

## **Exploitation of the Pandemic**

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Every big and significant event in human history provokes great productivity and reflection. It is a natural response to an intensive and transformative experience.

### **An invisible threat**

SARS-CoV-2 is a small virus, invisible to the naked eye. Therefore, it not only easily spreads from one organism to another, but also plants doubt in various strata of the society.

This virus is nothing like the ones shown in films; people do not drop dead in the streets, they do not foam up at the mouth, and their bodies are not taken over by uncontrollable convulsions. Looking purely from physiological and cinematographical perspectives – this virus is truly unimpressive, thus spreading and inciting conflict in the society is even easier. If SARS-CoV-2 was impressive, if it could take people down like a bullet, then it would gain more respect and draw out greater fear.

In such an instance, self-isolation and other limitations would be looked upon far more seriously. There would be no need for fines or threats from governmental institutions – it would be enough to know that by behaving irresponsibly, one may not survive until the morning.

However, this virus is relatively mild, and deadly only for some. Because this virus is not reminiscent of the disaster film scenarios, it is only natural that its veracity has raised some doubts in the society. Doubt, ask any salesperson, is one of the easiest commodities to sell. Therefore, antivaxxers sell it brilliantly (“you will get even sicker if you vaccinate”); vaccine manufacturers sell it brilliantly (“it will be worse if you do not vaccinate”); supporters of opening up the economy sell it brilliantly (“more people will die from stopping the economy than from the virus”); supporters of human life as of the greatest value sell it brilliantly (“the economy can be revived, people cannot”); people who have become hostages of the healthcare system sell it brilliantly (“just look and see how many people with heart diseases, cancer, will die if they do not receive their treatment”); healthcare system curators sell it brilliantly too (“if we do not use the strictest of measures there will be no doctors left to

provide any service”). Today every member of society has at least one doubt that they can sell.

If there was a war, a flood, or an earthquake – a visible reality – there would be less doubt. It is hard to manipulate reality when iron bullets plough through the human body, when water is forcing its way through front doors, or when concrete slabs are falling on one’s head. Then, everything is clear, and questions like ‘what to do?’ do not arise.

With a virus, and a not particularly impressive one – everything is different. Therefore, each group of interests can change the direction of the conversation their way and they’ll find relevant arguments. Whether they are correct or not is a secondary matter. The most important thing is to take up a certain position, defend it, reinforce it, and thus take the full advantage of the situation at hand for the beneficial use of personal or collective aims. That is not a battle for the truth, but for the definition of the truth.

In politics, there is a well-known expression: never waste a good crisis. Any calamity is a currency allowing one to initiate new projects or to devalue the old ones.

### **Business is dead – long live business**

Business grows and prospers when it manages to foresee and take advantage of opportunities, where others did not see them. Such opportunities are fewer when social and economic circumstances are stable. And contrarily – there are more of them when a wave of multifaceted changes turns up.

Still, in this expression there is a hidden contradiction, because unstable conditions of operation for business are rarely advantageous. This is how sales and supply chains are thrown off balance, stable algorithms change along with the behaviour of the consumers, unexpected expenses appear, it is harder to keep up with the financial commitments, and long-term uncertainty settles in. Part of the businesses are wiped out by the crises – particularly those which have to “switch off”, currently hotels, aviation companies, restaurants, and other sectors that are either sensitive to or are directly affected by the pandemic. All of these businesses, which until now had very clear guidelines of operation, have entered the unknown and are forced to find creative solutions to survive.

However, some businesses are strengthened by the crisis, particularly those that take advantage of the misfortunes of their competitors and rush to fill

their places in the markets, and also those who were prepared for the changes in advance and were simply waiting for an appropriate opportunity to deliver. In 2020, widely developed manufacture and service automation and digitisation processes have picked up pace. This was encouraged not just by difficulties in trying to directly reach the consumer (whose mobility due to the pandemic has been greatly limited), but also by the inability to ensure that an employee of the company itself will be able to be at work at a predefined time.

Today, all of those who manage to deliver their product or service directly to our doors are the winners. But not only physical products or take-away food – that was familiar long ago, though of course the volumes have increased now. Still, the most significant changes are taking place in the services sector, which is becoming increasingly mobile. For example, digital healthcare. In 2019 only 11% Americans used telephone doctor consultation services. During the pandemic, this number has risen to 46%. In Lithuania, we have also for a long time now communicated with our doctors more frequently on the phone than in person. At the moment it still seems unusual and not particularly efficient – but only at the moment. For a great proportion of people, the desk has moved from their office to their living room. Gyms with personal trainers have climbed into screens, and the same has happened with schools and teachers, theatres and actors.

Some remote business solutions implemented during the pandemic have appeared to be so functional and efficient that they will probably remain when the pandemic ebbs out. They will become the new canon, those that survived the trial by fire and ice, tested under the most complex circumstances, and therefore trustworthy and reliable.

Business is one of the most creative modes of human self-expression – looking at it universally, crises never destroy it, they simply provide stimuli for transformation and renewal.

### **Science dictates fashion**

Science, despite its direct influence on our technological (and therefore social) development, most often ends up at the periphery of the public consciousness. Firstly, because science is complicated and if one wants to talk about it, then adequate preparation or competently communicating science promoters are required. Another reason is that science is often busy with matters that, upon first glance, do not seem directly related to the daily public

experience. Many have heard about the *Large Hadron Collider*, but only a small fraction could explain how this device helps to understand about the nature of the universe. Why? Because the breadth of the universe is one of the most insignificant of our worries – what does it matter, the what and how it is made up?

But science is something else entirely when our dependence on it becomes relevant to our survival: when we read articles written by researchers on how the virus functions, or how it is different from others; when we wait for the vaccine; whether we follow or not the recommendations; when we observe our mental state.

Under such circumstances, science becomes not just a beautiful formula when awarding the Nobel prize, but also gains a concrete and actual form. Science will use this crisis to lure even more investment – not just private, but also governmental, as an increasing share of the population will consciously agree that funds dedicated to scientific research are a new priority.

Also, the pandemic itself has provided scientists with so much material that various dissertations and research related to the evolution of the pandemic, its management, and its long-term effects on the public will flow for decades to come.

### **To squeeze art out of the pandemic**

Unusual situations create unusual sensations, and from unusual sensations comes unusual art. The pandemic provided for creators something to stimulate the imagination and thoughts – a multitude of restrictions, limitations, and obstacles. The inability to do what is usual is reminiscent of popular creativity exercises, which encourage participants to seek out new modes of self-expression. 2020 for artists was like an endless exercise, the results of which may now materialise here or there, but they will flood the scene the most once the pandemic calms down. In galleries, bookshops, theatres, and cinemas reflections of nature and attempts to summarise this tragedy that has shaken humanity will appear. Various perspectives will be explored in depth – that of a doctor, laboratory assistant, policeman, politician, an elderly person trapped at home, funeral home employee, courier, check-out person, priest, sceptic, or child. The phase of thorough in-depth analysis of the transforming experience awaits us, and a great share of actual artists will not miss an opportunity to express themselves on the subject.

Behind them move the numerous art curating organisations. Institutions like *Rupert* will organise seminars and post-pandemic vision competitions around the world; contemporary art museums and galleries will initiate exhibitions where “the core of identity of the pandemic, the social and psychological isolation cross-sections, difference between prudence and cynicism, sociability and individuality, as well as many other beautified and polished definitions” will be sought; creators in their search for residencies or funding will fill out the applications so that there is room for the word “pandemic”, because funding for projects reflecting on the pandemic, and also for those who are dressing the wounds it has caused will be a priority (the “relevance” clause will be easily met).

### **Press is the reality**

The press and various social media channels got one of the best subjects in the past few decades. Most often the news has its use-by-date – a few hours at best. If interest is maintained for a few days – it means the news is really important. If a few weeks – it is most likely an event that will leave an imprint in the history of a country or even the world. But if it’s a few months, half a year, or even a full year – that is an exceptional meta-state of humanity, which will become a point of reference in tracking time. It is unavoidable that one day we will hear a newsreader speak these words: “<...> is the greatest human crisis since the COVID-19 pandemic”.

Interest in the pandemic in the press has been and remains huge, because it is directly related to one’s fundamental needs: worry about the wellbeing and lives of close and dear ones. Even though in the large part of the world such worries remain a daily affair, in the Western world, however, the situation is somewhat different. Most often here, life is threatened only by old age and accidents, but for that threat to be external and uncontrollable? No, since WWII it has not occurred.

Therefore, this time, interest in news about the pandemic has been exceptional: not the usual curiosity or leisure-time filler, but rather a gripping battle between humanity and an invisible, destructive force. Almost an adventure, it stimulates the thoughts and boils the blood. At least, finally, we have become witnesses of historical events (“we’ll have something to tell our children”).

The pandemic has also allowed us, even forced us, to focus on the information war and fake news phenomena. Even though it is not new, the pandemic and

the surrounding vacuum of life have allowed us to grasp its complexity and potential.

Information war is only possible when information is significant and relevant, and when it influences daily public actions and thoughts – and during the pandemic, this is exactly how it is. Even more, with physical reality shrunk, information becomes its replacement. It is impossible to step out into the street and to see what's happening in the world, since there is nothing to be seen. Just an ordinary day. Thus, we need to read or watch the information appearing on the screen. What information enters our field of vision – such is our reality.

This pandemic has reminded the press of its main responsibility and its complex, controversial role – the role of reality.

### **More wells will be needed, there is a lot of oil here**

The pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 is like a natural resource (and therefore, limited), which will be readily and fully exploited by businessmen, politicians, analysts, and a variety of other mental field specialists. A post-pandemic content flood awaits us: everyone, who can and knows how, will try and squeeze the maximum out of the pandemic, firstly to learn from mistakes made, and to prepare in case it happens again. And later, they will wait again until the next, no less significant event happens, which will once again move the immovable, from which there is profit or loss to be made, but most importantly – it will be something to be talked about, something to be lived through.

But the greatest sorrow is for those who will not be there for that new event; and no exploitation of the pandemic will recover these losses.