

## Ecosocial Notes Post Covid19 by Yayo Herrero

Some say that COVID 19 is a black swan, an unforeseeable event that could not be avoided. But not improbable or unexpected. Science tells us that this pandemic has a lot to do with the ecological crisis we are experiencing with the ecological crisis we are experiencing. According to IPBES (Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), the loss of biodiversity increases the frequency and virulence of such phenomena.

Biodiversity is the dense web of relationships between living things and is a real safety net for life itself, woven over millions of years of evolution. When biodiversity is lost, zoonosis - the transmission of viruses from animals to humans - is much more frequent. Along these lines, Fernando Valladares, a researcher at CSIC, (Spanish Superior Council for Scientific Research) said in a recent interview that "there was already a vaccine against Covid and we have killed it". That vaccine is biodiversity. The more it is destroyed, the more we are exposed to viruses. It is important, therefore, not to destroy the natural barriers that allow us to defend the human species.

On the other hand, some scientific literature is also beginning to link the lethality and speed of spread of the virus to air pollution. It seems that where people have been breathing polluted air for the last 15-17 years, incidence and mortality have been higher. Preliminary developments along these lines have been published in a study by Harvard University and another by the University of Lombardy. Moreover, the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) warns that the reappearance of eradicated diseases or an increase in vectors of infection are likely consequences of climate change.

The pandemic also surprised us with a partially dismantled and privatised public health system. We must remember that we are living in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. From this crisis we "came out" with a worsening of working conditions and impoverishment of large sectors of the population. Spain is now a structurally precarious country. It is not just that there are a few people who have to turn to social services because they are homeless or unable to pay their electricity bills, but that there are many people who have difficulties in terms of habitability, access to energy or sufficient and quality food.

The synergy between a situation of structural precariousness and a weakened public health system is obviously not the best starting point for tackling the pandemic. To get out of the situation created by the Corona Virus, it is necessary to look reality in the face and understand that this crisis is part of a profound civilisational crisis in the face of which it is urgent to organise resilient societies.

The first warnings came in 1972, when the Meadows report on limits to growth was published. Since the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the IPCC, the International Energy Agency, the IPBES, the scientific community in multiple universities around the world have been pointing out, with increasing accuracy and data, that we are going through a crisis caused by the overflowing of the Earth's limits and biocapacity. At the root of the problem is an economic system driven by the expansive dynamics of capital that needs to grow exponentially, consuming materials, energy, water, territory or biomass, but which has to do so on a planet that does have limits.

If the warnings had been heeded in the 1970s or 1980s, we could have made progress in transforming our economies towards systems that ensured the satisfaction of living standards on the basis of sufficiency.

The problem is that the expansive dynamic of the capitalist economic model is incompatible with the preservation of life over time. The economic logic, based on growth, which neither observes nor understands limits, has also taken root in the social imaginary, which has internalised a kind of sacrificial logic: everything is worth sacrificing in order for the economy to grow. Among other things, because of the overcoming of planetary limits, the global economy is having more and more problems in order to to grow to meet the needs of everyone. More and more people are being pushed to the margins of life.

Getting out of this situation in good conditions for most people and also for the rest of the living world means radically changing lifestyles, learning to live with sufficiency, i.e. learning to live with enough. It is obvious that there are many people who need more than they consume to have a dignified life, but it is also true that there are others - and I am not only referring to the famous 1% - who can live well with much less:

with less energy, less materials.... This is not a strictly personal question, but a structural question, which implies changing production models from top to bottom and that our economies should be planned around what is necessary and possible to produce in order to guarantee decent living conditions for everyone.

It is unavoidable to assume that the shrinking of the material sphere of the economy is a given factor. The key is not so much whether or not to degrow materially, but how to do it. It is possible to degrow with an unjust logic, so that privileged sectors, protected by economic, political and military power, sustain lifestyles based on the plundering of resources from other territories.

But we could address global economic degrowth as a process of socio-ecological transition towards just and resilient models. We need radically different economies that focus on producing to meet people's basic needs. There is no lack of ideas, proposals and technologies. It is not that we do not know how to produce food differently - there is agroecology; it is not that we do not know how to transform our city models. We are far from having a detailed and concrete roadmap, but we have many pieces of the way forward. What we lack is the social power to be able to force those changes. This political power is key, and in my view, in order to dispute it, we need a tremendous social base that wants, desires and is willing to work for these changes.

And for this, the key is the dispute over cultural hegemony. We need to radically overcome the "sacrificial logic" we spoke of earlier. In these days of confinement, a small moment of lucidity has opened up in which we have seen the fragility of the economic metabolism, what was essential and what is not. We have realised that we are living in an explosives magazine, in a situation of permanent risk.

With Covid 19 we accepted exceptional measures because the population knew that life was at risk. The problem is that with the ecological crisis, climate change and the depletion of basic resources, we are not yet aware, at least not by a majority, of the bleak horizons that lie ahead unless we undertake exceptional and urgent transformations.

It is very important to think about post-pandemic measures in the context of the ecological crisis we are facing. If we continue to look the other way, we will have less and less chance of facing new emergencies. Whether we manage to act in a way that prioritises the preservation of life will depend on the organisation we are able to put together as a society. We will need a lot of reflection, but also a lot of social organisation and a lot of pressure. Let us hope that we take advantage of these moments of lucidity to start moving in a different direction.

Translated with [www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator) (free version)