
Between resilience and recidivism: the social mutations of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the main results of the study entitled *The Social Mutations of COVID-19. A Multi-disciplinary Perspective* undertaken by the Philosophy and Social Sciences Section (SFCS) of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (IEC) in 2021 and 2022, in which a team representing some of the different disciplines encompassed within the SFCS—demographics, law, economics, communication studies, educational policy, geography, anthropology, border history, educational psychology and sociology—assessed the impact of the pandemic on the Catalan-speaking territories. The throughline of the analysis was to interpret the impact of the pandemic as a crisis of governability, in which the response of the different social science disciplines should be viewed as yet another way to struggle on behalf of and preserve individual and group life. Once resilience was confirmed, with epidemiological and pharmaceutical research coupled with the healthcare sector playing a crucial role, there is now discussion of a conjunctural effect; however, more than going back to normal we are finding an accelerated recurrence of the most negative trends identified prior to the pandemic, which could mean a fracture of the system on a longer timescale.

1. Addressing the impact of COVID-19 from the social sciences

In the midst of the health emergency, epidemiology and the health sciences were understandably at the forefront of the reaction to a pandemic caused by a theretofore unknown virus, SARS-CoV-2, but now, three years after the first known outbreaks appeared in Asia in 2019, the social sciences can provide an enriching and more reflective vision of it with greater perspective and more data. The goal is not only to measure the impact on the different fields in the social sciences—such as economics, culture, law, space and population—but also to take stock of it from the vantage point of each of these disciplines. Added value comes from cross-disciplinary examinations of an impact which was described as ‘syndemic’ from the very start, meaning that it extended beyond just the health crisis, as well as interpretations of part of the meta-discourse developed around an unexpected—though predictable—catastrophe with systemic consequences, or which prompted general contradictions in the economic and social system in which it appeared.

This text is the outcome of the determination of the Philosophy and Social Sciences Section (SFCS) of the Institut d’Estudis Catalans (IEC) to take a multidisciplinary approach to the impact of the pandemic in the Catalan-speaking lands. To do so, a two-year research project entitled *The Social Mutations of COVID-19. A Multidisciplinary Perspective* was undertaken in 2021 and 2022, which resulted in two main products. The first is a technical report that reflected the evolution of the pandemic from March 2020 to September 2021, which is posted on the IEC’s website under the title of *Social Impact of COVID-19. A Multidisciplinary Perspective*. The second is a book which seeks to reach a general readership entitled *The Social Mutations of COVID-19*, which was updated to the extent possible until late 2021. The title ‘social mutations’, which already existed in the initial research, sought to stress not only how the impact of the pandemic has changed over time, but especially how these mutations are taking place beyond biology, the virus’ interaction with the human species, and instead encompasses the social facet of its interaction with the populations with which it came into contact. Thus, the spotlight was trained on the same phenomenon based on the different interests of the social sciences, including demographics, law, economics, communication studies, educational policy, the border history, geography, anthropology, educational psychology and sociology. Naturally, these are not all the possible disciplines or even just those represented in the SFCS. Moreover, in some ways this project can be viewed as an added effort to the first reaction of the IEC as a whole, when it held a lecture series about the pandemic in 2020 featuring prominent members of the IEC’s different sections and experts from outside it (IEC, 2021).

Each document, the aforementioned report and volume, concludes with an ‘epilogue’, where the research coordinators Mercè Barceló and Andreu Domingo provide an overall assessment, more than a summary. The first one was entitled ‘Social Sciences and Biopolitical Immunology in the Catalan-Speaking Lands’ (Domingo & Barceló, 2022a) and the second one ‘Two Years and One Day of the Pandemic’ (Domingo & Barceló, 2022b). Therefore, this text can be consid-

ered a continuation of the two preceding epilogues. Time has continued to march on, although logically we have retained the same core discourse focused on biopolitics and the political immunology of society. The main themes include its impact on populations (on mortality, fertility and migrations), institutions and citizen freedoms, the economy, the educational system and specifically educational policies, the communication system, mobility and transports and neighbourhood struggles, as well as its uneven impact region to region. It examines the border as a place of exchange and separation, with the territories subjected to five different administrations and three states, as well as the social sciences themselves and the researchers who have had to deal with the pandemic over this period as they have organised their time, their lives and their research, with a particular focus on the field of sociology.

Therefore, our point of departure shall be the exceptionalism prompted by the outbreak of the pandemic and the mobilisation of biopolitical mechanisms by states and supra-state organisations, along with the gradual creation of immunity in the body politic, to which the social sciences have also contributed. We shall address how the idea of ‘back to normal’ has been addressed since the end of the lockdown, in this apparently permanent emergence from the pandemic. We shall then conclude with reflections on the concepts of resilience and recidivism to take stock of the pandemic’s impact on the Catalan-speaking lands, which in some ways can be extrapolated to the rest of the world.

2. Exceptionalism and biopolitics

The throughline outlined in the epilogue of the report that sought to understand the health crisis specifically and its associated syndemic in general is interpreting it as a crisis of governability in the biopolitical sense, as articulated by Michel Foucault (2001). At that time, we noted—and can now confirm, given the results—that the logic of the reaction to the pandemic was approached in biopolitical terms with the essential underlying question: ‘Who we should save and who should we let die?’ This question led the entire world to the synthetic formula that spotlighted the disjoint between health and economics. A choice had to be made. Given the different features of the illness in the age structure—as noted in the chapter on demographics, people over the age of 75 had a higher mortality rate—this false dilemma evolved towards a supposed strengthening of generational relations between ‘young people and the elderly’. Seen in this light, the goal was to prioritise saving the elderly by enforcing strict control over the population’s mobility and the physical distance between people, or, to the contrary, saving young people and children in order to continue economic activity and ensure future possibilities for the former and education for the latter. Here, education is crudely considered an investment in human capital that should yield future profit. By getting governability implicated as state action, this dichotomy entailed taking the concept of exceptionalism, following the interpretation of it that the philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998) made based on Carl Schmitt, as the norm of

governability and therefore of discussions on safety and freedom. This exceptional situation resonated in the declaration of the state of alarm, which motivated the political articulation of the debate over the more or less quick objective of achieving ‘herd immunity’.

If we focus on the Spanish state, as the field of law has clearly underscored, the recentralising option chosen from the very start, which turned ‘unity’ into a galvanising concept of the effort to overcome the pandemic—a kind of healing mantra—and thereby discarded the application of healthcare laws in favour of the state of alarm, was not only an offense against the State of the Autonomies (Spain’s political system) but also an explicit renunciation of institutional memory (i.e., experience) in healthcare management (Barceló et al., 2022). This decision can be criticised not only because of its limitation on autonomous government and individual rights or the loss of efficiency but also because it fattened parasitic businesses justified by the use of computer applications to monitor the population, and even the propaganda of ‘smart cities’, all for the greater glory of what has been called ‘surveillance capitalism’ (Zuboff, 2019), mirroring the Chinese authoritarian regime’s efficiency in containing the pandemic. The recent ‘territorial cohesion’ crisis, as the Spanish State likes to call Catalonia’s failed constituent process, can doubtlessly explain the insistence on messages of unity, shameful military theatrics in the early weeks and mistrust of the regional administrations. However, the temptation to fall back on authoritarian and technocratic responses—which were not exclusive to the Spanish state—should be interpreted as an expression of the previous momentum of democratic erosion, where judicial power supplants the lawmakers’ role. Despite the slogan ‘the virus knows no borders’, this retreat within State borders became particularly clear when analysing the contradictions at cross-border zones, especially in the sometimes ambiguous role of regions which were affected by border closures and their surveillance stemming from the decisions of the French and Spanish States, as well as cooperation in the healthcare networks, symbolised by the coordination of hospital services on either side of the border (Camiade et al., 2022).

Of the overviews presented, it may be surprising that after all this discourse, the arena of the economy has apparently been much more severely hit than health, especially if we compare it with the previous pandemic in 1918, in which there was an 11.1% decline in the GDP, as outlined in the economic report (Carreres, 2022). As underscored, this would be tantamount to translating the increase in value of human life itself. In absolute terms, that is, in the loss of human lives—with an average of 25,000 extra deaths as a result of COVID-19 compared to previous years—the comparison clearly leans in favour of the quick, efficient reaction entailed in the discovery and administration of vaccines, which halted deaths wherever they were administered. However, we should note that this overall 1.5 year loss in life expectancy in 2020 and 2021 compared to the maximum in Catalonia the two previous years—which is even lower in Valencia (0.6 years) and the Balearic Islands (0.2 years)—in contrast to the eleven years in the influenza epidemic of 1918, conceals an age-based mortality rate that differed widely in the two pandemics: while COVID-19 affected the oldest age brackets, the flu one century ago mainly affected

youths and children. This explains why the weight of this second pandemic in calculations of the mean life expectancy at birth is much lower than the first one, just as the recovery of those lost years is expected to be, even including the possible underestimation of the number of deaths caused directly by COVID-19 and the delayed mortality yet to be estimated produced by the stress to which the healthcare system has been subjected. The landscape marked by inflationist trends left in the wake of the pandemic, caused by the supply-chain crisis, with increasing demand parallel to the resumption of economic activity—which led some to dream about a new ‘Roaring Twenties’—has been aggravated in what seems to be the stagflation precipitated by the crisis sparked by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The economic impact has extended beyond the pending final estimate of costs. The short-circuit of the market’s neural processes is what has become extraordinarily salient. The forced hiatus in fundamental economic activities caused by the lockdown and physical distancing cast doubt on what we understand by ‘normal’. The impact of the suspension of economic activity and all mobility on air and noise pollution in large cities has been one of the examples exploited the most by the media. But the research in the chapter on mobility shows that the significance of the hiatus and the uneven distribution of harm caused by the crisis are also clearly reflected in a local level (Boira et al., 2022). If the acceleration in the flows of people, capital, goods and information can be considered the neural network of globalisation in the new millennium, the hiatus clearly revealed economies’ dependence on this mobility, illuminating the asymmetry between the health and economic bottom lines, with the Catalan-speaking lands under the Spanish administration as a prime example. We first saw the uneven footprint it left on health and the economy exemplified by the Balearic Islands, which had minimal mortality effects on life expectancy and yet a magnification of the consequences of the interruption in mobility, spotlighting the tourism sector’s dependence on it, in addition to the specificity of its status as an island. Yet we have also seen that neither populations nor neighbourhoods experienced the same shock caused by the changes in people’s mobility. The more socioeconomically vulnerable populations, who were forced to use public transport when it resumed operation and face worse living conditions and activities with a higher risk of infection, ran a higher risk than others. If we extend this vulnerability to activity, exposure to the virus has also shown a clear gender bias (with women more heavily involved in caregiving activities), an age bias (both young people and the elderly) and a bias with regard to background (immigrants are overrepresented in high-risk activities and have worse living conditions). The same holds true with the areas where this population is concentrated, with calculations of more severe effects in lower-income neighbourhoods. When it rains it pours.

It also pours if we consider the unwanted effect on the Catalan language given the pandemic’s consequences on the media ecosystem, with an increase in streamed and platform-based contents, where Catalan is underrepresented, if not excluded, in light of market laws and the defencelessness caused by a State that is unconcerned with languages other than Spanish

(Coromines Piulats & Martori Munsant, 2022). But this effect on and from the media is not limited to the economy. First we have to situate it within the prior context of the loss of trust in the State as a producer of social truth, which can be explained by the expulsion of truth from political discourse and action, as Hannah Arendt (2017) anticipated in the mid-1970s, which has been called post-truth since 2016 (Domingo, 2018). This loss of confidence in the State has also been reflected in the decline in the consumption of public media, which opened the floodgates for the turbulent, mucky influx of false truths channelled on the social media, feeding echo chambers that enlarged cognitive bubbles where conspiracy and denial theories were incubated and inflated. The recourse to fact-checking, itself contaminated by partisan manipulation, has lost efficacy amidst all the media noise, if it has not actually contributed to the spread of disinformation, or what has been called the ‘infodemic’. These effects cannot be dissociated from the consequences of the pandemic in that it accelerated the trend towards media concentration which had been observed prior to it, or of the combination of decreased income from advertising, a delay in the spread of payment for contents in digital publications and the increasing consumption of news via the social media. The high-quality news that is essential for citizens’ co-responsibility in handling the pandemic crisis has all too often succumbed to the paternalism emanating from the authoritarian option denounced in courts, when it has not simply capsized in the waters of post-truth.

If we look at the effects on the research community, as educational psychology suggests we do (Castelló et al., 2022), we could again say that when it rains it pours, in the sense that it has been the weakest link in the chain of a meagre research system whose victims are young researchers with the most precarious academic positions, along with women, whose tensions between work and family were more acute during the lockdown and remote work. The gender imbalances have become clear in working conditions and the elementary contradiction between productive and reproductive work. In other words, here, too, the importance and yet paradoxical devaluation of caregiving work have come to the fore, with a clear gender bias. And this is in spite of the fact that the adaptation to the new conditions (in both research and teaching) was marked by the competences in the new technologies required by the adaptation to remote work, which we may a priori consider more difficult for the older generations. However, just as in the economy at large, the pandemic has also caused a short circuit in the research system, in which the recourse to remote work has been unable to satisfactorily replace the forced cancellation of professional gatherings like conferences and seminars, thus diminishing the interactions—both scientific and political—that normally occur when results are shared. The upside in the guise of the effort to make scholarly publications more agile, which can be seen in the most prestigious journals in the field of health, has nonetheless come with a kind of opportunism and banality in the contributions. The health emergency caused by the pandemic has widened the gap—which existed before it—between what are considered the ‘hard sciences’ and the others, in a system geared at producing profits (with the lodestone of the ‘patent’) that is subordinated to business interests. We should note that the irony lies in the fact that the discovery of the vaccine was

facilitated by basic research, and that public investment gave it the definitive impetus. The health sciences are understandably considered top priority, although, as we shall see, the social sciences also focused on the early effects of the pandemic. This channelling of research has been sanctioned as the evaluation and funding process has been resumed by both the public administration and the private sector, beginning with grants provided by banks.

3. The immunological response

From the start, the biopolitical mechanisms implemented in the face of the pandemic included the creation of immunological responses, an analogy coined by Roberto Esposito, like measures adopted to strengthen the power to preserve the life of the individual and the community while also promoting the health of the body politic of the Nation-State (Esposito, 2011). This immunological response encompasses the reactions of institutions, populations and (for us) research activity in general, and research in the social sciences in particular, in a bid to understand first the virus and how it is transmitted and then the scope of the pandemic beyond biomedical research and the strategies that could be implemented to overcome its most unwanted effects.

We can include key decisions in the field of economic policy within this response, such as jettisoning the austerity policies adopted in the Great Recession of 2008 and focusing instead on palliative programmes to sustain the forced inactivity, such as temporary redundancy plans, along with the injection of money from the Next Generation programme. However, we should highlight the existence of comparative injustices over economic assistance that reflect the economic status of the European Union countries, and it remains to be seen what is ultimately done with the bulk of the economic assistance and whether it was really targeted at facilitating the transition towards a green economy or mitigating inequalities, as was its stated goal.

The sphere of educational policy provides us with a privileged vantage point for observing this immunological construction in such an essential area for social reproduction as education. We will use it as a paradigm for understanding the contradictions to which the system was exposed. Specifically, although the quick, unanimous reaction of the public administrations is noteworthy, which we can take as an example of top-down governability—from UNESCO and the UN to school boards—with statements that adopting policies of equity and inclusiveness stated as top-priority, it nonetheless tiptoed over the structural reasons behind the inequalities that it purportedly sought to combat (Sureda Garcia & Miquel Lara, 2022). Thus, here, too, the contradictions in the emphasis on the application of new technologies to continue classes became clear, as did the fact that the school extends beyond the educational environment and was forced to take on caregiving tasks. Thus, the insistence on teachers' and students' digital capacities and the pretension of digital literacy in the family setting were unable to resolve the evidence that the digital divide spotlighted the structural inequalities which the education system was in the-

ory supposed to combat. On the other hand, just as was observed with healthcare sector employees, teachers' status as 'essential workers' and the public praise in acknowledgement of their efforts served to feed a system which relied on worker voluntarism. Not only was the material provision of the technological means needed to normalise the use of ITC not considered, but the minimum structural material and human conditions which would make this access among populations labelled 'vulnerable' possible or limits them to the physical space of the school (square metres of classroom, IT equipment or improvement in the teacher-to-student ratio, for example) were deliberately omitted. Thus, we witness the perverse effect that an institution like the public school, upheld as the guarantor that will balance students' initial inequalities, became yet another complicit party in reproducing inequality. Apparently nothing has changed, the discourse in either supra-state organisations or the local administration, not only because the problems identified as the main impact of COVID-19 are the same as before but because the discourse, approach and strategy used to deal with them has hardly changed, framed within risk management and targeted at 'training human capital' and the loss that the pandemic may cause in meeting future market demands (measured ultimately as lower employability due to diminished capacity). As stated above, the narrative generated by supra-national resolutions served as a script for the response of the different State administrations, as a normative and prescriptive—not to mention hegemonic—discourse. Thus, we can see how the supposed clash that tends to be presented as the crux of the tensions around globalisation, namely the struggle between supra-state institutions and the State, was blurred because in essential matters, in the form of governance, they all concurred in adopting a top-down discourse based on the rhetoric of neoliberal management aimed at 'boosting resilience'.

However, the implementation of institutional mechanisms has not been anywhere close to the only immunological response, and the grassroots self-organisation of civil society, which this volume has illustrated with the study of urban movements in the city of Valencia, can be considered a prime example (Moncusí Ferré & Foriavanti Álvarez, 2022) as the first extraordinary response by movements, most of which were created to combat existing inequalities and discrimination, to both the pandemic itself and the declaration of the state of alarm. They span from neighbourhood movements, the main focus of the more veteran neighbourhood associations, to those related to gender spearheaded by the feminist movement, anti-racism associations, overall inequalities combatted by the alter-globalisation and anti-militarism movements and in general all the movements where intersectoral struggles converge. What became clear from the early days of the pandemic was their capacity for self-organisation and mutual support, as well as the activation of networks of solidarity that reinforced or created neighbourly bonds that had previously been eroded. It is noteworthy that this mobilisation not only contradicted the precautions of an administration that tends to infantilise the population but was also forced to counter the perverse effects that the administration itself was causing in its drive to limit the havoc wrought by the pandemic. One example is the recourse to digital communication which excluded or hindered people who had a hard time accessing it or the generations that are less

trained in how to use these new technologies (often trusting that these shortcomings would be solved within the family). In this sense, the generation gap of the urban movements themselves was revealed, with an operational advantage for those associations whose members tended to be young, with digital native generations. The territorial location of these movements also explains why the struggle over public space became a core of their actions: from countering the disciplinary actions by residents in what became known as the ‘balcony police’ to the contradiction entailed in limiting the use of public space in the restrictions on mobility and the declaration of time brackets for circulation, coupled with the appropriation of public space by private companies that were allowed to open as a return from the forced closure suffered by restaurant businesses, usually in the form of terraces.

Finally, as we said, research in general and research in the social sciences in particular should be considered a contribution to the immunology of the body politic. Suddenly, rulers placed their hopes in the field of science. This acknowledgement, sometimes used as a protective shield—just consider the controversy over whether or not the famous ‘Expert Committee’ which the Spanish government was supposedly consulting actually existed—glorified the figure of the ‘expert’. To some extent this could be considered a shift of biopolitical responsibility to experts, a glorification that contradicted the disdain that populist nationalism had been directing towards science as part of the *élite* that had become the source of all the people’s ills. In this sense, the figure of the scientist has been perceived in two ways. On the one hand, scientists were given priority access to the media during the pandemic crisis—the social sciences to a lesser extent—which in turn should have favoured scientific dissemination by capitalising on the credibility that the political class seems to have permanently lost. On the other hand, more or less imposed media leaders were created who became the target of the populist anger stoked by the far right. If we focus on the social sciences, using the particular case of sociology, where the first reactions were collected in the region of Valencia and Catalonia (Sanvicén-Torné et al., 2022), we see how suddenly they shifted gears to explore the areas where the pandemic had left its deepest marks: education, social inequality and gender relations, as well as the effects on the elderly and children, in addition to addressing health. The tendency to take stock of structural weaknesses and strengths was also replicated in the field of scientific reflection. In turn, this translated into responses which stressed the depth of the disruption caused by the pandemic, in contrast to the inertia of the system. We believe that the experience of the prior economic crisis weighs heavily here, which in sociology has led to ‘Gramsci-esque’ considerations in the sense that one of the challenges facing the discipline was to account for the radical transformation in which the former certainties of modern society are declining and a new social order yet to be defined is emerging. This thesis lay at the core of the posthumous work by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (2016). The pandemic emergency could be considered both a return to pragmatism and confirmation of the position which claimed the end of an ‘old world’ and the emergence of a new world—one that is not quite as discouraging, of course. However, we noted the suspicions regarding to what extent the reorientation of research priorities in sociology reflected the emer-

gency—and extrapolating the results, the different disciplines in the social sciences in general—or whether it should instead be considered an accommodation to calls for research which, as mentioned above, privileged these fields. And we say this without downplaying the strengths of the majority of the aforementioned areas in Catalan and Valencian sociology prior to the pandemic, both the sociology of education and sociology from a gender perspective.

4. De-escalation and construction of an impossible ‘normal’

We now recall somewhat ironically the speculation on the form that the economic crisis would take during the pandemic and after it lifted: the onslaught of letters from ‘V-shaped slopes’ to ‘L-shaped slopes’, and how they were soon replaced by the Greek alphabet to name the variations of the virus, from ‘Delta’ to ‘Omicron’. The amnesia imposed by the accelerated pace that is the hallmark of the new millennium has made some people already forget the pompous propagandistic declaration of the ‘new normal’ in the summer of 2020, when we were just emerging from the lockdown halfway through the first year of the pandemic. At that time, the slogan was ingenuously presented as the needle in the compass that showed society’s direction at the end of the lockdown, with a clearly performative mission. It is the slogan that the socialist president, and with him the Government of Spain, obscenely embraced without being repelled by its overlooked origin: the opportunistic vision of taking advantage of the momentum caused by the crisis as a great chance (to do business).

This was the message of the book that inspired the political discourse, the recipe book by the Silicon Valley magnate who had popularised the term within the neoliberal framing of the discourse of ‘resilience’ (McNamee, 2004) in the early twenty-first century: not only to emerge from the crisis, but to take advantage of it to come out of it stronger for having adapted to its conditions. Who was stronger? That is the crucial question. If we survey the results, the obvious response is the system, not society or the people. And in a similar vein we should think about the slogan of the ‘great reset’, also disseminated that summer of grandiose, empty promises. The formula was proposed by the oracle of Davos (Schwab & Malleret, 2020) as an opportunity to improve the system in order to emerge from the social-health crisis, as if it did not spread from the zoonosis that caused the pandemic and the conditions that aggravated it—like privatisation and the cutbacks from the austerity policy previously applied to the healthcare and educational systems—and the prior inequalities that explain its uneven impact. Both visions were infused with the argument of ‘rebooting capitalism’, a vow we hear every time we stumble upon one of the crises which may not have been created by the capitalist system but which it has helped to multiply. It goes without saying that the promise, which at the time was associated with all debates on guaranteed minimum income, was forgotten as soon as the crisis was believed to be overcome.

If we think about the desolate state of the world now that we can indeed put the pandemic behind us, we see how far we are from the political propaganda: instead of the more inclusive world promised, inequality still goes unchecked; debates on the redistribution of wealth and activity are tabled; and decarbonisation is in the midst of a backlash, taking advantage of the energy crisis and the gas shortages caused by the armed conflict in Ukraine. In fact, as noted regarding the self-organisation of the civic and neighbourhood movements in Valencia (Moncusí Ferré & Foriavanti Álvarez, 2022), the de-escalation, like the gradual return to 'normal', signalled a relaxation in social tensions which was used to silence all the siren calls which wanted us to believe that remediation, or transformation, was drawing near, clearly revealing them for what they were: a way to protect the system in case the fever rose to heights that could have endangered it. If we take stock, it is clear: there was no back to 'normal' beyond the norms that restricted mobility and imposed social distancing or mask-wearing, that is, the health behavioural rules adopted to contain the pandemic. Outside this realm, there was no going back in the sense that if the economic conditions and therefore the social order were in fact changed, it was not for the better.

5. Between resilience and recidivism

When taking stock, the more optimistic among us have underscored the resilience based on the knowledge society which has led to an array of vaccines, the main tools for controlling the pandemic, within a relatively short period of time, with considerable contributions from the public sector. Nor should we forget the robustness of the healthcare systems, beginning with the efforts made by the individuals within them. In this sense, they have also sought to highlight the governance of the crisis, which prevented the spread of the panic and disorganisation that many predicted in the worst dystopian vision of the future in the societies that were dealing with the threat of the pandemic, despite the resistance from some sectors, the more or less widespread disturbance and its extension over time, when stricter restrictions were being applied to sectors like services in general and tourism in particular, and the income that certain groups have tried to earn from this upheaval.

A more carefully weighed assessment has sought to determine whether the effects can be considered conjunctural (as we saw at the beginning, they may be in the case of mortality and life expectancy, or neighbourhood self-organisation in a very different sphere), whether what it did was aggravate unwanted trends noted above (succumbing to the temptation of centralisation in the case of the Spanish administration in particular or the advance of what is called surveillance capitalism everywhere), which if we assess it pessimistically we could describe as 'recidivism'. That is, we could view it as the inertia of going back to the bad habits that prevailed prior to the pandemic, which would be obvious in the promises that have been left along the way like the spread of universal guaranteed minimum income, or how it made us dream by

spotlighting the improvement in the environmental indicators based on the radical halt in the majority of activities that contributed to pollution. In this cubbyhole where we are stashing the different typologies built based on the directionality of the pandemic's effects, we could still consider those phenomena which could have been considered emergent until the outbreak of the pandemic (such as the spread of remote work and the concentration of media ownership), which seem to have burgeoned based on this experience, or whether to the contrary it signalled a shift in trend (which some may believe has happened with the ages-old trend of rural depopulation, despite our scepticism in this regard).

And here we should say that this assessment may be muddled by a problem whose timescale is difficult to calibrate, which leads us to a kind of illusion. For example, we have already said that the effect on mortality may seem conjunctural if we bear in mind the relatively quick recovery in the drop in life expectancy that is expected in all the regions analysed. Without shifting phenomena, however, and with our sights set on the long term, we could wonder whether the pandemic may not be a warning about the return of infectious diseases as a reality that the demographic transition in general and the health transition in particular had banished from our imaginary. Indeed, we may believe that if the pandemic stemmed from zoonosis, as all signs seem to indicate, and that this translates the imbalance between the economic system and the environment, instead of considering it a 'merely' conjunctural effect it should be internalised as one of the first disruptions in the system, such that in the future we should be prepared for new pandemics.

See bibliographic references in the Catalan version of the article.