realm of geopolitics signals an end to self-righteous liberal victory. In past decades, China pursued a policy of avoiding involvement in international crises and ceded to America and others in questions of geopolitical wars and crises, except for issues that were considered relevant to Chinese national security: mainly Taiwan, Tibet, and the South China Sea. However, this policy is changing as China has begun developing its military structure. The military, involved in regional alliances, will be positioned to intervene more frequently in global conflicts: to protect the sources of raw materials in Africa and Latin America, to protect Chinese markets in Asia and to ensure unencumbered lines of transportation in the Belt and Road projects. China may not be drawn into military confrontation with the US, but it will adopt a strategy of exhausting the wounded lion, all the while enhancing its international presence and economic expansion.

These geopolitical shifts emphasize the limits of former systems and institutions in dealing with today's global challenges. The current pandemic is a clear demonstration of the limits of geography. From various types of viruses to climate change, from water scarcity and air pollution to cyber security, these institutions demonstrate themselves less and less legitimate and capable. This requires a global response to issues of global consequences. Therefore, while the rising geopolitics represent the fragmentation of the world into different zones of influence, we must all the more urgently treat the world as a single unit in dealing with the aforementioned crises. At the same time, this begets several questions, with the most relevant ones including:

Can a transnational order or framework be established without shared principles or value systems? In the end, the previous architecture of the international system did not only reflect the value systems and principles of the hegemon, but clearly also served its own interests. There are intimate links between the hegemon's declared values and principles, and its thinly concealed interests. The League of the Nations was essentially a structural representation of the British vision of the international order, whereas the United Nations and Bretton Woods system served the same purpose for a U.S.-dominated global system. *Pax Britannica* or *Pax Americana* have had internationalist dispositions. The old institutions have steadily debilitated the global capacity for dealing with borderless challenges and multidimensional threats.

Regressing to nationalisms and advancing towards transnationally connected localism

The COVID-19 pandemic, for a potentially prolonged period, may be haunted by fear of poverty, accompanied by escalating racist tendencies. This is a recipe for both civil and cross-border wars, so we need to address the state's function and the concept of security. We have recently witnessed how an atmosphere of fear and tension drives people to voluntarily give up their freedoms for the sake of security. And while the exceptional measures enacted by most countries are justified in the context of the pandemic, their far-reaching consequences will not remain benign, as governments do not easily relinquish the powers granted to them through states of exception, even when the necessity for it has disappeared. We are at a time where even the use of smart technology to violate the remaining privacy has been justified, in order to contain the spread of the virus.

These faults of the nation-state direct attention to the problem of nationalisms: instead of openness, the world is witnessing a rise in isolationist trends, and of course this retreat will not be limited to economic sphere. Nationalist and racist tendencies are being reinforced, both of which are trends that have been steadily growing. The COVID-19 virus has been weaponized to increase pre-existing fear of the «other,» an «other» perceived as a source of infection. The closing of borders and the rise of

nationalistic self-centeredness will drive efforts towards isolated autonomies, thus escalating xenophobia, the rejection of minorities and difference, and the targeting of refugees.

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Since the United States became the center of the pandemic, largely as a result of Trump's indolent nationalism, the situation of underprivileged minorities and the black community became even more evident. The death rate among these populations have been proportionally much higher in comparison with the entire U.S population. The murder of George Floyd was one of the most recent events in a number of incidents that have triggered today's massive protests advocating that «black lives matter». The social costs of these internal fractures are incalculable.

Just as we understand fear and tension can bring citizens to forfeit their freedoms, we too can interpret solidarity and the will for a common good as key drivers for change. In a re-ordering of our current reality, the local and its potential to reflect community and engender solidarity must be recognized as the root of transnational cooperation and efforts. In envisioning a new structure that provides participatory parity for all, certain communities and global cities already point to solutions. Throughout the world, human individuals can participate in their respective communities in a horizontal fashion. Building a culture of openness to difference can already be witnessed in the efforts made to provide community support in world cities or global metropolitan centers.

This concept is not new, as historically, city-states have allowed for face-to-face sociopolitical interaction, void of any vertical stratification and the complications this entails. Some of our unprecedentedly diverse, modern cities now reflect this possibility: spaces have been created, ones that shed hierarchy and unequal power relations, instead embracing diversity and more equal participation for the common good. The re-municipalization of public services allows for individual actors and communities to assert their voices on a leveled playing field. Such interactions and cooperation can set the bar for the transnational order.

The U.S.-centric international order has been unraveling for a while now, an unraveling accelerated and deepened in this pandemic. In its place, rather than passively allowing the emergence of an international order or status quo in which the United States and China will be the two dueling superpowers, a transnational order presents itself on the horizon. The relative weights of various G-2 countries can increase as the current order unravels. As multiple interests and powers are simultaneously affected by the same issues, in everything from air pollution to cyber security, borderless challenges and threats can offer strategy and response in more diffuse terms. This transnational order would be less structured, increasingly horizontal, and more fluid. Relative influence of regional powers and units could increase, as leadership no longer resembles a hierarchical system.

In closing: the future and the post-pandemic order

This work first outlined historical trajectories of societal change, especially through the lens of crises beginning with World War II. It then observed the current context and how the market regime, western culture, modern institutions and nationalist configurations have brought us to this point. Finally, it proposed that this pandemic provides a space-time in which a new era can emerge: a new world order, underpinned with the potent, constitutive potential of interconnected societal organization. This opportunity for transition does not call for a moment of rebalancing, but rather reimagined institutions and societies, as the power of ideas enables new global history.

The western-centric, liberal and ethnocentric order has fashioned itself as the product of the natural course of history and supposedly advancing progress. However, this reflects the intellectual and cultural hegemony of the West. The COVID-19

pandemic is a peculiar moment and an exceptional period in human history: the pandemic is accelerating the process of the deterioration of the current order, and is simultaneously calling into question what was previously accepted as the norm.

Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis has revealed the arrogance of humanity in the face of nature. Our planet and its inhabitants, from humans to the wider ecosystem, have all suffered from a world order driven by economic greed and power plays. The countries of the world have spent trillions of dollars on building an arsenal of death and have rushed to exhaust the earth without limit.

As overviewed here, former institutions and the global system that are now reeling were neither merciful to the earth, nor working towards the common values. The growing cracks in this antiquated system, however, provide an opportunity for humanity to build a more just order. There is an urgent need for a new structure and organization that can truly be transnational.

This highly anticipated new world order calls for a new value system. Western liberalism, which promised people freedom, equality and the rule of law, has failed to provide this, and will not be able to rebuild itself. It has been in decline for a long time. It has failed to adhere to its moral, human universality, and has become a tool of hegemony in the hands of an influential few. The instrumentalization of the world by the centers of power produces rigid categories that acquire an exclusionary character, justifying violence against opponents.

The new value system should be based on a global human foundation, triumphing for good wherever it exists, and restoring respect to nature and human dignity. Although we foresee the escalation of exclusionary nationalisms and rightwing extremism, there is no doubt that extremism will fail to create security, stability or economic prosperity. It will not provide concrete solutions to the crises of the era. It is born in a moment of fear and despair, so it will only prevail for a temporary period, after which much will fail. Still, people will start seeking a more rational human system.

These nationalisms, instead, can be combated by looking towards the increasingly diverse cities throughout the world, the urban settings where coexistence is rooted in true community and membership, united in that all share in a non-hierarchical participatory parity that will keep being global. The post-pandemic world may not be fair or safe, but it will eventually push humanity to build a more just alternative.

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