

# WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis  
A collective work by CES



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Centro de Estudos Sociais  
Universidade de Coimbra



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# RESILIENCE

Madalena Alarcão, Luciana Sotero

What do you do when the future seems bleak and uncertain? COVID-19 confronts us not only with an immediate health problem, but with very significant and as yet not fully known negative impacts on the economy, employment, education, security, tourism, as well as on how we manage our own social and family relations.

Uncertainty about the evolution of the pandemic and the capacity of the economy, work and society to recover; the prediction that a second wave will emerge again before science comes up with an effective medical response; and fear of a future that seems increasingly uncertain and marked by threats and disasters on a large scale, all tend to generate a feeling of fear accompanied by withdrawal, blockage and hopelessness.

Against this background, how shall we react? By being resilient and able to turn adversity into opportunity. The greatest harm man can do to himself is to lack, or lose, a sense of the future. Because that is where you project your favourite vision of life, or your vision of the world, your dreams, your purpose. And while that vision is the backbone of your existence and the organiser of values, skills, learning and behaviour, purpose is the source of energy that makes us able to overcome obstacles and adversities, because it drives us towards transformation.

Much has been written and thought about resilience, at the individual and family level to begin with, and more recently at the organisational, community and even global level as well. Given that this is a complex concept, consensus is far from having been reached, especially regarding the way resilience is built and how it develops.

But there are some aspects that seem essential for the human being to be resilient:

1. Giving meaning to adversity and seeing it as an opportunity to transform oneself, in accordance with one's preferred vision of life and purpose, even if the latter also need adjustment;
2. Having a positive outlook, even in regard to the most negative aspects or realities, as well as being able to discover the "good", transformative side of adversities; humour and reframing are very useful strategies to see "the half-full part" of a "half empty" glass;
3. Maintaining and raising hope, identifying strengths and (possible) sources of support; this hope is not abstract but rather feeds on the many strengths contained in each one of us, even when we are still not aware of them;
4. Actively pursuing a desired future, which can mean a lot of work and, above all, focus, determination and perseverance;
5. Not focussing on the desire to return to a past that will no longer exist as such, and fully embracing the idea that "reality" is something you build;
6. Allowing oneself to feel the happiness and joy of small victories;
7. Creating and/or maintaining meaningful relationships and sharing experiences, meanings, victories, failures... in short: to inspire and let oneself be inspired, to give and to receive.