

The Globalisation of Lockdowns

Planetary urbanisation revealed

By Eric Charmes & Max Rousseau

If Covid-19 has spread so rapidly, it is namely because urbanisation is now planetary and connects a wide range of territories to each other, through an international flows of goods and people.

As we write, 1 billion of human beings are affected by the lockdowns enforced to contain the spread of Covid-19. The simultaneity of these political decisions is exceptional. The outcome will be a recession on a scale unprecedented since the 1930s. Thus, on all the continents, governments have brutally disrupted the flows of trade, crippled the economic machine and destabilised societies. They have also severely restricted public freedoms.

Limiting lockdown to where the outbreaks occur, as was the case in several major pandemics (e.g. the Great Plague, when containment zones were established around infected areas, and the recent Ebola, MERS or SARS epidemics), would obviously have limited the pandemic's economic and social impact considerably. There was an attempt to do just that at the start: China, where the pandemic emerged, limited the area under lockdown to the outbreak in Wuhan, then to the region where the industrial megalopolis,

¹ The authors would like to thank Philippe Genestier, Maxime Decout, Pascal Séverac and the editorial staff of *La Vie des Idées* for their critical comments after reading the first draft of this article.

Hubei, is located. Thus, for the time being, it has managed to curb the spread of the virus in its territory.

Italy, the first European country affected by the epidemic, initially attempted to follow suit, by imposing lockdown solely in the areas of outbreak. However, the country was obliged to extend the containment zone rapidly and ended up imposing a nationwide lockdown. Subsequently, few countries attempted imposing a local or even regional lockdown strategy. Why did such spatially indiscriminate lockdown measures, which have high economic and social costs, appear universally as the only solution?

The characteristics specific to the virus obviously play a role. Clearly, sacrificing the economy and social life for health is not directly due to the virus' mortality rate: estimated at between 0.4 and 1.3%, it is much lower than the recent epidemics, notably SARS (11%) and MERS (34%). In addition, Covid-19 is not particularly contagious, with a reproductive rate (or R zero) similar to that of SARS, a disease whose spread was contained. However, Covid-19 has specific characteristics, which make its spread particularly difficult to control. It spreads quite rapidly and is hard to detect because many people show no apparent symptoms, but are contagious nonetheless.

The virus infects hosts from which it can spread imperceptibly. This mechanism plays an important role. It has allowed the virus to take advantage of a relatively silent evolution that is misunderstood: planetary urbanisation. Therefore, the virus has bypassed the usual measures involving the establishment of containment zones and quarantines in infected areas. In this way, economic rule as the overriding issue in public policies has come up against a new geographic reality that it has largely created.

The urban is out of the city

How do you define urban? Traditionally, it is contrasted with rural. But what are its distinguishing features? A dense group of several thousand inhabitants was considered a town in the Middle Ages, whereas today it is more suggestive of the countryside. On the contrary, a peri-urban village of several hundred people in the vicinity of a large metropolis is more urban than many cities: its residents have easy access to better resources than is the case for the inhabitants of an average-sized city in an outlying area (a prefecture in a

department in central France², for example). Henceforth, what we call urban should be dissociated from the morphological criteria still used to qualify it, i.e. the density and diversity of activities and functions.

In that case, what is urban? In the traditional rural world, there is a juxtaposition of relatively autonomous groups. There is interaction between villages, but they can survive (almost) independently. On the contrary, in the urban world, every part of the territory makes a contribution to the functioning of the whole. In this framework, every neighbourhood depends on the contributions of others for their survival. The big city, with its different neighbourhoods and districts, traditionally embodies the urban. Today, it has ramified spatially. The so-called “global” city is deeply embedded in the international flows of goods, people, materials and capital: for example, the head office of a company may be in Paris, but its factories and customer service are not in the Parisian suburbs, they are in Wuhan and Rabat.

Big cities are also linked to holiday resorts, as we saw when their residents migrated at the onset of the lockdown. These areas are often considered to be the countryside. Yet, they are very urban. A seaside village or ski resort are as urban as big cities because they function, above all, in relation to other quite distant places: where second homeowners and, more generally, holidaymakers live. These places, which are dedicated to leisure, also have an essential urban quality: the mix of populations between seasonal workers, permanent residents and visitors who, in some cases, may come from all over the world.

On a more limited scale, if we consider the spaces that people may travel through daily on their way to work, major cities depend directly on areas located well beyond their designated perimeter. Rural areas are home to the working and lower middle classes. Their role, as we have seen with the Yellow Vest movement in France, is to stoke the metropolitan economies.

² In the administrative divisions of France, the *département* is one of the levels of government under the national level (“territorial collectivities”), between the administrative regions and the communes. The departmental seat of government is known as the prefecture.

Today, the urban is constituted by a complex of places, whose links spread across multiple geographic scales, ranging from the district or even the housing unit, to the planet. In this way, places that *a priori* do not fit existing definitions of the city have become urban. This is the case for oil rigs, mines or even agricultural areas. In fact, they are all dependent on urban resources, be it in terms of their operations or their markets. The scales of interdependency are both local and global: the residents of an average French city employ the local plumber, at the same time they eat meat from animals fed on Latin American soybean, watch television on Korean screens or use Algerian petrol. In other words, the metabolism of a place links it to the entire planet.

A recent discussion described these changes precisely. It was triggered when the concept of “planetary urbanisation” was revised on the basis of earlier proposals by Henri Lefebvre (about the extension of urban society and urban fabric towards “complete urbanisation”). In a work published in 2014, Schmidt and Brenner advocate a complete overhaul of the traditional categories of analysis, starting with the distinction between town and country. The ambitious theories presented in this work sparked intense discussions, but struggled to win approval because of the lack of convincing empirical evidence. However, since the outbreak and spread of Covid-19, and in the wake of the public response to the health crisis and its economic and social repercussions, many recent events can be read and better understood through the prism of planetary urbanisation. As a result, this crisis provides a crucial empirical boost to Schmidt and Brenner’s hypothesis.

Basically, the spread of planetary urbanisation, which is intrinsically linked to the globalisation of capitalism, involves four inextricably linked processes: the disappearance of “wild” zones, the global interconnectedness of territories, the blurred division between town and country and, lastly, the globalisation of urban inequalities.

A virus at the heart of planetary urbanisation

Human diseases of animal origin, including zoonoses, represent 60% of infectious diseases globally and three-quarters of the new pathogenic agents detected in recent decades. These diseases generally come from “wild” zones. Obviously, they may emerge on livestock farms, in which case the virus is usually due to contamination by wild animals. Therefore, zoonotic diseases are connected to the disappearance of the “wild”, which itself is linked to planetary urbanisation. Throughout the world, the areas considered as wild are

being transformed and degraded by the advance of urbanisation in all its forms, be it mining deposits, planting rubber or constructing new cities. The advance upsets ecosystems and establishes new contacts between fauna, flora and humans.

The geographers who have conducted research on recent pandemics, particularly SARS, have shown that the advance of urbanisation plays a key role in the emergence of new infectious agents. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the major new viruses have emerged in territories (China, West Africa, the Middle East), where the advance of urbanisation is unbridled in the extreme, multiplying new contacts between human societies and the wildest remaining regions.

This advance is manifest in the intensive new agricultural holdings. The risks of virus emergence have multiplied as a result of the phenomenal increase in global meat consumption, particularly in China. The livestock farms designed to feed the new middle classes in megalopolises, such as Wuhan, are covering increasingly large areas taken from the wild. Deforestation, especially, disturbs the habitat of bats and we know the role they play in the emergence of new viruses that can be transmitted to man. Bats are thought to be the source of the current pandemic, with the pangolin as the possible intermediate host. As if it was still necessary, the emergence of Covid-19 shows the permeability of the supposed boundary between nature and culture. This permeability is increasing constantly as a result of planetary urbanisation.

A second key feature of the hypothesis of planetary urbanisation is the emergence of “urban galaxies”, whose different elements interact with the entire planet almost simultaneously. The virus reveals the importance of this global scale. Admittedly, the Spanish flu and earlier the Black Death were global pandemics, but the current situation stands out because of the virus’ rapid spread. The epidemiological inquiries conducted in France suggest that the first cases may have appeared at the end of 2019, at a time the Chinese government was still questioning the possible transmission of the virus between humans. This speed highlights the full extent of human flows. During the first three critical months, between December 2019 and February 2020, 750 000 passengers entered the United States from China. Coupled with the virus’ capacity to spread without showing any symptoms, the magnitude of human flows explains why it was almost impossible to contain the outbreaks of the pandemic.

The acceleration of planetary urbanisation has clearly been underestimated, which has meant that governments were even more ill-prepared. Eight centuries ago, the Great Plague took 15 years to travel the Silk Road to reach Europe. The recent major epidemics spread faster, but not nearly as fast as Covid-19. In 2003, four months after the emergence of SARS-CoV, there were 1 600 recorded cases of contamination in the world, compared to 900 000 for SARS-CoV-2 after the same length of time, which is 500 times faster. Globalisation was nothing like what it is now: in 2018, the estimated number of passengers travelling by plane was 4.2 billion, almost three times higher than in 2003. And Wuhan airport, one of China's main hubs, played a key role in this dynamic. Thus, the virus was dispersed outside China at a speed that few people had genuinely anticipated.

Everybody knows that many goods are imported from China, but many tend to imagine factories that manufacture a plethora of objects at low cost, which allows western working classes to carry on being part of the consumer society. Yet, we are a long way from a simple exchange of low-cost goods for high value-added products. The flows are much more complex and multiform because of delocalisations and the globalisation of manufacturing chains. Thus, in Wuhan, there are a hundred French businesses, including some national champions, notably car manufacturers Renault and the PSA Group. Far from the cheap products associated with China, their factories produce hundreds of thousands of vehicles and are banking on the globalisation of the western lifestyle. These economic relations go hand in hand with intense human flows of executives, engineers or sales representatives, along those who manage the logistical flows.

With Covid-19, Europe has learnt to its cost that China is an integral part of its world or rather that Europe is no more than an element in a vast network, in which Chinese territories are also key elements. They include vast tomato farms for export, suburban factories in metropolises bigger than Paris, yet unknown to the general public, and business centres, whose sheer verticality makes the business centre of La Défense look almost provincial.

The third central element of planetary urbanisation hypothesis is that a metropolis can no longer be reduced to a dense vertical city. Obviously, the halls of economic power (notably, financial) are manifest in the business districts that bristle with towers. However, that is merely an emblem of metropolitanisation and even of the city. The contemporary metropolis is by no means just a historic centre with a business district. It should be

considered as an array of interlacing networks, which provide day-to-day links with places that have very diverse forms, sizes and functions. Brenner and Schmidt describe a continuous process of “implosions/explosions”, where blocks of density float in the middle of fluctuating paths of diffuse urbanisation. This view is widely shared in urban geography but is still often unsuspected or, at least, rarely highlighted. Interestingly, those interconnections were clearly revealed as outbreaks of SARS-CoV-2 infections were reported.

Discourses on the geography of globalisation often contrast connected metropolitan centres with outlying and remote territories. Yet, the spread of the virus reveals that the geography of globalisation is far more complex, as reflected in the hypothesis on planetary urbanisation. In France, the first clusters were identified in Méry-sur-Oise (a municipality with 10 000 inhabitants, situated on the edge of the Parisian suburbs), Les Contamines-Montjoie (an alpine ski resort), La Balme-de-Sillingy (a village in the peri-urban area near Annecy, a small city) and an evangelical church in Mulhouse, a shrinking city. We are a long way from France’s major metropolitan centres. In Italy, the first clusters were also villages or small towns (Codogno or Vo’), rather than the central districts of Milan or Venice.

With the first European clusters, the virus revealed the role of metropolitan fringes in the globalisation of industrial value chains. Indeed, the flows do not just concern the business quarters in major cities: they are also woven between sites of production. The intensity of the links between the textile factories in the Val Seriana and China explains why this peri-urban territory located north east of Bergamo became the site of one of the first Italian outbreaks. In Germany, the infection was first identified in Starnberg, a municipality of 22 000 inhabitants situated 20 km from Munich, but connected to the rest of the world through its automobile parts manufacturing plant. Of course, major city centres have become the main epicentres of the epidemic (New York is the best example), so much so that people are calling into question what has been perceived as their main economic advantage until now: their potential for dense and intense exchanges. The fact remains that the first European outbreaks were not identified in metropolitan centres.

Let us sum up the main points: given the fuzzy urban boundaries, the spread of networks formed by cores of urbanisation and the intensity of the flows that travel along these networks, it soon became clear that isolating clusters was impossible. The only limits to containment zones that could be established were the good old national borders. Yet, these borders often remain quite permeable because international supply chains cannot be interrupted or because cross-border workers are indispensable.

The planetarisation of urban inequalities

A fourth key element characterises planetary urbanisation: the reconfiguration of the spatial dimension of inequalities. There is nothing new about the urbanisation of inequalities. The Neolithic revolution led to the emergence of the first cities, which relied on the extraction of an agricultural surplus to the detriment of smallholder self-sufficiency in order to feed a class no longer bound by the constraints of food production. More recently, medieval cities, whose boundaries were still clearly visible, were organised around a well-defined central site: a market. According to Max Weber, this led to the emergence of a social class, the bourgeoisie, which in turn embarked on a process of accumulation. By pushing back feudal or religious social boundaries and integrating the hinterlands further and further away from the urban economy, this accumulation laid the foundations of capitalism. In fact, one of the chapters in Schmidt and Brenner's book shows how the complete restructuring of the English countryside was *in fine* a process that involved the extension of the cities, as well as the power of the bourgeoisie, and gradually paved the way for the industrial revolution. The enclosures actually encouraged the conversion of millions of landless peasants into cheap labour, by pushing them into the suburbs of London and Manchester.

Gradually, urbanisation then took over from industrialisation as the main driving force of capitalism. The globalisation of capitalism can now be read as the ultimate phase in the expansion of the extremely unequal relationships that it weaves between territories. Of course, these processes go hand in hand with the emergence of middle classes in countries where they used to be virtually non-existent. However, on a global scale, the wealthiest people stand to gain the most from globalisation.³ These differences can be seen spatially. For example, recent international research underlines a "global gentrification"⁴ dynamic, whereby the better off are appropriating major metropolitan centres. This appropriation follows globalisation and takes the form of segregation: in all major metropolises, the working classes are being pushed further out on the fringe. Even the favelas in the centre of Rio are under pressure from gentrification.

³ Branko Milanovic, *Global Inequality. A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*, Harvard University Press, 2018.

⁴ Loretta Lees, Hyun Bang Shin, Ernesto Lopez-Mórala, *Planetary Gentrification*, Wiley, 2016.

These inequalities play an important role in terms of the impact of Covid-19 on our societies. Indeed, pandemics occur, above all, in times when social disparities increase. Peter Turchin observes a historic correlation between the level of inequalities, the intensity of links between distant places and the virulence of pandemics. Indeed, the more a class asserts its wealth, the more it spends on conspicuous consumption, often in the form of luxury products from faraway places. Yet, viruses travel primarily with long distance trade. This is not a new phenomenon: the almost simultaneous collapse of the Chinese and Roman Empires in the first few centuries AD can partly be explained by the virulent epidemics that spread along the trade routes. However, mobility then was incommensurate with mobility today. In terms of the global human flows, the difference is particularly striking among the upper classes. Their sociability has always been international, indeed, cosmopolitan. But their mobility has taken on a new dimension with the impact of globalisation and planetary urbanisation. Consequently, in the face of a new extremely social virus that is difficult to detect, the upper classes have become a potential collective super diffuser. Their role in the winter of 2020 proved to be just that.

Investigations will be necessary to identify the virus' channels of diffusion, but the speed of the spread has already revealed the importance of international seminars, the flows of students, as well as tourist and business travel. These flows, particularly those that underpin industrial globalisation, sparked the first European outbreaks and then contributed to the diffusion of the virus throughout Europe and other continents, notably Africa. The first outbreaks were not socially selective, illustrating the fact that globalisation is also manifest "from below"⁵ and does not simply concern executives or wealthy tourists who travel. Thus, one of the first outbreaks in France in Mulhouse at the Porte Ouverte Chrétienne church, or in South Korea at the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, affected churchgoers who cannot be likened to the upper categories. The now famous "patient 31", the woman who was the source of 80% of the infections in South Korea, had no recent history of travelling.

However, when we reconsider the chronology of the different outbreaks around the world, the prominence of places frequented by the upper classes is striking. In Brazil, the epidemic spread from a Rio beach club, the most *select* in the country. In Hong Kong, the first outbreaks were in upscale hotels (as with SARS). In Egypt, some passengers (mostly of European or North American origin) were infected on a Nile cruise, along with the Egyptian crew. In Australia, a cruise was also at issue: the virus spread after infected passengers, who disembarked from an ocean liner, were scattered across the country. In Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, the spread of Covid-19 is linked to the return of

⁵ Armelle Choplin, Olivier Pliez, *La Mondialisation des pauvres*, Seuil/La République des idées, 2018.

holidaymakers from ski resorts in the Alps, notably Ischgl. In Eastern Europe, skiing is also at issue: the virus spread to Russia, Ukraine and Belarus from fashionable clubs and restaurants in Courchevel. Even South Africa was contaminated via the Alps: the first official report of the virus was linked to a holidaymaker returning from a weekend skiing in Italy. In Mexico and the United States, transmission chains have also been traced back to the slopes in Colorado. One last example: In Uruguay, cases multiplied after a high society wedding attended by a fashion designer just back from holiday in Spain. These examples show the extent to which the spread of the virus depends on practices involving intense social interactions in confined spaces (restaurants, conventions, cocktail parties, clubs) and as much intense international travel. This also explains why prominent political figures, as a group that enjoys this type of practice, were so heavily hit by the pandemic.

The impression that international contagion was elitist may have been strengthened by the fact that getting hold of tests was difficult (this reflects another form of inequality in the face of the pandemic). Nonetheless, unlike tuberculosis or cholera, which kill primarily in poor countries and slums, the new epidemic did not initially hit dense working class districts. It spread through upper class networks built on practices that involve intense ephemeral sociability in multiple locations. Singapore is a good example of how the virus spread along social classes. The first confirmed case goes back to the 23rd January. It concerns a Chinese man from Wuhan who went to an upmarket resort. The first non-imported infections were reported on the 4th February in a shop frequented by Chinese tourists. It was not until April, two months later, that the epidemic affected more modest social groups when an outbreak was reported in a dormitory of migrant workers. Given the dynamics of the epidemic, this time lapse is considerable.

Therefore, the groups that reap the most benefits from planetary urbanisation were the first to be hit by the virus. It spread thanks to their mobility. That is why Europe rapidly substituted China as the main diffuser of the virus. Indeed, this is confirmed by phylogenetic data: the spread of the virus in Africa came essentially from Europe. Even in India, although the initial cases were linked to China, the first outbreaks are linked to Europe. During the second phase of the pandemic, other routes of globalisation became key, characterised by the flows between the European hub and recently infected countries.

The European hue of the virus in the first stages of its transmission outside East Asia also explains why the neologism “coronisation” has spread in Africa and India. The virus’

initial association with the upper classes explains why a governor in Mexico publicly claimed that poor people were immune to Covid-19. Similarly, in black districts in the United States, Covid-19 was perceived as a “rich white” disease for a while.

From the flows of globalisation to poor areas

These ideas petered out. Over time, the virus spread more broadly, both spatially and socially. Here again, the hypothesis of planetary urbanisation helps understand how. First of all, globalisation has its stokers.⁶ Singapore is a case in point: the virus was also carried by people referred to as migrants rather than expatriates, albeit at a much slower rate than for the wealthy categories. Their living conditions in overcrowded dormitories accelerated the rate of transmission, where it was harder to control than in the condominiums in wealthy districts. In general, social distancing is difficult in shanty towns and slums. Yet, they are a major feature of planetary urbanisation and provide shelter to a substantial proportion of the population in mega cities in Africa, Latin America or Asia.⁷

The virus also spread along the networks that make up the metropolitan systems. The migrations that followed the lockdowns revealed the full extent and diversity of the territorial interdependences, which go far beyond the suburbs and the peri-urban rings. This migration was prevented in some countries, such as China or Norway. However, in India or several African countries, we saw a huge number of migrants, living precariously in the heart of the mega cities, for whom returning to the country was a matter of survival. In rich countries where migration was not prohibited before lockdown enforcement, such as in the United States or France, students went back to their parents if they could and the better off left the major cities for more comfortable residences. The analysis by the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Research (INSEE) shows that 11% of Parisian residents left the city. When the better off departed to their second homes, it left a strong impression in the media: New spatial inequalities became apparent in France and the United States. It appeared that they operate at much larger scales than those usually considered, such as

⁶ See Armelle Choplin, Olivier Liez, *Op. cit.*

⁷ See Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, Verso Books, 2017.

when city centres are contrasted with their working class suburbs or distant peri-urban rings. The urban exodus to second homes fuelled a strong resentment among residents in the host territories, which will be hard to resorb.

The pandemic's trajectory has highlighted the spatial nature of inequalities. Indeed, for those at the bottom of the social ladder, teleworking was often impossible and daily mobility continued, especially to dense zones where activities are concentrated. During lockdown, it was primarily the residents in working class districts who had to keep going to their workplace and have contact (obviously wealthier categories still travelled to work, doctors in the first instance, but there are fewer of them proportionally). Added to the greater dependence on public transport, this mobility significantly helped spread the virus among the working classes. It explains why there is a higher concentration of cases and more deaths in working class areas.

In the first outbreak reported in the United States, at a retirement home in Kirkland in the suburbs of Seattle, the employees, mostly women, helped spread the virus. They were reluctant to mention that they were contaminated, not because of social stigma (as in some affluent circles at the start of the pandemic), but quite simply because they were afraid of losing their jobs and not having sick leave. In addition, they often have several precarious jobs, including one in the restaurant sector, of which the role in the spread of the virus is known.



Montpellier, late March 2020: a queue outside a supermarket (credit: Max Rousseau)

In this way, Covid-19 highlights the new territorial inequalities that are a product of planetary urbanisation. Although worldwide links benefit the wealthy categories,⁸ above all, working class areas have become epicentres despite being some distance from the initial outbreaks: in Europe and the United States, the main outbreaks occurred at ski resorts, but Seine-Saint-Denis, the poorest department in France and Detroit, the most impoverished big city in the United States, have become epicentres. In New Orleans, the spread of the pandemic was boosted by Mardi Gras, when the infection was imported by tourists and revellers; some even having the good taste to dress up as a virus. Today, the city's poor districts are paying one of the heaviest tolls in the entire United States.

These inequalities are effectively doubled by the virus' extreme selectivity. Apart from the elderly, the virus targets individuals presenting co-morbidity factors (diabetes, heart problems, etc.). Obviously, these conditions are not equally distributed in society and in space. In the United States, where inequalities *between* and *in* major cities are extremely

⁸ See Thomas Piketty, *Op. cit.*

marked, the virus appears to be far more fatal in cities with a black majority (New Orleans, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee) and poor districts, i.e. the ghettos that have become medical and food deserts as a result of the austerity measures. In Chicago, the difference in life expectancy between districts can be up to 30 years, which is more than a generation. In this way, Covid-19 redoubles the major inequalities in terms of access to health. Indeed, those who succumb to the virus are frequently the same as those whose life expectancy is falling because of other factors (overdose, suicide, water poisoning, etc.).

Research must refine the general outline given here, but the overall picture is clear: Covid-19 reveals the magnitude of the inequalities associated with planetary urbanisation: on the one hand, are the upper class who, in their travels for work or pleasure, have carried the virus all over the world; and on the other hand, are the far more sedentary working classes, who often work in their service. The latter will pay the highest price for the pandemic.

A government of planetary urbanisation?

It is obviously important to avoid jumping to conclusions. The pandemic's impact will depend particularly on its duration. If it is curbed rapidly for some reason, we can expect a return to normal. However, if the virus sticks around, social relationships and the economy will be severely disrupted. Therefore, the Covid-19 crisis, which is partly the outcome of planetary urbanisation, could in return affect it profoundly. In particular, it could modify the established hierarchies between the types of urban spaces. Despite the first phases of the spread of the pandemic, a fear of dense cities is likely to resurface. In fact, once the epidemic was established, the virus spread much faster in dense large urban centres and their suburbs. In the light of this observation, having left the cities and changed their habits during lockdown (second homes have become the main homes, more teleworking, etc.), some members of the wealthy classes may be tempted to prolong the experience. This is more likely if transport becomes more complicated in the major densely populated centres, as might be expected. The lines will shift slowly, but a new cycle may develop that is less favourable to density. A change of this type could reduce the real estate pressure on the

major metropolitan centres and make them slightly more accessible to the menial workers that stoke the metropolitan economies. Undoubtedly, it will also mean that more political consideration is given to peri-urban and rural areas. However, it will increase pressure on environmental resources in these areas (competition between agricultural and residential uses of land, increase of pollution generated by private car use, etc.). These changes highlight the need to democratise and expand the scale of urban governance and government, currently too focused on central areas. Current and future disputes over land use—environmental preservation, the distribution of housing, and agricultural and industrial relocation—can only be discussed and mediated effectively in the broader context of vast metropolitan regions.

On another scale, Covid-19 also underlines how the planet is governed. With planetary urbanisation, the interdependency between places, territories and areas has largely overcome national borders. In addition, international exchanges have become more complex and multi-scalar, in the sense that this is not France that has come into contact with China, but the Contamines-Montjoie ski resort now finds itself connected to a forest in Hubei via an English tourist returning from a conference in Singapore, where he met other Chinese executives, who may have dined with a doctor friend, who works in a hospital in Wuhan. How can links like this be governed? With these networks, closing national borders seems to swing between the ridiculous and the excessive. Ridiculous because the virus has often crossed borders before one even thought of closing them and excessive because their closure would cause major social and economic disruption.

This brings us back to the beginning of the article. We can put forward the hypothesis that a measure as brutal and blind as lockdown was imposed on billions of individuals because of the impossibility to wean us abruptly off the flows borne by planetary urbanisation (just one figure suffices to make that clear: 80% of the active ingredients of the world's medication comes from India or China), combined with the failure to control them. Governing flows is the focus of current discussions on tracking and monitoring the contacts of people who are potentially ill. The problem here is that the spectre of tighter control and surveillance is looming, as Foucault observed when the plague struck. Many people fear that developments to control flows will involve disciplinary measures or even be a threat to freedom. All the more so because multinational companies who supply security and electronic surveillance systems are keen to meet states aiming to strengthen their capacity to protect their citizens. In this context, how can tracking be conducted without impinging

on fundamental freedoms? Civil societies, though slightly confused, are waking up to what the control of flows could entail.

The issue is a difficult one within a national framework and even more so in an international framework. For example, how can Europe, which has set up some of the strictest personal data protection measures in the world, change course and impose what amounts to a general surveillance system for people's movements? This type of question, which is almost impossible to answer positively, has forced most governments to conclude that the virus will be difficult to eliminate. Indeed, a country that implements the necessary measures would severely restrict its relationships with its neighbours. New Zealand, a country where the virus seems to have virtually disappeared, has imposed quarantine for at least 14 days on all its nationals returning from abroad since the 29th April 2020; other nationals, with the exception of Australians, are quite simply banned from entry. Can this continue for much longer when the virus is still on the country's doorstep? Given that Covid-19's morbidity, unlike SARS, does not seem totally unacceptable, striving to live with the disease seemed to be the "least bad" solution. Thus, numerous countries have stopped trying to eliminate the virus and instead are striving to control the spread by social distancing (of which lockdown is an extreme version). They are betting that with a treatment, a vaccine or group immunity, the pandemic will end up becoming as banal as flu. This wager has already brought a first devastating lockdown, with no guarantee that others will be ruled out. If the situation does not improve, a growing number of people will be asking whether planetary urbanisation is really worth it.

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