A Manifesto for a Better Post-Covid-19 World

INSIST network

Covid-19 is Showing the Fallacy of the Neo-liberal Age

Our ways of living, acting, and thinking are subject to—historically contingent—material, politico-economic, and socio-cultural framework conditions, and path dependencies. In the city, urban infrastructures are a good example of this. They shape our everyday practices: from mobility, dwelling, and leisure to care, working, and shopping. If there are no cycling lanes, it is difficult to use the bicycle to satisfy our need for mobility. If there are no green spaces, we cannot meet our demand for recreation without having to leave the city. If there is a lack of open urban space, physical distancing becomes impossible.

However, these collective systems, necessary for satisfying basic needs and generating well-being, have been fundamentally undermined by a radical individualism that emerged in the neoliberal era of the 1980s. The individual (consumer) became the central locus of attention. Individual market choice (in line with rational-choice theory) replaced common political decisions. The individual replaced the collective subject. Privatization, the retreat of the state and the commodification of ever-new areas of life have been logical consequences of this strain of thought. Within this dogma, it is the individual that is to blame if the virus cannot be contained or if a transition

4

to a more ecologically sustainable mode of living is not achieved. These actions are no longer conceived as a collective endeavour. Individual responsibility replaced collective responsibility. Market logics characterized by an ability-to-pay morality replaced democratic deliberations and the negotiation of those values that structure our lives. Democracy turned into a supermarket, the city into a magnet for international capital.

Covid-19 has revealed this way of thinking for what it is: a dangerous fallacy. Coping with crises, be it Covid-19 or the climate crisis, cannot be left to market forces and the individual alone. Covid-19 demonstrates that we need to regain the ability to deliberate among a plurality of actors—to discuss, disagree, argue, gain new perspectives, disagree (again). And, ultimately, find compromises on how we want to live together, not necessarily as friends, but at least as equals and certainly not as enemies. Covid-19 has revived a new sense of community, mutual respect, and help. It has restored the insight that we are deeply embedded in and dependent on collective systems and those who maintain them—from infrastructures and health services to communities and (often) strangers (cashiers, delivery workers, nurses, sanitation workers, and so on). Therefore, we need to build new forms of and strengthen collaboration between a diversity of actors on multiple levels to shape our common paths towards the future.

We cannot go back to normal because normality was the problem

The Covid-19 crisis is simply an expression of a more significant crisis that humanity is going through: a civilization crisis. We must unlearn to consider ourselves as the most important beings on Earth, superior to other species. We all are part of the Earth; it does not need us, but we do need it. So, we must live with it. We must unlearn that development is only synonymous with economic growth, competitiveness, and productivity. Development also has an immaterial side: health, fellowship, joy, the beauty of building something in commonality, productivity as the fact of doing more with less, protecting ourselves in solidarity, giving and receiving love.

During the 2008 economic crisis, we witnessed the rise of social movements outraged by neoliberal policies. Were these protests a fight for a fairer world, or did they arise from the recovery need of the artificial, comfortable, and individualistic world that had been sold to society?

The 2008 crisis created the perfect conditions for the emergence of neo-populism, a thought based on the rise of the emotional factor, nurturing a brutalized and credulous society lacking critical capacity. The same community that, today, prefers to support people such as Greta Thunberg as the prophet girl of the apocalypse dramatically upset with the world, instead of acknowledging scientific arguments.

Compared to the Covid-19 outbreak, the climate crisis has never been recognized as a crisis, maybe because society has created the perfect framework to guide our decisions based solely on our emotions while discrediting the scientific. Or, perhaps, because the climate crisis does not affect the minority that dominates and commodifies most of the planet's natural resources and has decision-making power. Isn't that why, today, they force us to use the term 'resilience', to manipulate these vulnerable groups into accepting the persistent inequalities of this system and its effects, such as climate change?

→

This pandemic has proved that every nation, whether developed or not, needs to rethink how they undertake planning and development of their territories.

Today's predominant politics are obsolete, inflexible, and inhuman, revolving around the state, institutions, and capital. Let's not let this pandemic be a pretext to continue with failed recipes for economic reactivation policies that only benefit the minority of privileged individuals and corporations that have done nothing but produce greater inequality. We need to change current politics into one that is dynamic, adaptive, and interdependent, like life itself. For this, we could incorporate biology, ecology, and life sciences. In this way, we would live in a society that practices a policy of life, for life, and to live life.

As many people have been saying, "we cannot go back to normal because normality was the problem". It is up to us to rethink what world or worlds we want for future generations. Perhaps it is about that—accepting that it is possible to live with different worlds respectfully and that, together, we can build universal ideas based on dialogue and conflict, with critical regard towards previous hegemonic impositions.

In the case of a crisis, the conflict between individual and community desires is enhanced. When resources are limited, people frequently rely on governments to provide an organized rescue plan. This also evokes a moral dilemma as individuals wish to maintain the right to choose how to comply with legislation. Their practices are often driven by a cost-benefit evaluation between their needs and the social values as a whole.

Therefore, it is essential (for individuals, companies, and governments) to create a structure that delineates accountability while maintaining principles that underpin each community's foundation. Realigning incentives are required to develop reserves in the best times to provide an efficient buffer and downturn response mechanism.

Rethinking within a 'bigger nature'. People taking the lead, solidarity-supporting states, and the market back in its place.

People have proven to be able to organize, adapt, and take the lead in crises like these, mainly through cooperation and mutual collaboration. New partnerships and cooperation at multiple levels must be strengthened to successfully emerge from this crisis and should lead to a reorganization of communities, where people can truly take a stand as educated, adult, and resilient individuals.

Governments are vital in coping with crises and providing democratic guidance when needed, as well as supportive of healthy communities in general. They should provide the material, social, economic, political, and cultural basis for communities to thrive and be democratic, pluralist, diverse, alive, and accessible—refocusing their investments from merely serving markets and their influential players to supporting foundational economies, healthy and active communities, and bottom-linked governance.

Markets are assumed to be the pinnacle of human wisdom and technological improvement. In reality, large parts of societies have become subordinate to commodification. Building on heterodox thinking, markets should be reduced to mere resource allocation systems embedded in pro-social networks, solidarity economies, grounded democratic decision-making, and rich cultural practices, rather than enclosing nature and humans in vicious extractive growth.

Big governments, multinational corporations, and global markets have created autonomous, un-earthed, and socially detached spheres. The interactive and interscalar global and local dynamics and expressions of the pandemic have proved that 'big' government, corporations, and markets depend on the most local sphere, whether they like it or not, so they must start giving it the attention and importance it needs.

Urbanization and anthropocentric worldviews have led to a significant reduction in people's contact with their natural environment. When Covid-19 and wild nature
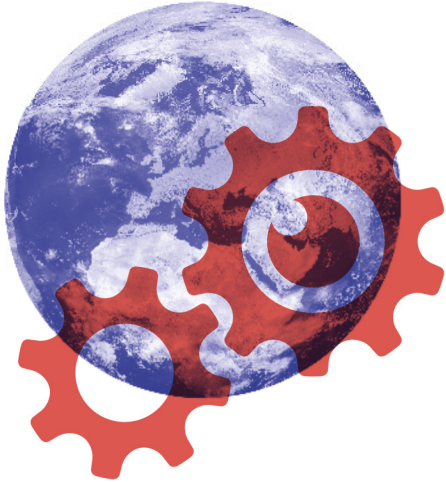
forced us humans to restrict our activities, we saw the actual colour of our Mother Earth. It is high time for humankind to rethink and adjust its position as part of a more prominent nature. A starting point is seeing the planet as a global common that needs to be taken care of.

Our Notion for a Future Agenda

Covid-19 has been a disruption of the way we think about our cities and rural areas. This pandemic has proved that every nation, whether developed or not, needs to rethink how they undertake planning and development of their territories. It has provided an opportunity to rethink governance systems, urban-rural linkages, commu-nity solidarity, international labour and trade, climate change, the provision of basic services, and the well-being and safety of residents. A shift to a more nature-embedded attitude is needed both for the environment and humanity. To prepare the post-Covid-19 world, the new 'normal' needs a radical agenda. ●

⟶

1. The presumed positive effects of Covid-19 on climate change in terms of more ecologically sustainable living conditions need to be interpreted in their broader socio-political context—by recalling long-standing challenges about political inertia, power struggles, and institutional assets.

2. Transformative endeavours need to shift their focus from market incentives to collective rules, institutions, and infrastructures.

3. A city's functionality needs to be measured in terms of its ability to provide welfare-critical goods and services instead of its ability to attract international capital, tourists, investors, and highly mobile knowledge workers.

4. The agenda should focus on addressing the disproportion in service delivery—non-commodification of basic services. There is a need for immediate action for access to better health care for the urban poor and rural communities.

5. The closure of borders has revealed the extent to which food systems, which could (and should) be localized, are dependent on international labour and trade. Creating more sustainable and resilient food systems requires vision, effort, and long-term investment, and these systems need to be in place when new disasters strike.

6. **Self-organization of communities should be stimulated to develop innovative interventions in the use of public spaces and mobility, the provision of different open areas on the neighbourhood level and scaled-down investment in people-driven mobility such as walking and cycling in cities.**

7. **Affordable housing should be a human right, in which the voice of marginalized communities should be heard; these communities should truly benefit from any development programmes aimed at their improvement.**

8. **Local-scale solidarity networks should be co-constructed and sharing values should precede actions in this process. Solidarity actions based on collective values have a reliable power to reproduce communities and become institutionalized.**

9. **Inter-community relations and diversity should be fostered since they play an essential role in the capacity of communities to reform themselves and overcome challenges such as a potentially socially destructive pandemic.**

10. **Proper care of physical and mental health during and after the pandemic is essential not only on a personal but also on an institutional level.**

ABDELLATIF ATIF (Free university of Bolzano, Italy), **CARLOS ESCARPENTER MARTINEZ, CANAVATE** (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain; KU Leuven, Belgium), **CHRISTINE MUCHIRI NJUHI** (Technical University of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya), **CLARA MEDINA GARCÍA** (KU Leuven, Belgium; UCM, Spain), **DAWIT GEBREHIWET** (Ethiopian Institute of Technology – Mekelle University, Ethiopia), **DORA BELLAMACINA** (Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, Italy), **ESHETE SITOTAW** (Addis Ababa City Plan and Development Commission, Ethiopia), **FARZANA YASMIN** (KU Leuven, Belgium), **FEDERICA ROTONDO** (Politecnico of Turin, Italy), **FRANK MOULAERT** (KU Leuven, Belgium), **GENARO ALVA ZEVALLOS** (IMSDP Network), **GRACE VALASA** (Technical University of Kenya, Kenya), **HONGKAI CHEN** (KU Leuven, Belgium), **ISYE SUSANA NURHASANAH** (KU Leuven, Belgium; Institut Teknologi Sumatera, Indonesia), **JOAN NYAGWALLA OTIENO** (KU Leuven, Belgium; Technical University of Kenya), **JULIET NJERI RITTA** (Technical University of Kenya), **KAMMERHOFER ARTHUR** (KU Leuven, Belgium; TU Wien, Austria), **MARJAN MARJANOVIC** (Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, UK), **MARTINA BOCCI** (Politecnico di Torino, Italy), **MOHAK JHAWAR** (KU Leuven, Belgium), **MONICA MARTINEZ FERNANDEZ** (KU Leuven, Belgium; ETSAM, Spain), **MULUBERHANBIEDEMARIAM TASSEW** (Shire Campus Aksum University, Ethiopia), **NINELIA MARKARIAN** (KU Leuven, Belgium), **NUR HAMIDAH** (Bandung Disaster Study Group; U-Inspire, Indonesia), **PIETER VAN DEN BROECK** (KU Leuven, Belgium), **RICHARD BÄRNTHALER** (Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria), **SONIA MOLLICA** (Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, Italy), **SYLVIA INZIANI** (Maseno University, Kenya), **VIDYA SPAY** (Nata Desa Indonesia), **WOSSEN GEBREYOHANNES** (EiABC, Ethiopia), **YESCHA DANANDJOJO** (IMSDP Network)