

## It's time to not resume

The current health crisis is gradually bringing world production to a standstill. In just a few weeks, it has made possible what seemed impossible: a loosening of the budgetary stranglehold, a reassessment of dividends, a defense of the welfare state by those who had been dismantling it, unconditional support for workers impacted by income losses, and an unexpected drop in greenhouse gas emissions. But we are already hearing about huge economic stimulus plans once the confinement period ends in order to close this parenthesis as soon as possible and resume the trajectory of economic growth that was interrupted.

Yet two interrelated issues need to be considered as we emerge from the crisis. On the one hand, we must limit, by all possible means, the immense social and [geopolitical](#) crisis that is looming. On the other hand, we must not resume as before.

The difficulties that will pile up in the coming months mean that there will certainly be a 'before' and 'after' covid-19. We will no longer live tomorrow exactly as we did yesterday. This 'after' scenario is being prepared but has not yet been written. The following thoughts aim to rationally channel the chaos that is coming. These considerations also try to take into account the current exacerbation of inequalities, for those who are isolated, for those who have lost their jobs, for those who must continue to expose themselves to the illness in their workplace, and for those who work from home.

This sanitary crisis creates a paradoxical situation. It is causing a profound reassessment of how our economy functions, as even [those esteemed analysts most convinced](#) of its merits now recognize the impasse we are in. However, despite the drastic emergency measures, the on-going economic production beyond [those sectors deemed "essential"](#), and the [erosion of civil liberties](#) show that some are poised to do everything possible to resume production, "come hell or high water" for ecological balances or for the physical and psychological health of humans. We must therefore be prepared to prevent a resumption of the same mortiferous trajectory, so that this moment in humanity indeed constitute a turning point toward a desirable future.

### ***Time for an inventory***

Together with others (numerous [organisations](#), the [Club of Rome](#), [the sociologist Bruno Latour](#) or a group of intellectuals calling for a [covid-19 conference](#)), we believe that the economic slowdown imposed by the crisis provides an opportunity to, at last, seriously tackle the ecological problems which, if left unaddressed, portend much more disastrous episodes. We may never again have the opportunity to reassess, all together thanks to the fierce focus brought by covid-19, how our system of production is organized, what we really care about, and above all to decide to alter our trajectory.

Among the very many proposals that have emerged to make this crisis a tipping point towards finally achieving peaceful relations with the complex system that is Earth, there are those of [Bruno Latour](#). He suggests, before we resume production, that we inventory what we value and what, on the contrary, we want to stop. This proposal is conducive to the individual and localized appropriation of major planetary issues. It calls for reinventing how we socialize with nature, rather than dominate it in a species-centric fashion. Above all, however, a profound reassessment of human activities is probably the only way we

can comply with the Paris agreements, because the drastic and necessary decrease in our greenhouse gas emissions that is required is not compatible with a "business as-usual" recovery.

From this perspective, we can only wonder whether we should relaunch, as if nothing had happened, the aeronautic, shipbuilding and car manufacturing sectors, international tourism, intensive agriculture and livestock farming, the agri-food and digital industries and, more generally, our productive system, which is based on the international division of labour and incentives for unlimited consumption. It isn't that that we should no longer make planes, ships, cars or even produce cans, but we must first ask ourselves: what is essential and makes us happy? And what is not? What makes it possible for us to live here without compromising this ability for others living elsewhere, and for future generations?

These questions could, for example, lead us to produce only materials-efficient cars (as opposed to SUVs) that would be used only when there is no substitute for public transport, to drastically limit the use of airplanes, to support an agriculture in synergy with ecosystems, to no longer tolerate that our clothes and medicine come from the other side of the world, to eat local food, etc... All this would be up for debate, taking into account the implications of these choices for us and for others, especially those around the world who currently depend entirely on outside production to survive.

### ***Empowering ourselves to not resume***

The covid-19 crisis has led some nations, for many reasons other than meeting their international climate commitments, to urgently define what are "essential activities". Some companies whose production was deemed 'non-essential' have (voluntarily or not) temporarily reconverted to making prioritized products, while others have tried to conduct business as usual, others have stopped, and many of the workers affected by these choices have found themselves deprived of employment.

This division between "essential" and "non-essential" activities is imposed without citizen control and cannot therefore serve as a model for the future: if we were to collectively undertake the inventory suggested by Bruno Latour, these ideas and experiences would have to be discussed using democratic mechanisms. These could take the form of citizens' conventions or general assemblies, on several scales, which would make it possible to discuss and perpetuate the changes that are needed to guarantee sustainable living conditions.

These mechanisms would take time, yet the crisis requires very rapid public intervention to prevent bankruptcies and unemployment. Nevertheless, some interventions would, in the immediate term, clearly be pointless: what is the benefit, for example, of [supporting aircraft production](#) when, even beyond the current sanitary crisis, the growth trajectory of air transport and the accompanying manufacture of new aircraft are unsustainable in view of our goals to limit climate disruption? Rather than eternally reassuring the markets that public authorities will make up for all the failures of large companies, including the most polluting and least necessary ones, why not start reorienting the production system towards our "essential" needs? At the very least, it would be advisable to condition this emergency aid for companies and banks to [their commitment toward a real ecological transition](#). In parallel with these short-term interventions, the institutional conditions for the debate on our future could be created.

Creating a universal income would make it possible to immediately alleviate the economic distress caused by this crisis, and by other as-of-yet unresolved causes. Proposals along these lines are emerging [all over the world](#). Far from being merely a circumstantial response, a mechanism of this type could accompany, in the long term, the necessary transformation of our system of production and the abandonment of [growth-based economic principles](#), as the city of [Amsterdam](#) is already considering. This income, to be defined by each country, can be distributed from the moment we agree to tax the richest. The financial viability of a universal income was demonstrated theoretically [a few years ago in the case of Spain](#). Meanwhile, some companies are making indecent profits (Amazon and other digital companies), at the expense of their employees while our local retailers, our liberties and socializing are decimated. Taxing such companies would be quite logical. Taxes on financial transactions, which could also limit stock market speculation, would also be justified.

Perhaps we could make a ten-year commitment. Ten years with a universal income in order to avoid the tragedies of job loss, accompanied by a strengthening of public services and social redistribution. Ten years with capped incomes, thanks to a redistribution of wealth as proposed by Thomas Piketty --- and widely promoted in the early days of the epidemic, in order to rebuild social peace and to rework the salary scale to take into account [the social utility of each job](#). Ten years without trips to Bali or luxury cruises. Ten years to learn to prefer a tomato from a nearby garden rather than a rib steak from Argentina, a game night with friends rather than a weekend in New York, a visit to the local shoemaker rather than new sneakers assembled by harried low-wage workers and handled by an Amazon-mediated, uberised delivery person, or bird calls rather than drone swarming. Ten years to eventually find our new jobs and the more sustainable organization of our activities. Ten years to get back on track with the Paris agreements, which we were already slipping away from with each passing day prior to the pandemic, and to finally reconcile ecology with defending the economically downtrodden. Ten years to adapt and decide what to do next.

These are only suggestions that should be debated widely, beyond any crisis-driven governing. The collective psyche will no doubt be upended by the present crisis. There will be difficult moments and others fertile with new desires. It would be distressing to let the mindset that spawned the ecological disaster again craft our future, as it did after the 2008 financial crisis. So, without delay, scientists, activists, politicians and power-players, citizens, let us take stock of what is essential to us, let us share initiatives, let us organize at all levels to prevent the security-state and ecocidal recovery that is already taking shape, while we work or remain confined, out of fear for tomorrow. Let us not allow this crazy trajectory toward irremediable disaster to resume. Let us impose an institutional, ecological and civic re-foundation that finally offers everyone the opportunity to flourish, while preserving our common good and the whole of life.

Translation : Martin Bowen