Health crises have always coexisted with humans, but, fortunately, over the centuries they have become a rarity, especially in developed countries. The advance of science and its repercussion in societies has developed a sense of almost total immunity to these dramatic situations. Improved hygiene, sanitary conditions and a broad and reliable health care network have increased the protection of citizens in the West – from Europe and North America – from birth to death. In effect, we have to go back to the 20th century, to remember the most devastating epidemics – the Spanish flu, at the beginning of the century (1918-19), the most deadly with 40-50 million deaths and HIV/AIDS, which since 1981 has already caused between 25-35 million human lives.

However, in the first two decades of the 21st century we were surprised by several outbreaks of crisis, namely: i) SARS/Bird flu (2002-03, 770 deaths); ii) Swine Flu (2009-10, 200 thousand); iii) Ebola (2014-16, 1 thousand); iv) MERS (2015, 850).

Perhaps it was a prediction of what would arrive at the end of 2019, the COVID-19 (close to 250 thousand dead until 04 May_12:32, source. Johns Hopkins University).

Eventually due to forgetfulness, the delay in the reaction of the western world, especially in the United States and some European countries, is justified. As in previous crises, it was thought that it would be geo-restricted to China and the Asian continent, derived from gastronomic culture, exotic to say the least, and due to health specifications.

However, the mobility of citizens – professional reasons or simply tourism – has made COVID-19 a true global crisis, decisively affecting the citizens of countries, even the most developed ones, that almost with no living generations with knowledge and experience in this type of phenomena, let themselves be surprised.

On the other hand, the way information was handled in China, may have aggravated the situation and also contributed to the initial inertia.

However, life has undergone an unimaginable mutation. The big question that arises today – given that we will gradually abandon confinement to return to normality – is what will be the new normality? At the outset we have two hypotheses: Do we open the door to greater collective social awareness and to a more transparent, sustainable, fair and solidary economic system? Or, on the contrary, to evolve into a more unequal world, plagued by deaths, new poor and unemployed?

The option should be relatively simple, making us all committed to a better, more sustainable, humane and less material world. But, in view of the worldwide repercussions in the productive fabric and the operational impairments registered in the different value chains, do we face serious risks of falling into a scenario of generalized disorientation and loss of hope?

This is the challenge that the developed world is facing. In other words, how to rescue countries that are doubly in crisis – sanitary and financial-economic – in order to avoid losing hope in the values of the Western world, guided by the freedom, equality and fraternity that has guided us; and, now, ecologically more balanced.

For all these reasons, COVID-19 is much more than a serious disease. It is a milestone in the evolution of the world.

Before leaving Greece for the conquest of Asia, Alexander the Great donated his heritage to his friends: land, forests, villages and even customs duties on ports and all their income. After the distribution of his personal goods – and not of the goods of the kingdom, whose throne he left to his mother – ended, one of his friends, Perdicas asked him if he had taken anything for himself, even if it was only as a souvenir. And Alexander, looking him in the eye, replied: "Yes, hope". Then Perdicas resigned his part, received as a gift, and said to him: "To us who will come to fight at your side, let us therefore share in the hope.

The story would come to recognize Alexander, as "the Great". And what about Europe and the USA, how will they look in this story? In this context, we will face COVID-19 and later times in a battle without truce that allows us to cherish the hope for a better world, where knowledge is the cornerstone.

By:

Eduardo Leite

Universidade da Madeira; CiTUR – Centro de Investigação, Desenvolvimento e Inovação em Turismo

e-mail: eduardo.leite@staff.uma.pt

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4109-3122

Ricardo Silva

Instituto Politécnico do Porto

e-mail: rjos@iscap.ipp.pt

Ana Leite

UAb; L'École des hautes études en sciences sociales

e-mail: anamiguelleite@gmail.com

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2413-050X